

The Sabbath Day

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In recent years the Lord has been re-emphasizing the importance of the Sabbath day through his prophets. From our earliest records of the Lord's dealings with mankind we know that the Sabbath has always been a critical part of the covenant that the Lord and His people have made with each other. That it is supposed to be a blessing and benefit to mankind is clear from the Savior's statement in the New Testament where He says: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath".

A scripture that has often been associated with this recent emphasis by the prophets is found in Isaiah. It says:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight... Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth" Isaiah 58:13-14

Unfortunately, I worry that many of us sometimes struggle to call the Sabbath a delight and are not realizing the full blessings that the Lord intends us to receive from our Sabbath day observance. Have any of you ever felt that the only reason that you go to church, is not because you are feeling spiritually fed, but because of a sense of duty or obligation? Have you ever felt that you would get more out of Sunday school, relief society, or priesthood if you spent your time in the hallway instead of in the classroom? Are you finding yourself bored from hearing the same things over and over again? Do you feel that you would be better off staying home and reading general conference talks than listening to the speakers in sacrament? I know I have felt these things from time to time in my experience as a church member. If you, like me, have had these kinds of feelings, I would invite you to consider some thoughts on how we can change our ways of thinking about the Sabbath. I also would invite you to pay special attention to what thoughts the spirit brings to your mind that are above and beyond what I may share with you today. Since the spirit is the true teacher, what he has to say to you regarding the Sabbath is much more important than anything I may have to say.

To enable ourselves to get more out the Sabbath Day I think it is important for us to review two important questions. First, what does Lord intend for us to gain from our experience in mortality? And second: what is the Doctrine of Christ?

Let us consider the first question.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi gives a concise statement regarding the purpose of life. He says:

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” 2 Ne: 25

This passage clearly states that the purpose of life is for us to have joy.....but what is joy? Since our earthly views and definitions are tainted by the fact that the fall has caused us to become, as Alma states it, “carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature”, I think that our concept of joy falls far short of what the Lord has in mind when He speaks of joy.

We do know what joy is not. It is not carnal pleasure. It is not entertainment. It is not blind self interest and isolated self fulfillment. Joy is always experienced in connection to people and things that are outside ourselves. It is always associated with love. It is never present when we are only thinking of ourselves and our own appetites and desires. We may sometimes catch glimpses of joy when we look at a new born, or the face of a beloved family member that we have not seen for a while, or in beholding the beauty of nature, but we have to remember that these are only glimpses of joy. True joy can only be experienced by those that become the kind of person, do the kind of things, and live the kind of life that our Father in Heaven lives. That this kind of joy is completely beyond our comprehension is well captured by the Apostle Paul when he said:

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” 1 Cor 2:9

A particularly instructive passage of scripture related to the topic of joy is found in the Book of Mormon in Lehi’s dream. He dreamed that he saw “a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy” (1Ne 8:10). After partaking of the fruit he described it as being, “most sweet, above all that I ever before had tasted.” (1Ne 8:11) However, there were some individuals that did not seem to share Lehi’s taste in fruit, because “after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.” (1Ne 8:25) Most people would probably assume that there must be something wrong with the fruit of the tree if it did not taste good; but we know that the fruit of this particular tree is never bad. Therefore, if it does not taste good, then the fault must lie with the taster, not the fruit.

In extending the ideas presented in Lehi’s dream, we could imagine that there are a whole range of different kinds of partakers at the tree. Some may feel the fruit must be rotten and should be spit out immediately. Others may feel that it is very bland, but they will continue to partake for the sake of family members that expect them to partake. Some may feel that it tastes OK but think they would like

it better if only the gardener could manage to change the flavor more to their liking. Others may feel that the other partakers at their part of the tree are ruining their tasting experience. And finally, there are those like Lehi that are starting to realize just how amazing the fruit really is. But make no mistake, no matter what kind of partaker we may feel that we currently are, to appreciate and enjoy the full flavor and benefit of the fruit of this tree, all of us, including Lehi, must become like the one who planted the tree; and that is why we are all here in mortality, to see if are willing to allow ourselves to be changed into that type of person.

And that bring me to my second question: What is the doctrine of Christ?

In the 11th chapter of 3rd Nephi the Savior gives a short definition of His doctrine when He says:

“And this is my doctrine, ... the Father commandeth all men everywhere to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved;” 3Ne 11:32

That’s it. That is His doctrine; faith in Christ and continual repentance with a covenant via the ordinance of baptism that we will continually strive to do so. A couple of verses later He says:

“And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil” 3Ne 11:40

Lest we think He is saying that there should be no more ordinances after baptism, a couple of chapters later in chapter 18 of 3rd Nephi, He gives the people the additional ordinance of the sacrament saying:

“...this doth witness to the Father that you are willing to do that which I have commanded you. And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name...But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock.”

By comparing these different accounts it is clear that the core of His doctrine, that which is not to be added to, is Faith in Him and continual repentance, or change, to align ourselves more fully to His will. This allows us to see everything that we do in the Church in a clearer light; every commandment that He gives, every ordinance that He asks us to participate in, and every meeting He asks us to attend, has the main purpose of increasing Faith in Him and bringing about our repentance. This continual process will gradually transform us into people that can experience.....true joy.

With this understanding, the Sabbath Day can and should be seen as a day of repentance; a day of resting from the selfishness, self gratification, and self worship that we so easily fall into during the

week. And as we all know, repentance (or change) is often not a comfortable process. Change is almost always accompanied by sacrifice.

My understanding is that the first time the word “worship” shows up in the scriptures is in connection to the heart rending account of Abraham’s offering of his son Isaac. Abraham asks his servant to wait while he and his son “go yonder to worship”. In the New Testament the word “worship” first shows up in connection with the expensive gifts that the wise men brought to the baby Jesus. As the authors Terryl and Fiona Givens put it: “Worship, then, is about what we are prepared to relinquish—what we give up at personal cost.” (The Crucible of Doubt, Pg 43). If our Sabbath Day worship does not include this kind of attitude of sacrifice and repentance, then it is not truly worship.

We all know that the main reason that we come to church is to partake of the sacrament; to renew our covenants to have faith in the savior, repent of our sins, and strive to change into the person God wants us to be. However, many times we look at the rest of the sacrament service and other meetings in the block as unnecessary appendages to the sacrament. What would happen if we saw them as tightly connected to each other; as two sides of the same coin? In their book entitled “The Crucible of Doubt”, Terryl and Fiona Givens ask:

“... what if we saw lessons and talks as connections to the sacrament rather than as unrelated secondary activities? What if we saw them as opportunities to bear with one another in all our infirmities and ineptitude? What if we saw the mediocre talk, the overbearing counselor, the lesson read straight from the manual, as a lay member’s equivalent of the widow’s mite? A humble offering, perhaps, but one to be measured in terms of the capacity of the giver rather than in the value received. And if the effort itself is negligible—well, then the gift is the opportunity given us to exercise patience and mercy. If that sounds too idealistic, if we insist on imposing a higher standard on our co-worshippers, if we insist on measuring our worship service in terms of what we “get out of” the meeting, then perhaps we have erred in our understanding of worship.” The Crucible of Doubt, Pg 42

In D&C section 59 the Lord makes clear the connection that He sees between sacrifice, worship on the Sabbath, and joy. He says:

“Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments on my holy day; ...on this, the Lord’s day, thou shalt offer thine oblations [oblation being a sacrificial offering of time, talents, or means in service of God and fellowman] and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing

thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord. On this day thou shalt do none other thing... that thy joy may be full." D&C 59 8-9, 12

If we can truly internalize this concept of Sabbath Day worship it can transform our view and experience not only of the Sabbath, but of everything. Through this kind of worship the Lord through His atonement will change our hearts so that every joy is sweeter and every trial more bearable. President Boyd K. Packer expressed well the effects of this kind of sacrificial obedience to the Lord's requirements when he said:

"Obedience – that which God will never take by force – he will accept when freely given, and he will then return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of – the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to be, at least a thousand fold more than we offer him." –Boyd K. Packer, Apostle

Brothers and sisters, I testify that these things are true. In my life when I have viewed the Sabbath in terms of what I can give instead of what I can get, it has always led me to greater faith in my Savior, in His commandments, in His purposes, and in His church. And most importantly, it has led me to a greater capacity for compassion, love, and joy.

I pray that we will all be more successful at improving our capacity to experience the full flavor of the fruit of the tree of life by striving with greater effort to view the Sabbath as a day of repentance, a day of change, a day of sacrifice, and a day of joy.

And I do so in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.