

Come Follow Me Class Insights – Easter

I'm Taylor. And I'm Tyler. And I'm John. We welcome you to a special edition of Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, an Easter celebration. We've invited our friend John Hilton to share time with us today as we celebrate Jesus and his love. So, to begin and to set the stage for today, let me just take a few moments and kind of outline what we're going to be doing. You'll notice right off of the bat that we're going to be talking about something infinite in nature. It's the infinite Atonement, and as President Nelson reminded us a few years ago in General Conference, it's not an entity unto itself. It's not a thing in isolation. It's the infinite Atonement of – this is really important – of Jesus Christ.

So sometimes we can get so excited about what the Atonement can do for us or how the Atonement can help us or heal us or forgive us when, at the end of the day, the Atonement itself doesn't do any of those things. He's the one who does all of those things through the power of his Atonement, through the things that he suffered willingly, of his own free will and choice that opens this door for us overcoming sin and temptation and struggles and pain and adversity and affliction. It's important that we keep the focus especially on Easter, around this time of year, that we keep the focus clearly on this Son of God as we celebrate the most important event in the history of the universe, I think, in the history of eternity as far as we're concerned, for our salvation. So, to begin, Taylor is going to help us understand the foundation of where we get most of our information from the 1st century in the Holy Land regarding the events of the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ.

So, we are celebrating Easter. If you turn and face east in the morning, what do you typically see if there are no clouds? The brilliant, beautiful sunrise. That is Jesus, symbolically. And that is what Easter is all about. It's about facing east. The resurrection of the rising Son. Easter reminds us that because of Jesus, all of us can be resurrected physically and spiritually if we center on Jesus. So, the scriptures have lots of great stories about Jesus and in particular if we look at the four gospels in the New Testament, this is where we get much of our information about Jesus, his life, his death and his resurrection.

The gospels, as we've talked about in the past, the word “gospels” means the good news. And it is good news. God has spoken forth from heaven through the living word, his Son Jesus Christ, and we have four incredible disciples who each penned their witness of who Jesus was to give an invitation to you; that as you learn more about Jesus, you might look specifically at how Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each witnessed or testified of Jesus. What is similar? What is different about those witnesses? Similarly, when you are listening in testimony meeting, if all these members of the Church each witness of Jesus Christ but each in their own way, there's something beautiful to learn.

So, I'll just give you a moment or two to hear about what the gospels are as literature. So, when the gospels were written anciently, they were written in the guise of an ancient biography. Now in the modern day, most of us generally understand what a biography is, and many biographies

are very lengthy and they basically go from like before the person was born through every little thing they did as a child, and their young age, and their middle life and how they died and their legacy, but every last detail we try to pack into these biographies. That is a modern biography where we try to trace the character development of the hero of the story. Ancient biographies were a little bit different.

Let me just point out why ancient biographies were composed, and what we've discovered through scholarship is that the four gospels in the New Testament follow this format of an ancient biography. First of all, it's to preserve the words and deeds of a great hero. Second, to preserve the memory of a great person, to provide praise for that individual, so that the reader will follow that hero and you reveal the character of the hero through that story, and in particular ancient biographies often would deeply focus on the manner of the death of the hero as a way of revealing their character.

Now if you think about the four gospels, only two of them even talk about the birth of Jesus. They spend most of their time, only the last year or two or three of Jesus's life and even then, most of the focus of the gospels is the last week of Jesus's life with a deep focus on the suffering leading up to his death, his crucifixion, and then his resurrection. And I might point out that for an ancient reader who is familiar with ancient biographies, they would have been stunned to read about Jesus because in the ancient biographies, the hero never came back to life, ever. And yet here we have four witnesses saying this hero not only died for all of us, but the character of this hero is that he had the ability to come back to life and because of that, you too can live again. That is the beautiful promise of Easter.

And so, this Easter celebration, we invite you to think about all the times Jesus has lifted you up. Wherever you are at in your life, you can be lifted up by the power, mercy, grace, and goodness of God. That is our witness to you today and that is what we're going to be spending our time talking about.

Okay, so as we jump into discussing the events of that final week of the Savior's life with emphasis on the final 24 hours, let's just get a really quick overview here on the board. So, there are some differences and there are some similarities between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John on the various events and when they took place and what order they took place in and how they unfolded. But John, how would you help us contextualize what's happening from Sunday to Wednesday, not particularly in order, but some of the major events?

So, for example, on Sunday of the triumphal entry, the Savior enters into Jerusalem and along with that there's the host of people who are praising him as he enters in. As Tyler said, the gospel authors differ slightly on the details of which day, but we know the cleansing of the temple is coming up, and next Jesus is going to curse a fig tree, he's going to teach some parables in the temple and the Pharisees and especially the chief priests who are there are going to perceive that he's speaking against them in parables. You know, one thing that we sometimes don't focus on is that in John, chapter 12, some Greeks seek an audience with Jesus and he gives

a testimony unto them and the voice of God speaks from heaven, testifying of his Son, Jesus Christ, another powerful event in these final, few days.

So, this leads us up to the critical time period which is – there is a lot that's going to happen in this last 24 hours of Jesus's life. So, let's start probably with the Last Supper, and so while we don't know the precise physical location where this was held, Jesus is going to meet with his disciples, and that's when Judas Iscariot will leave to go and betray the Savior, and from there the Savior will walk across the Kidron Valley into Gethsemane.

A little interesting detail, we often talk about the Garden of Gethsemane, but that is not a scriptural phrase. John talks about a garden, and Matthew and Mark talk about Gethsemane. We put that together as the Garden of Gethsemane, and that's where the Savior will offer a prayer specifically with Peter, taking Peter, James, and John aside and suffer for our sins. From Gethsemane Christ will be betrayed and taken to the house of Caiaphas. John adds in an extra trial. All of the gospels talk about the trial at the house of Caiaphas. They call it a palace, which gives us an indication of the wealth of the high priests at that time, and from there Christ will go to Pilate. And so now as we're into the morning of the day of his death, he'll be tried before Pilate. Luke tells us that there was also a trial before Herod Antipas, and eventually the Savior will walk what we today call the Via Dolorosa, the way of sorrows, and on the way to the cross, that's where we have Jesus speaking to the women who are mourning his death. We have Simon who carries his cross, and finally, Christ is taken to the place that he often referred to as Calvary – is Luke's term – or Golgotha, and it's interesting that we sometimes talk about the hill of Calvary or going up to Calvary, but the scriptures themselves don't speak about a hill of Calvary, there's no elevation difference that's spoken of in the scriptures.

So, let's dive deeper into each of these events and look at the significance of what happened in each element on this list and more importantly, why we should care in the 21st century about what happened here. So, let's begin with Gethsemane. So, you have this place where Jesus goes to begin the infinite atoning sacrifice, and it's important for us at the outset to note where does Jesus's suffering take place wherein you and I have some sort of benefit? Is it all in here? Is it in here? Is there any of it in here? Do you and I benefit from anything that took place here? Because sometimes what we like to do as human beings, I think, is we want clearly defined borders. We want clearly defined – this is the box – this is where it all fits, either here or here, when in reality, I think it's important to realize that we have the opening threshold and the closing threshold when he gives up the ghost, and “we may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear”, not just on the cross, but throughout this process¹.

Now we have a lot of clues in scripture and from prophetic commentary but isn't it interesting that sometimes we put all of our emphasis on Gethsemane and then some put all of the emphasis on the cross, but we don't often even talk about this middle stuff. And yet Isaiah says, “[by] his

¹ Alexander, Cecil F., and John H. Gower. “There Is a Green Hill Far Away.” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/there-is-a-green-hill-far-away?lang=eng.

stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). That sounds redemptive. That sounds atoning to me. Like the scourging, it's part of – the scourging is part of his infinite suffering, it's part of what Elder Maxwell would call “the awful arithmetic of the Atonement” for all of God's children², and so it's important as we jump in that we don't try to create clearly defined boundaries where the scriptures and the prophets don't create boundaries.

So as to jump in on that, Elder Gerald Lund taught that it is a “doctrinal error” to separate out – a lot of people will say something like, well, Jesus atoned for our sins in Gethsemane and on the cross, that's the resurrection. And again, Elder Lund said that's a doctrinal error to bifurcate it like that. There are more than 50 scriptures that talk about Jesus dying for our sins; Jesus says, I was “slain for the sins of the world”, I was crucified for the sins of the world, so to separate out Christ's atoning from our sins from Calvary is not accurate (3 Nephi 11:14). He, in describing his own gospel in 3rd Nephi 27, what does he say? I came down to the earth, basically, because the Father sent me, and why did the Father send him? That he may be lifted up by men upon this cross. And that's the core of his gospel. He defines his gospel, and if you read in 3rd Nephi 27:14, he actually mentions over and over again, “lifted up”, for this cause I was lifted up, my Father had me lifted up. It's this central focus in his own definition. He's not afraid of talking about the cross. Because I think some people might wonder, well who actually – I don't care if it was Gethsemane or Calvary, why does it matter?

I was talking with Robert Millet who's spent more than thirty years doing interfaith studies and conversations, and one of the things that he lamented to me was that, at least for some Christians, the way that some Latter-day Saints almost exclusively focus on Gethsemane has led them to believe that we don't believe in the importance of the cross, the importance of Christ's Atonement on Calvary. And so, for some Christians, they may look at members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and say, oh, you're not Christian. We actually do believe in the atoning power of Calvary. So sometimes if we focus exclusively on Gethsemane, we actually create a misperception about what we actually believe.

So, John, you've done a lot of research on the comparisons between what the scriptures, what the prophets have said, beginning with Joseph Smith down to our modern day, regarding Gethsemane and the cross on Calvary. What have you learned?

So, the short version, and honestly, this was a surprise to me. I was having a conversation with a colleague and he said, John, where do you think the emphasis that we have on Gethsemane comes from? And I was like well, of course, the scriptures. So, I started looking at the scriptures, and to my surprise, what I found was there are only two passages of scripture that talk about Jesus's suffering for our sins in Gethsemane. These are powerful scriptures and they are important ones; there are just two of them. In contrast, there are more than fifty passages of scripture that talk about Jesus Christ dying for our sins. He mentions – “...slain for the sins of the

² Maxwell, Neal A. “Willing to Submit.” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, Apr. 1985, abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1985/04/willing-to-submit?lang=eng.

world” (3 Nephi 11:14). Yeah, and many of those are the Savior's own words, his own voice. Another example in Romans, chapter 5 Paul says, “...while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for [our sins]” (Romans 5:8).

So over and over again the scriptural emphasis, well okay, it must be Joseph Smith, that's where the Gethsemane emphasis comes from. But that's actually not true. If you look at the writings and sermons of Joseph Smith, he only talks about Gethsemane one time, and in that instance, he's not even talking about suffering for our sins, he uses it as an example of Christ's submission to his Father. But there are more than 30 times that he focuses on the crucifixion. Several of those are specifically about Christ dying for our sins.

To make a long story short, across thousands of talks in the Journal of Discourses, in General Conference from 1850 to the present day, for every one time that a Church leader has said something like, Christ suffered for our sins in Gethsemane, there have been more than five times that they've said something like, Christ died for our sins. So, whether you're looking at the scriptures or the voice of Church leaders or actually as we were - to me what's most important is to look at the voice of the Savior himself. On one powerful occasion in Doctrine and Covenants 19 he focuses on his suffering for sins in Gethsemane, and in contrast, there are more than 20 times that he specifically focuses on his death, his crucifixion, being lifted up upon the cross, and so it – I'm reminded of a time when I was talking with a friend and he was pretending to be interested in something that was important to me and I think, you're not interested, you don't even care. And he said I'm interested in you. And it's an important lesson, right? That when you care about someone, you care about what's important to them. And so even some of us might go like, oh, I don't like to look at an image of the crucifixion or I don't like to think about the crucifixion, the fact that it's clearly important to Jesus Christ is an indication that it should be important to us.

At least for me in my teaching in the Church, I don't know about your experience, in earlier years when I focused on teaching about Christ's Atonement, I would spend most of my time right here in Gethsemane and then we'd kind of skim through all of this in terms of the resurrection, whereas actually the scriptures and the Church leaders had a different emphasis.

Yeah, so it's interesting because back in the early 1900s, Elder James E. Talmage wrote the book that many of you are familiar with called *Jesus the Christ*. It's interesting because he says in there – he devotes a lot of good effort to helping us understand what Jesus is enduring and experiencing in Gethsemane. When he shifts over to his description of the Savior's atonement on Golgotha, on the cross of Calvary, he uses a very interesting word there. In talking about the description in the scriptures from noon to 3:00 p.m. when thick darkness gathers, he says the weight of Gethsemane returns to Jesus intensified on the cross. He uses the word “intensify”.

There's something really profound taking place on the cross when we take everything that's going on here, and now we continue it for three more hours but this time in a very public place in the middle of the day, raised up, stretched out, with people mocking him along the way. And on

that note, in 2018, I believe, we can go back and double check the exact date, but President Nelson actually says something very similar, that Jesus Christ in Gethsemane felt every pain, felt the weight of our sins, and then he said all of the suffering was intensified as he was cruelly crucified on Calvary's cross.

So, John, the question would then come up, I think, for many people in the Church, of the actual symbol of the cross itself. Why would we not have that on our churches? Well, that's a great question and it probably deserves a whole broadcast in itself, but the short version is, what's interesting is, if we were to go back to the time of Joseph Smith, the cross was not the symbol of Christianity – Methodists, Baptists, most Protestant denominations did not use the cross as a symbol. It was only a Catholic symbol and there were only five Catholic churches in the whole state of New York in 1820. So, Joseph Smith is growing up in a cultural context where the cross is not a sign of religion and specifically of broader Christianity. And over the following decades our Church has continued the institutional practice of not displaying the cross, and I think one of the things that can be very helpful for us as we interact with the 99% of Christians for whom the cross is a symbol of the resurrected Christ is to remember that for many the cross is the living Christ.

Eric Huntsman published this story: “I remember being surprised once when a Presbyterian friend corrected me when I told her that we prefer to worship a living rather than a dead Christ; she responded that she did, too. The cross reminded Protestants that Jesus died for their sins, but it was empty because he was risen and no longer there on it. I was chastened by her response, realizing that just as we do not appreciate others mischaracterizing our beliefs, neither should we presume to understand or misrepresent the beliefs and practices of others.”³

I don't know what your experiences throughout your life have been, Tyler, but I know that for me when I was a missionary, if I saw someone wearing a cross, I would kind of automatically think about them as the other and that's different. Now I wish I could go back and go up to others and be like, hey, I see that you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or, I see that you believe in Christ's Atonement for our sins. I've got this book right here and it talks – in the very beginning, a prophet named Nephi foresees Jesus Christ lifted up upon the cross and it's this great common belief that we have. The prophet Jacob in Jacob chapter 1 said that we should view his death. Mormon said that the death of Christ should “rest in [our minds] forever” (Moroni 9:25). And in another place, he says, “Behold the wounds...” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37). As Jesus says, Doctrine and Covenants 6:37 said the living Christ himself is saying fix your eyes upon – look at the wounds. When Jesus says “Learn of me,” he means his whole life and especially culminating in that most critical part of his life when he's performing the infinite sacrifice when the Lamb of God is being slain for the sins of the world and I'm – and you and we're all part of this - of the world (Doctrine and Covenants 19:23).

³ Huntsman, Eric D. “Preaching Jesus, and Him Crucified: Religious Studies Center.” *Preaching Jesus, and Him Crucified*, BYU Religious Studies Center, 2017, rsc.byu.edu/his-majesty-mission/preaching-jesus-him-crucified.

Brothers and sisters, he's not just dying on the cross. He's suffering for me. He's suffering for you. He's suffering for each of us on the cross. This week of Easter, it's worth some time to maybe dig into Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and then the scriptures of the Restoration to learn of him, even when it gets a little bit uncomfortable, because that price wasn't just paid in random. That infinite Atonement was paid for me and you and us and to understand what that means and what he went through, understanding once again, it's an infinite Atonement, and here I am with finite capacity, a finite brain, and for me to be able to understand that, it's impossible. But with a finite capacity with the help of the Holy Ghost, I can learn certain elements of what Jesus is going through to enhance that experience so that it becomes much more meaningful for me, so that I appreciate the price that was paid because I understand it better, and the more I understand it, the more I love him. The more I love him, the more I'll follow him and the more I'll devote my life to him.

He gave everything for us. He laid it all on the altar, and the more I can learn about what was actually laid on the altar, the more likely I am to lay all that I have back on the altar in return. President James E. Faust said that “any increase in our understanding of [the Savior's Atonement] draws us ... to him”⁴, and it might give some opportunities for me to learn about an aspect of the Savior's Atonement that previously I've shied away from a little bit, but any increase in any aspect of the Savior's Atonement increases that “learn of me” will then help us draw closer, and it's been interesting to me to look at a couple of stories from members of the Seventy who, before they were converted to the Church, found great power in the images that we're talking about (Doctrine and Covenants 19:23).

Elder Dube of the Seventy told about an experience when he was ten years old in Zimbabwe where he grew up in the Catholic Church, and he was not a member but he was looking at these different images of the Savior, and he says when I got to the picture of the crucifixion, tears came to my eyes. He called it one of the defining moments of his life. He felt this spiritual rush saying this happened. Jesus died for you. Elder Enzo Busche, he was in the hospital and thought he was going to die and he just looks at the wall and he sees an image of Christ on the cross and all of a sudden, he's filled with hope.

And I think for some people – it's probably going to be different for individuals but I think especially those who are feeling truly deep pain, there may be something about the image of Christ on the cross that allows us to connect with him in a different way, to realize Jesus truly understands the pain that you're going through, and you or I in a moment of doubt, we might say no one understands me. And maybe I don't understand you and maybe your mom doesn't understand you, maybe no human understands you, but Jesus does, and for some people I think it's going to be Gethsemane that really helps them feel that connection. You mentioned the scourging, “...with his stripes we are healed”, that might be a part of it (Isaiah 53:5). And for

⁴ Faust, James E. “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope.” *Our Greatest Hope*, Oct. 2001, abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2001/10/the-atonement-our-greatest-hope?lang=eng.

others it can be Calvary and I love that we don't have to split it up. It's – there's an infinite Atonement here.

One phrase that we often focus on is “the living Christ”, and we absolutely 100% do believe in and focus on the Living Christ. I think another phrase that we can remember is “the loving Christ”. The Savior himself said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). So, Jesus Christ himself personally defined his greatest act of love as the crucifixion. Nephi says, “he loveth the world, even he layeth down his [life for the world]” (2 Nephi 26:24). Moroni says that same thing over and over again. You see that God is manifesting his love, and so it's not that there is, which is it, is it the living Christ or the loving Christ? It's both. In fact, if I can share this quote from Dr. Jennifer Lane, she's the Dean of Religious Education at BYU Hawaii. She wrote, "As we think about the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, we can also know that he is the life and the light of the world: Christ as the sacrifice and Christ as the living word. We don't have to pick which one to focus on because we can't have one without the other."

So, a phrase from many, many talks, and I've used it and I'm going to continue to use it because it's really important. The phrase is, I am so grateful that Jesus died for me. Isn't it interesting that we put the emphasis on him dying for me? The older I've gotten, the more I've studied the infinite Atonement and that the elements taking place through each of these events, the more I stand in absolute awe that Jesus Christ chose to live for me. What do I mean by that? I don't mean just that he resurrected, I mean that when he goes into Gethsemane knowing the dual nature of his being -- half mortal, half God, Mary is his mother and God the Father is his Father – it seems to me that the entirety of his mortal aspects would be pleading with him, if not screaming at him, to just give up the ghost right then, because this is way, way harder to endure than should ever be expected of anybody. He could have “let [that] cup pass from [him]”, rejected the cup that he'd covenanted to take, but he chose to endure it, to go through it, not around it, not push it aside, but to go through it and live through it, to endure all of that infinite agony, not just in Gethsemane, not just the senseless things that are taking place in the abuse through the trials (Matthew 26:39). Nephi's words, “...they scourge him ... he suffereth it ... they spit upon him, and he suffereth it” (1 Nephi 19:9). In that 1828 dictionary, “suffer”, the definition is “allow”. So, he allows the spitting, the mocking, the scourging. Why? “...Because of his loving kindness” (1 Nephi 19:9). Because of his great love.

So, at any point, because of who he is, the only person ever born who has absolute power over life and death, the only person who you can't forcefully take his life away from him, he has to give up the ghost; he has to willingly lay it down. And at any time in this process, he could have taken the easy road either to Galilee or – head up to Galilee or, say, you know what? I can't do this anymore. And what he uses – the phrase in Doctrine and Covenants 19 with Martin Harris – to shrink. He didn't shrink. He stood up under the weight, and he lived through all of it for me. When everything in his mortal side would have been pleading with him to use that heavenly power to give up the ghost, and it's only at the very end when he says, “It is finished”, which

becomes three of my favorite words in all of the scriptures (John 19:30). When Jesus says, “It is finished”, that's the indication to me that he has now lived through all of it, the full price has been paid, there's nothing left to be done (John 19:30). He completed it. He lived for me, and then and only then does he allow himself to die for me.

And I think it's important, there might be one person out there today who's saying to themselves, but did he die for me? Am I too far gone? Like, you do not know all the things that I've done. And it's so important to remember that just like Jesus did not give up on us at any stage here, he is not giving up on us now. It is not too late.

So yet as another witness, if we think about the Living Christ, we have this beautiful image that we have in the Church, it's our official logo, it's the Christus statue. If we look closely, particularly at the one we have in Salt Lake based on a model in Denmark, well, the original in Denmark, what do we see in that statue? It's the marks of Jesus's suffering on Calvary. So, when we worship the living and the loving Christ, his witness to us that he is who he says he is “enfleshed” in his resurrected body.

I remember as a kid asking my dad, like, wait a second, I thought a resurrected body is a perfected body. I think it's curious that Jesus has a perfected, resurrected body and yet he's got wounds in his body. What do you think about this? We are engraved on the palms of his hands; he does not forget us. He does not forget that he did all these things for us. So, when you see that beautiful image that we have as the official logo of the Church, you can know that Jesus always and forever will remember you because you are in his hands.

I love this concept that Taylor just shared. It reminds me of something our good friend Shon Hopkin, this concept he shared that when Jesus presents himself to the Nephites, what is his first invitation to them? To come forth and touch the wound in his side and the marks in his hands, his wrists, and his feet. Why? So that they might know that he is their God who came down to this earth to be slain for them, to save them. And the way Shon talks about this is, it's in Christ's vulnerability that we find strength in our own vulnerability, in our own weakness. We can find great strength knowing that, like you were saying, it doesn't matter how deep we've gotten into something, there's still hope, and lest we lose that hope, Christ retains those scars in his perfected, resurrected body as a reminder to us that we're not beyond his reach. Our badness doesn't exceed his power and his goodness.

Elder Holland referred to those as signs, the tokens in his hand as signs that bad things happen to the perfect, and I think that's a helpful thing for us to remember as well, that Jesus Christ who didn't deserve any of this and maybe you or I in our lives are treated in a way that we don't deserve. But Jesus also understands that.

Now, let's go to Calvary itself and not talk about the specifics of the physical crucifixion. What we're going to focus on for the last segment here is, what do we learn about Jesus, about the kind of person he is, using this 1st century biography idea? What do we learn about his character by

analyzing the few statements that we have recorded in the New Testament that he uttered while he was on the cross? Recently I've gone through and looked at every time one of the seven final statements that Christ makes on the cross has been used in General Conference. So, it's been more than 300 times that these statements have been used, and it's the first statement from the Savior that represents about half of those, yes, and so as Jesus is being nailed to the cross he says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And the Joseph Smith translation makes it clear that he's referring to the soldiers who crucified him. Although if you look at other General Conference talks, speakers have referred to many other people, including the Pharisees, the chief priests, that Jesus is including all of them in his statement, forgive them. And that is so powerful, that in the very act of being crucified, he is forgiving those who are doing that to him.

And by the way, those Roman soldiers who are in the act of crucifying him or shortly after they've crucified him, whenever that statement came, they weren't being gentle. They weren't apologizing. They weren't – these men were mocking him as this symbol of the king of the Jews, this group that for them, there's not a lot of love there. And there's something about Christ's character of looking outward. I know that when I'm in pain, I look inward and focus on myself. But as Christ was walking to the cross, he turns to comfort the women who are trying to comfort him.

Now here on the cross, when he could be spitting at the people who are mocking him, he's forgiving them, thinking about them, and while we can't know for sure the precise chronological order of the statements, one of the next statements is when the thief on the cross says, Jesus, remember me, and I don't know what your thoughts are, when I was growing up, I was kind of having a negative impression of this thief that when Jesus says, truly, "...To day [you will] be with me in paradise", there was always the focus on the fact that, well, you know he's really talking about the spirit prison and there's no deathbed repentance (Luke 23:43).

One of the things I think that is interesting is the phraseology that the thief says, it's kind of similar to Alma the Younger: "...Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me..." (Alma 36:18). And even though Alma the Younger was in the darkest abyss, Jesus reaches out to him. And so, I wonder if there's a message to us in this statement from the cross that Jesus is saying, there is worth in you and you will be with me today in paradise. Here's what Joseph Smith said, he kind of paraphrased this statement, he said that in this statement Christ was saying, this day thou shalt be with me in the world of spirits, then I will teach you all about it and answer your inquiries. Did you notice the first person, I will personally teach you and to me that's so powerful.

I've never seen, maybe there's a painting of this and I haven't seen it but I would love to see the painting of Jesus and the thief in the world of spirits where he's reaching out to him. And so again I think there's that message, it is not too late for you. Even on the cross Jesus is holding out hope to the man who has recognized Jesus for who he is and is begging for mercy.

So, we've got two of the statements. What about the one where he looks and, in the distance, you have John standing next to his mother Mary, and he says, "Woman, behold thy son", and John, "Behold thy mother" (John 19:26-27). To me that's again this beautiful image of Christ reaching out when most of us would be reaching in. It shows the love of the Savior. If we were to look at how that phrase has been used in General Conference, most frequently it's used to talk about Christ's love for women, especially his mother. Actually, his mother who gave him life and now she's watching that life that she engendered being raised up on the cross. And another way that we can think about this is if now John's mother is Mary, that makes John and Jesus brothers. So, on the cross John is coming closer into the family of Christ, and I think that may be also a metaphor that we can see in there for each of us. And because Jesus is Mary's first-born son, the oldest under that Jewish tradition, he's in charge of taking care of her and making sure her needs are met.

There's no mention of Joseph in the story from the time, the last time we get Joseph in the New Testament comes when Jesus was twelve. So, something happened to Joseph in that subsequent eighteen years we would assume, which means Jesus is still fulfilling his earthly duty as her oldest son to make sure she's taken care of, even in the midst of his intense suffering, he's still turned that - "... charity suffereth long, and is kind..." (Moroni 7:45). He's showing us what this looks like over and over and over again.

Then for me, the most painful of the seven statements on the cross is traditionally that number four where he, according to the timeline in Matthew and Mark, after the three hours of darkness from noon to 3:00 p.m. where it says that he raises up on the cross and in a loud voice says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). In that phrase we see a Christ who is completely and utterly alone, and we'll put a link in the description to this article about what Church leaders have taught about the seven statements. This is one of the most earliest ones, actually that Church leaders talked about. Brigham Young spoke about this in the 1850s regarding the fact that God is withdrawing his spirit, he doesn't completely abandon Jesus, but to Jesus it feels that way. He is utterly and completely alone.

I love how Elder D. Todd Cristofferson phrased it: "Each of us, whenever that sense may come upon us, need to stop and think, Jesus Christ died for me, Jesus Christ thought me worthy of his blood, and he loves me, he has hopes for me, and he can make a difference in my life. His grace can transform me." You and I might feel humbled as we realize that Christ's feelings of forsakenness on the cross were for us, and so that when you and I feel alone, we know that he has felt that way as well.

You know John, for me, one of the grandest ironies of that whole sequence taking place on the cross is when you couple it with what he had told his apostles moments before stepping over the Kidron brook and entering Gethsemane, he told them, this night you're all going to be scattered and you're all going to leave me alone. But he says, but I'm never alone. I'm not alone because the Father is with me. He's always with me. He's always been with me. And now here, a matter

of hours later, he's saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). And the grandest irony of all is that he asks this heartfelt question, "why hast thou forsaken me", and we have no response in the scriptures, and I love how Elder Holland taught the concept in his great talk that he gave it as his opinion that never was the Father actually closer to the Son than at that moment, but Jesus wasn't allowed to feel that, thus adding serious depth to Jesus's statement in Doctrine and Covenants 76 verse 107 when he said he tread the winepress alone (Matthew 27:46).

He had to be all alone for some reason. And it might be worth your time this Easter season to read carefully the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John separately, like Taylor talked about earlier, to see their portraits. It's in Matthew and Mark that this statement is made and that's the last statement. There is no other voice. The temple – the veil of the temple is rent, perhaps as a way of God testifying and declaring to the people of what's happened. But in Matthew and Mark, Christ dies on the cross with this cry, and I think there's a portrait of Jesus that they want us to see and understand that you've so beautifully described.

And then you get in the gospel of John that simplest statement of all, "I thirst" (John 19:28). Two words. And President Nelson talked about that phrase. That's the phrase that's been least used in General Conference. But President Nelson talked about it in a powerful way, saying that to a doctor of medicine, that is a significant statement and is an indication of the unbearable agony and shock that Christ is going through physically and spiritually.

And then the last two statements kind of go hand in hand, the "It is finished", and then "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (John 19:30, Luke 23:46). And I think both of those are beautiful. That last one that he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Like you mentioned earlier that Christ is laying down his life. No one is making him do it, and it's interesting that in Luke the very first time we hear the voice of Jesus is when he says to his parents, "wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). And now the last words we hear in Luke again, turning to his Father's business – his last statements on the cross reveal the character of Christ in a really powerful way.

And now for us in the 21st century, I find it fascinating that Taylor already mentioned that the Church's new logo with this emphasis of the Christus statue there, knowing that the marks of this infinite Atonement are retained in his hands and in his feet and in his side. Isn't it interesting in English how this works? That we talk about Jesus, of all of the titles there, we could spend hours on all of just the titles and names of Christ. One of them is, he's the Prince of Peace. Brothers and sisters, we live in a world that is not saturated with peace right now. We live in a world that has a lot of turmoil, a lot of conflict and contention and war and dishonesty and things that are the opposite of peace. But I love how if we turn to the Prince of Peace and we learn of him, we appreciate him, we call on his name, what will happen is we will become much more familiar with the Prince of Peace.

The violence he endured for us means that you and I can experience his peace. We can come into the safety of his wings that he puts out for us, that he uses that analogy in scripture as a chicken with the little chicks coming under that wing to protect us as we come into that covenant with him. There's a power that comes when you feel the peace of Jesus Christ and I want to testify that I know Jesus Christ lives today. He is the living and the loving Christ.

Now as we turn our attention from the events that take place in Gethsemane and through the trials and on the cross and we now focus on the tomb and that glorious resurrection morning, I think it's important for us to realize why Easter is such a significant event, why the resurrection is the single greatest event probably in all of eternity for us up to this point. Jesus has overcome two deaths for us through this infinite atoning process. He suffered for our sins; he paid for our spiritual death. In the scriptures, especially in the Book of Mormon, the prophets there refer to that as hell, that he suffered the "pains of hell" for us so that we wouldn't have to go down into that awful realm, and when he said, it is finished on the cross, seems to imply that that full price was paid (Alma 36:13, John 19:30).

Now his body laid in tomb that late in the evening of that Friday, he then lays in that tomb for the rest of Friday, all day Saturday, and then early in the morning Sunday to overcome our physical death, to overcome the grave for us. It seems that it was required of him to overcome both deaths, what Jacob in the Book of Mormon will call "that awful monster, death and hell..." (2 Nephi 9:26). He overcomes both of them by descending into them to then break the bands of both of those deaths for all of us.

Now on that first Easter morning, when those women went to the grave with the spices and the ointments to complete the burial process and the stone was rolled away and the angels declare to them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" "He is not here, for he is risen" (Luke 24:5, Matthew 28:6-7). I don't know of three any more powerful words in all of scripture than "he is risen", because what that means is now those two deaths have been totally broken for us, opening the way for us to rise (Matthew 28:6-7).

I love how in the Book of Mormon in 2nd Nephi 9 when Jacob the prophet, Nephi's brother, is talking about this. He says, if Jesus hadn't completed an infinite Atonement, then our bodies would have died and would have been laid down in the dirt, in the grave, to rot and crumble, "to rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:7). And if that happens to our bodies, he says, Jacob says, that our spirits would be subject to the devil; we would become angels to the devil "to rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:8). Jacob used the same four-word phrase: "to rise no more", for both our spirit and our body, if Jesus doesn't complete an infinite Atonement (2 Nephi 9:7-8). Is it any wonder that we sing out, "He is risen! He is risen! He hath opened heaven's gate. We are free from sin's dark prison, risen to a holier state"?⁵

⁵ Alexander, Cecil F., and Joachim Neander. "He Is Risen!" *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/he-is-risen?lang=eng.

I want to finish with a personal experience that we had a couple of days ago in our home. It was Sunday, and Jenna, our little twelve-year-old daughter, had done a Primary experience for her three youngest siblings, Brennan, Ellia, and Merrit, and they sang Easter songs, and they had a little craft, and later that evening as we were gathered around eating dinner, Jenna mentioned, hey, did you all see the new craft that the little kids did for their Primary lesson today? And there were four of these sitting over on the side of the room. And our little Merrit, the youngest, age 5, he was so proud of his, as my wife went and got his and was admiring it, and then little Merrit said, and did you see the tears? And all of us looked at each other and thought, what is he talking about, did we see the tears? And this little 5-year-old said to us, the tears on Jesus's face.

And I went and I got the – this – and I looked a little closer, and sure enough, little Merrit has drawn a tear coming out of Jesus's eye, and we asked him, why tears? Why is Jesus crying? And this little 5-year-old said, because he loves us. The thing that's amazing to me is that, independent of everybody else, that little 5-year-old came to the conclusion that Jesus loves little Merrit and loves all of us so much that when he was able to burst the bands of death and come walking out of the grave, that it would cause him to shed a tear of joy because of that deep and profound love that he has for all of us.

Now as you celebrate Easter this year, there are a lot of uncertainties in this world. There are a lot of heartaches. There are a lot of things that you and I are carrying in our soul, deep within our heart, that at times are very painful. I love the fact that we worship a God who weeps with us, who cries tears of joy and cries tears of, at times, pain as we suffer. And the glorious message of the gospel, the good news of the gospel, is that the Son of God came from heaven to this fallen earth. He took upon himself all of our struggles, all of our pains, all of our toils, all of our frustrations and sins and addictions and everything that would be the negative effects of the fall of Adam and Eve. He took all of that upon himself and conquered death and hell, that awful monster so that you and I can have a bad day every once in a while. We can have times when we feel less than strong, less than ideal, and somehow, because that tomb is empty and because there is a Savior who isn't just the Savior, but he is your personal Savior and Redeemer, and he's up in heaven today, sitting enthroned on the right hand of the Father, who is pleading our cause before God on high, somehow, we will be able to overcome through his infinite goodness and mercy and grace.

As we celebrate Easter this year, just know that he lives. He is not in the tomb. He is risen, and because of him, you and I can rise up both physically and spiritually. I'm going to stick with Merrit on this. Jesus loves us. More importantly, he loves you, and we leave that with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.