



TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES

Sandra Rogers

NOT LONG AFTER his final preparations for his ministry—the subjection of his mortality to forty days of fasting and his triumph over the powers of darkness in Satan’s great attempt to thwart the plan of salvation by overwhelming the Son of God—Jesus of Nazareth took himself from the wilderness of Judea to his boyhood home in Nazareth. There, “as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). He was given the scrolls containing the book of Isaiah and read from the sixty-first chapter, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that

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are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:1–2; Luke 4:18–19).



*Christ taught that he was anointed to proclaim liberty to the captives.
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Everyone in the room knew that this scripture referred to the eagerly anticipated Messiah. They also knew that when Jesus sat down after reading the scripture, he signaled that he was now going to give commentary on the passage he had read.¹ His next words stunned them: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). In this brief moment in a small, inconspicuous synagogue in the dusty rural hamlet of Nazareth, Jesus calmly and succinctly announced who he was and what he had been sent by his Father to do.

In this Easter season, when I think of the scriptures that speak clearly to every heart of the mission of our Savior and the reasons why we might feel to shout “Hallelujah! He is risen!” I remember a few favorite passages.

The Lord revealed to Moses, “My Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2).

Isaiah foretold the great sacrifice of the Atonement, prophesying, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4–6).

Alma taught, “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

Heavenly choirs of angels announced at his birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Christ’s invitation to all was, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

The Savior confirmed to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:10–11).

These verses are all eloquent testimonies of the Savior’s divine purpose and ministry. I read them during the sacrament, and I especially love them at Easter. Today, however, I would like to focus on one of the phrases that Jesus read in Nazareth to announce who he was. The passage from Isaiah reads, “to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” and the quote in Luke reads, “to preach deliverance to the captives.” I would like to share a few thoughts with you this Easter season on how Christ proclaims liberty, preaches deliverance to those who are captive, and opens the prisons to them that are bound.

Let me start with two questions: Who are the captives that are bound? And what is the nature of their captivity? I would like to consider with you four types of captivity. First is the captivity of physical death that comes to all as a result of the Fall of Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:21–22; 2 Nephi 2:22–23). The second is the captivity we experience because of the actions of others or social circumstances. The third is the captivity of physical infirmities. Finally, there is the captivity we bring upon ourselves by our own choices and attitudes.

THE CAPTIVITY OF PHYSICAL DEATH

All those who live on earth will experience physical death. Mortals through the ages have attempted to stave off the captivity of death through elixirs, powders, cryonics, lotions, nutrients, and surgical procedures. Christ offers, instead, the promise of opening the doors of the prison to them that are bound by death. As Jacob explained, “For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection. . . . Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:6–7).

For the mortal body to rot and crumble and rise no more is a terrifying captivity in and of itself. But without the intercession of Christ, the liberator of all men and women, the

end result for our spirits would have been even worse. Jacob helped us understand this end result when he taught: “O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself. . . . O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster” (2 Nephi 9:8–10).

When Christ rose from the tomb on the third day as the first resurrected being, he shattered the chains of eternal captivity for not only our bodies but our spirits as well. Perhaps it has been too easy for us all to accept this marvelous free gift as the given part of the Atonement, the part that every human being receives no matter what. And because it was given for all, we may not be nearly as appreciative of this gift as we should be. When we rejoice this Easter season because of Christ’s victory over death and the great promise of the resurrection and immortality, let us remember that without that resurrection, not only would our bodies have been captive to the grave, never to reunite with our spirits, but our spirits also would have been slaves to the devil, forever in misery in the clutches of the master of darkness.

When Christ took up his life again and became “the first-fruits of them who slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20), he freed all of

us from the captivity of physical death and opened the door for all the other miracles of the Atonement. Through his infinite grace and our faithfulness and obedience, death is conquered and hell has no power to hold our spirits captive. Without immortality there could be no eternal life (see Moses 1:39). How grateful I am for this great gift of deliverance!

THE CAPTIVITY OF THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS

Another form of captivity from which Christ can set us free is the captivity created by others. There is no doubt that Christ has the power to free God's children from enslavement. We have the examples of the children of Israel being freed from Egyptian bondage (see Exodus 7–14); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego being saved from the flames of King Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (see Daniel 3: 8–28); Daniel being spared from the lions' den (see Daniel 6:10–23); Nephi being freed from the bonds inflicted upon him by Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 18:11–20); Alma and Amulek rending prison walls through their faith (see Alma 14:25–29); Lehi and Nephi, the sons of Helaman, being encircled in a pillar of fire as prison walls were destroyed (see Helaman 5:21–50); and Joseph Smith being delivered from Liberty Jail.

But we are also aware that there are many, including the most faithful of believers, who were not physically released from captivity. Convert believers and their wives and children were thrown into the flames along with their holy scriptures as Alma and Amulek were forced to watch (see Alma 14:8–10), the early Christian martyrs were imprisoned and eventually

crucified or cast to the lions to provide local entertainment, and Joseph and Hyrum Smith did not survive their incarceration in Carthage Jail.

How are we, then, to understand Christ's promise to preach deliverance to and liberate the captives in these circumstances? Why were not all these believers freed? Understanding the answer to the question *why* is not always easy for any of us, because such understanding is acquired only by our faith in Jesus Christ (see Philippians 4:7). That understanding necessitates, as King Benjamin taught, that we yield "to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, and [put] off the natural man and . . . [become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

Those who can submit to the Lord's will, knowing that life is truly more than mortality and more than we know with our limited perspectives, are also be able to understand that Christ can liberate the spirit even when the body is in chains. We learn from Abinadi's death by fire that God knows how his children suffer and is prepared to "execute vengeance upon those who destroy his people" (Mosiah 17:19).

Alma was constrained by the Spirit not to stretch forth his hand and save the innocent converts who were killed by the wicked Ammonihahites because "the Lord receiveth them up unto himself in glory; and he doth suffer that . . . The people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of

their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day" (Alma 14:11).

Mormon noted after a terrible slaughter on both sides of a Nephite-Lamanite war that "while many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promise of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness" (Alma 28:12).

More importantly, faith and trust in Christ can turn some moments of captivity into blessings in disguise. A *Mormon Times* article tells about Alfred Young, who was twenty years old when he was taken prisoner in World War II and sent to Japan. His life was filled with "darkness, uncertainty, sickness, beatings, and starvation. One day, he wanted something to read and his friend, Jim Nelson, gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon." After his release, Alfred married, began a family, remembered Jim Nelson, and looked for his church. The family was baptized and sealed in the temple. The gospel became the balm that healed the trauma of his captivity, and it ultimately saved his family. As a prisoner, Alfred had been stripped of everything humane, but when he encountered the Book of Mormon, it liberated him.²

In a *New Era* article, Melvin Leavitt tells the story of Piet Vlam, the second counselor in the Netherlands Mission in May of 1942. As a former naval officer in occupied Holland, he

had to travel to Arnhem to register with the German officials. When he left his wife to register on May 15, he had no idea he would not see her again for three years. Along with other Dutch military officers, he was sent to Germany as a prisoner of war. Brother Vlam couldn't help but ask *why*.

One day after Brother Vlam arrived at Langwasser prison compound, a fellow prisoner began asking questions about religion. Brother Vlam knew how to answer the questions, and soon other prisoners wanted to hear about the Church. Groups were not allowed to gather, so Brother Vlam taught the gospel two men at a time as they walked around the camp. Soon the group wanted to hold worship services and found an empty barrack. A blanket covered the window so that the guards could not see them. Hymns were read, not sung, to avoid attracting the attention of the guards.

Gospel principles guided the behaviors of the prisoners in the group. The prisoners fasted despite their hunger. One received a testimony during a night of fasting and wept as he told the group the next day of the indescribable feeling of peace he had received. The men even composed an original song called "Faith."

Church activities continued until they were liberated. Seven of the prisoners were baptized. One of these prison converts became the first president of the Netherlands Stake. Through faith and trust in Christ, Brother Vlam fulfilled his calling in the mission presidency despite his incarceration.³

Using the example of Joseph Smith’s experience in Liberty Jail, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shed great light on how the Savior can free those who remain bound. He said, “The lessons



*The lessons of Liberty Jail teach us that man’s extremity is God opportunity.
(Liz Lemon Swindle, Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, Courtesy of Foundation Arts.)*

of the winter of 1838–39 teach us that every experience can become a redemptive experience if we remain bonded to our Father in Heaven through it. These difficult lessons teach us that man’s extremity is God’s opportunity, and if we will be humble and faithful, if we will be believing and not curse God for our problems, He can turn the unfair and inhumane and debilitating prisons of our lives into temples—or at least into a circumstance that can bring comfort and revelation, divine companionship and peace.”⁴

Elder Holland’s “lessons from Liberty Jail” apply to all the forms of captivity that come to us because of the actions of others. Those who have suffered captivity at the hands of others—whether it is abuse of any sort, dishonesty, slander, gossip, or unfair judgment—can take comfort in the truth that Christ has the power to take those burdens from us and liberate us from the damaging effects they cause. Elder Richard G. Scott explained: “Your abuse results from another’s unrighteous attack on your freedom, . . . and to compensate, the Lord has provided a way for you to overcome the destructive results of others’ acts against your will. . . . You cannot erase what has been done, but you can forgive. (See D&C 64:10.) Forgiveness heals terrible, tragic wounds, for it allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. . . . It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord. . . . He will heal you as you cease to fear and place your trust in him by striving to live his teachings.”⁵

How does this healing occur? Elder Scott said: “The beginning of healing [and the release from captivity caused by someone else’s misuse of agency] requires childlike faith in the unalterable fact that Father in Heaven loves you and has supplied a way to heal [or liberate or deliver]. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, laid down His life to provide that healing. . . . The cure requires profound faith in Jesus Christ and in His infinite capacity to heal.”⁶

Through our faith, forgiveness, trust, and obedience, Christ liberates us from the prisons created by the agency of others. When we are able to understand his doctrine, rely on his love for us, and cast our burdens upon his shoulders, looking forward with his eternal perspective, we will have regained our freedom. By choosing him, we are delivered and bound no more.

Additionally, we can feel we are held captive by social conditions and constraints. Bullies can intimidate and coerce us, and they exist in far more places than the elementary school playground. The pain and the terror of rejection or verbal and physical abuse by others are as real as a prison cell. Too often in today’s world, youth and adults alike are intimidated—and intimidation is a form of captivity—by those who would entice, threaten, or provoke by calling evil things good and good things evil (see Isaiah 5:20).

Each time children of God experience peer pressure to be immoral, to feel ashamed for Christ’s sake, or to respond to any situation in an unrighteous way, their agency is being

tested by the agency of others. The myth that morality and fidelity are old-fashioned and trite can imprison more than just one individual as generations are affected by the choices perpetuated by this lie. The myth that withholding judgment or having charity means that all values are relative and should be given equal importance or loyalty creates a heavy chain that eventually traps a person in doubt and disaffection, leaving him or her to be constantly “driven in the wind and tossed” (see James 1:6). However, confidence that Christ honors those who honor him (see 1 Samuel 2:30) provides an “anchor to our souls” (Ether 12:4) whereby we are capable of giving affirmative answers to those who question the “reason for the hope that is within us” (1 Peter 3:15). I remember one of my saddest moments as a faculty member at BYU. One of my students came to me in emotional tatters. She had come to BYU looking for a supportive community that shared her values, something she had not enjoyed being the only Mormon in her high school. Instead her peers at BYU teased, sneered at, and demeaned her because she was not willing to watch an R-rated movie. How proud I was of her! Despite the hurt of rejection “by her own,” her faith carried her through the social prison created by her peers. To “stand in holy places and be not moved” (D&C 87:8) in today’s world requires faith, courage, poise, and patience.

Another potential social prison is that created by poverty and the subjugation of the poor by others. Isaiah saw the oppression of the poor as a great wickedness in his time and in

the latter days (see Isaiah 3:14–15). Poverty limits options and constrains choices. The Lord knows all about poverty. He has revealed principles and strategies to break the chains of poverty. The Lord taught the early Saints of this dispensation in parable about their obligations to the poor: “And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself. For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just? Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one: and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:25–27).

In a revelation clarifying the principle of consecration, the Lord said,

For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures.

I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

But it must needs to be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed

to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment (D&C 104:13–18).

One sister in the Philippines saved money, according to the principles of personal preparedness, to repair her home if it was struck by a typhoon. This last year, as a devastating typhoon moved toward the Philippines, she prayed that her humble home would be spared. Part of her faithful prayer was the promise that if her home was spared, she would donate what she had saved to repair her own home to others whose homes had been damaged. Her home was spared, and her money was donated to help those members who had suffered in the typhoon. Meanwhile, just a few months later, her daughter found a job that would pay her more and also give her more time to be at home with her family and to attend the temple regularly. This family is being delivered from the chains of poverty by their faith in Christ and their obedience to his precepts.

The Lord also taught an additional important principle regarding the poor. “Wo unto you rich men, that will not give

your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; . . . wo unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and who are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, and who will not labor with your own hands. But blessed are the poor who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth will be theirs" (D&C 56:16–18).

I have a good friend from Ghana. Once she told me that the Saints in Ghana had to rely on this blessing in faith because life was so hard for the poor in Ghana. She also said that they knew their poverty would only be relieved at the Second Coming of the Savior. She said she prayed for the Second Coming constantly but feared that her prayers were "too small" to counter the "big" prayers of all of us in America who have so much and are worried about losing it.

Those who have are to avoid the snares of selfishness and greed and share what they have in order to relieve their brothers and sisters of the captivity of poverty. Those who do not have are to keep faith in the Lord's promises and avoid the captivity of covetousness and greed. Each can do that by following the Savior.

The Lord has revealed the law of consecration, the law of the fast, the welfare program, the principles of personal and family preparedness, the Perpetual Education Fund, and

Employment Resource Services to help break down the walls of the prison of poverty for faithful members of the Church. Still, the theme that continues to be repeated is that faith and trust in the Lord break the figurative bonds of poverty. And after observing the power of faith in the lives of many of the poorest in the Church, I see great spiritual blessings in their lives because of their obedience.

For those individuals or their loved ones afflicted by social conditions and challenges, the captivity of the body or the mind to those conditions is not unlike Joseph Smith's circumstance in Liberty Jail. Elder Holland's insight that these can, through faith in Christ and trust in him, become redemptive experiences provides us with the reassurance that Christ is still and always delivering the captive, no matter the type of prison in which that captive is bound.

THE CAPTIVITY OF PHYSICAL AFFLICTIONS

Another form of imprisonment common to our sojourn in mortality is disease or disability. Christ's ministry was filled with acts that delivered sufferers from pain, sickness, and infirmity. Over and over again, he healed all manner of sickness and disease. Whether it was "divers diseases and torments" (Matthew 4:24), leprosy (see Matthew 8:3), palsy (see Matthew 8:5–13), possession by devils (see Matthew 8:16), an issue of blood (see Matthew 9:20–22), blindness (see Matthew 9:27–19), a withered limb (see Matthew 12:10–13), or being blind, dumb, lame, or maimed (see Matthew 15:30–31), Christ freed the person from those conditions. I have only named a few healings from

the Book of Matthew. In a review of all four Gospels, I counted more than one hundred references to Christ's healing power.

Yet just as not all those imprisoned inside walls and fences gain complete physical freedom, those imprisoned by the frailties of the body—whether caused by genetics, accident, poor care, or poor judgment on our part—may not always gain complete freedom of a healthy body or mind. Elder Dallin H. Oaks recently taught that healing the sick can come by medical science, by the prayers of faith, and by priesthood blessings. He reiterated that God “manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles . . . among the children of men according to their faith” (2 Nephi 16:13). But Elder Oaks also noted, “Faith and the healing power of the priesthood cannot produce a result contrary to the will of Him whose priesthood it is. . . . The Lord’s promise is that ‘he that hath faith in me to be healed, *and is not appointed unto death*, shall be healed’ (D&C 42:48; emphasis added).”⁷ Elder Oaks then illustrated the faith and trust involved in presenting all our various pains to the Lord. He said, “As children of God, knowing of His great love and His ultimate knowledge of what is best for our eternal welfare, we trust in Him. . . . I felt that . . . trust in the words of the father of [a] choice girl whose life was taken by cancer in her teen years. He declared, ‘Our family’s faith is in Jesus Christ and is not dependent on outcomes.’ . . . We do all that we can for the healing of a loved one, and then we trust in the Lord for the outcome.”⁸

Elder Merrill J. Bateman once told the story of a young girl who suffered from a rare disease called glutaric acidemia, which causes great pain and paralysis. The girl was confined to a wheelchair and could not speak, though she could send messages with her eyes. A gifted teacher was able to work patiently with the girl and learned that her favorite hymn was “There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today,” particularly the verse that reads,

There is music in my soul today.
A carol to my King,
And Jesus listening can hear
The songs I cannot sing.⁹

Feeling guided by the Spirit, the teacher asked, “Does Jesus listen? Does He hear the songs you cannot sing? . . . Does Jesus talk to you in your mind and in your heart? . . . Does Jesus say, ‘Heather, I love you’? . . . Does he say, ‘Heather, be patient; I have great things in store for you’?” The intensity of the girl’s eyes penetrated the teacher’s soul. The girl “knew she was loved. She knew she was special. She knew she only needed to be patient because great things were in store for her.”¹⁰ Christ’s love and comfort provided solace to a little girl whose faith assured her that through his power she would be restored to a “proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23).

THE CAPTIVITY OF OUR OWN WRONG CHOICES

The last type of captivity experienced by all human beings is the captivity we create by our own agency. As the Apostle

Paul said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Sometimes we sin because of ignorance, sometimes because of our weaknesses, and sometimes because we decide to be willfully disobedient. Regardless of the reason, through the love of our Heavenly Father and the sacrifice of his Beloved Son, we can repent and be freed of the consequences of unrighteous choices.¹¹

Throughout every age, the Lord has stretched forth his hand urging and imploring us to repent and return to him. Lehi taught that "redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered" (2 Nephi 2:6-7). Jacob added this plea, "O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto God who is the rock of your salvation" (2 Nephi 9:45).

True faith in Christ will propel us to action, to do all that we can do to partake of his redeeming grace offered to us through the Atonement. That faith builds within us such a trust and confidence that we want to obey his commands and live by his teachings. "As we place our faith in Jesus Christ, becoming His obedient disciples, Heavenly Father will forgive our sins and prepare us to return to Him."¹²

As one who has had, to confront my own sins and continues to do so, I have taken great comfort in the words of

Ezekiel. "If he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity: he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live" (Ezekiel 33:14–16).

King Benjamin explained it this way:

And again, I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and the standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him

that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. (Mosiah 4:11–13)

The hope of redemption from sin through the Atonement of Jesus Christ is the most powerful hope mankind can ever have. Think of the experience of Alma the Younger, confronted by an angel of the Lord about the seriousness of his sins and harrowed up in body and spirit by the severity of those sins. He told his son Helaman:

Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness,

and am encircled about the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. (Alma 36:15–21)

Can you imagine the joyful scene in the spirit world upon the Savior's arrival after his death and Resurrection? Those who had died "firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ . . . were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. . . . While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful" (D&C 138:14–18). Those who had looked forward to this grandest of independence days, who had made the effort to repent, to improve their discipleship, to be obedient, had seen their faith rewarded.

The Savior then organized the righteous, giving them power and authority, and "commissioned them to go forth

and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead. And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel." (D&C 138:30–31).

I also propose that we would sell the Atonement far too short if we only believe that it made it possible for us to be delivered from the burden, terrible as it might be, of our sins and transgressions. The Atonement of Jesus Christ, if we rely on it with active faith, also covers our dumb mistakes, our uninformed judgments, and our childish responses. Because of the Atonement, we are not only delivered from sin through his grace and our renewed and retuned discipleship but also given the great and magnificent opportunity to learn from our mistakes. We are not held captive by our inexperience, ignorance, and immaturity. We can actually learn and be taught. Weaknesses can become strengths (see Ether 12:27). Debts can be paid, relationships saved, wrongs righted, trust regained, and wisdom increased because Christ's Atonement gives us the gifts of progress, reconciliation, development, and improvement.

Despite these reassurances, too many of us are reluctant to leave the prisons we have built for ourselves. The Savior is knocking at the door of our cells, shoving keys under the door, and too often we ignore their presence. What is it that keeps us locked up inside the walls we have built ourselves, unwilling

to take advantage of the deliverance Christ offers? Is it because of the “easiness of the way” that we hesitate or refuse to follow Christ? (see Alma 37:46).

President Ezra Taft Benson revealed the root of our imprisonment in his classic address on pride:

Most of us think of pride as self-centeredness, conceit, boastfulness, arrogance, or haughtiness. All of these are elements of the sin, but the heart, or core, is still missing. The central feature of pride is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. *Enmity* means “hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.” It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us. Pride is essentially competitive in nature. We pit our will against God’s. When we direct our pride toward God, it is in the spirit of “my will and not thine be done.” . . . The proud cannot accept the authority of God giving direction to their lives. . . . The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren’t interested in changing their opinions to agree with God’s. . . . The proud [also] make every man their adversary by pitting their intellects, opinions, works, wealth, talents, or any other worldly measuring device against others . . . to elevate [themselves] and diminish [others].¹³

Pride, then, keeps us captive, imprisoned, in shackles because we, ourselves, do not want to let Christ rescue us. It is

the enmity or opposition we feel toward him, toward the Savior and Redeemer of the World that prevents us from moving from exquisite pain to exquisite joy. The War in Heaven, fought between the forces of Lucifer and the forces of Christ, is raging again in the spiritual battlefields of our own lives, and pride makes a sorry general, tactician, or strategist.

President Benson taught that the antidote for pride is humility. Is it any wonder, then, that Christ's first recorded sermons in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon include the Beatitudes? And is it any wonder that the Beatitudes offer so much counsel about humility? Christ uses the term *blessed* to describe the poor in spirit who come to him, the meek, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for his name (see 3 Nephi 12:3–10)—all components and attributes of humility.

The great gift of deliverance, now and in the eternities, is ours through humility. Humility is the seed of faith, the harbinger of hope, the mother of repentance, and the doorway through which the Holy Ghost can come into our lives and provide inspiration, comfort, and peace. Humility is the gateway to obedience and discipleship, the window to hearkening to counsel. Humility protects us from the mists of darkness, the filthy water, and the enticements of the great and spacious building. Humility is like a spiritual GPS unit, keeping us fixed on Jesus Christ, the fruit of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8).

Humility is an immunization against all that would seek to draw us away from our Savior and Redeemer. It is the

filter—the spiritual bouncer if you will—that throws out the lies that are pleasing to the carnal mind (see Alma 30:53). Humility is the brake on careening desires, the corrective lens on worldly myopia, and the finely tuned hearing aid that picks up every word spoken by the Lord, through his servants, and through the Holy Ghost.

The blessings of humility include forgiveness and mercy (see D&C 61:2), direction from the Lord (see D&C 112:10), strength and knowledge (see D&C 1:28), the broken heart we offer to God as evidence of our sacrifice (see Isaiah 66:2), and the reassurance that we will not need to be compelled to be humble (see Alma 32:16).

Humility and trust in Christ allow us to grant ourselves the gift of forgiving others. I have come to learn that the commandment to forgive is more a blessing to the forgiver than the one in need of forgiveness. When we can subdue anger, contention, hurt, and pride and forgive the one who engendered those feelings in us, we turn the judgment seat away from ourselves and give it back to Christ, where it ultimately belongs (see D&C 64:10–11).

My favorite scene from the Hollywood classic *Ben Hur* is not the chariot race. It is at the very end of the movie. Ben Hur has allowed his heart to be filled with anger and revenge; he wants others to suffer as he and his family had suffered. But a change of heart occurs when he witnesses the Crucifixion of Jesus. He tells his loved ones that he heard Jesus forgive those who crucified him and that his words “took the sword out of

my hand.” He is freed from the shackles he had created for himself because Christ offered a better choice.

On two occasions in my life, I, like Anne Shirley of *Green Gables* fame, felt that I was in the depths of despair. In each circumstance, I felt that I was powerless to do anything to stop the maelstrom of challenges and difficulties going on around me. In one case, I felt that I had made so many mistakes and errors that it was now impossible for me to regain the trust and confidence of those around me. Their continued suggestions for my improvement reinforced my sense of failure. In the other case, I felt that the decisions and actions of another were pinning me in a corner and causing me to do my job inadequately. In both situations, I felt defeated and helpless.

In the first instance, I remember praying for help and guidance, fighting through my embarrassment and my pride to try to find a way to recover, to make things right, to regain trust. The answer the Lord gave me was precise and simple. It was, “Study the Beatitudes, and be more of what they say.” Through that learning process, I became convinced that the Beatitudes were far more than simple little phrases to learn in Primary. I came to understand how critical and fundamental they were, at least for me. And I came to know that unless I could be willing to learn, to take counsel, to admit mistakes, to attempt to do better, I would never progress temporally or spiritually. It was not an easy lesson to learn, and there are days when I wished I didn’t have to learn it over and over again, but I am convinced it was a lesson from heaven for me.

In the second instance, I was so befuddled in my little prison cell that I became despondent, so much so that it was noticeable to others. A good friend, a colleague and a mentor, came to me one day and said, "I know you are in a bad place. I know you feel painted into a corner. I don't know how to help you, but I do know that Christ can help you if you will let him." Again, the root of my angst was my pride and the anguish of feeling that I was not measuring up because someone was taking my territory. My friend's counsel was a wake-up call. It sent me back to asking, yet again, whether I was willing to learn, to admit an error, to try again, to improve because of my faith in Christ. Again, I was asked to exchange pride for humility.

Each of these circumstances taught me that not only will pride keep you from repenting of a sin, but it will also keep you from learning and growing and improving and changing. In each case, it was the Savior—his doctrine, his gospel, his atoning sacrifice—that made change possible.

I wish I could tell you that after these two experiences I never have had to relearn those lessons. But that would be a lie. I learn them week by week and month by month in my work, in my relationships with my family and friends, and in my calling to teach teenagers in Sunday School. I continue to have the profoundest gratitude for deliverance from my errors. What despair I would experience if I felt that it was impossible to learn, to improve, and to change.

President Benson taught that humility, like pride, is our choice. He encouraged us to choose to be humble by esteeming others as ourselves, by receiving counsel and chastisement, by forgiving those who have offended us, by rendering selfless service, by going on missions and preaching the word, by going to the temple more frequently, by confessing and forsaking our sins and being born of God, by loving God and submitting our will to his, and by putting him first in our lives.¹⁴

Sometimes we begin a course of action that is contrary to the Lord's commandments while thinking we will always have all of our degrees of freedom. A friend once likened this attitude to swimming in the river of filthy water described in Lehi's dream (see 1 Nephi 8) but feeling okay about ourselves because the iron rod was still in sight. Suddenly we find that the prison doors are shut tightly and completely. We have allowed ourselves to participate so much in the darkness that we now are nearly incapable of turning on the light. Our habits and addictions, our spending of "money for that which is of no worth" and our laboring "for that which cannot satisfy" (2 Nephi 9:51) have eroded our agency bit by bit.

Yet the first step of any recovery from those powerful habits and addictions is to catch the glimmer of light in the darkness and follow it back to a greater light. An editorial in the *Church News* explained that in the Church's inspired recovery program, one decides to "turn your will and your life over to the care of God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ."¹⁵

I am a nurse by training, and as far as I know there have been no scientific studies demonstrating the mechanisms through which brazen serpents on poles exert healing powers. We know that there were many of the children of Israel who chose not to look, as they were instructed to do by Moses, and so they were not healed from the plague of snake bites (see Deuteronomy 21:8–9). Yet, all those who “beheld the serpent” lived. Those who refused to look perished because “they did not believe that it would heal them” (see Alma 33:20).

Our pride can keep us from looking to Christ to live. For some reason we are willing to turn to tele-counselors, talk-show hosts, and New Age philosophers for counsel and affirmation, but we don’t choose to turn to the one, the Holy One, who holds the keys to all the cells in our particular prison. The winds and the waves are blowing all around us, and we keep wanting to build our houses on the sand (see Matthew 7:24).

Humility—that humility based on faith and trust in the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6)—unlocks the prison doors, even when we have built those prisons ourselves. When we choose humility, we are choosing Jesus Christ. When we choose Christ, we are choosing deliverance and freedom. As Jacob so beautifully expressed, “Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto men. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of

the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit" (2 Nephi 2:27–28).

My prayer is that in every season, but especially in this Easter season, we might choose liberty and eternal life through Christ, our Lord; that we also might rejoice in the liberty and freedom given to us by the Savior through his great Atonement, his suffering for us, and his triumph over death and hell. I love and worship him for giving us hope for freedom from sin and from error. I honor him for preaching deliverance to the captives and setting at liberty them that are bruised (see Luke 4:18). I praise him for opening the prison doors to them that are bound.

I testify that he lives. I know that he has done what he covenanted to do. I witness that he has and will set the captive free. I give all glory to his holy name.

NOTES

1. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 179.
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3. Melvin Leavitt, "Missionary Focus: Captive Missionary," *New Era*, April 1977, 18–19.
4. Jeffery R. Holland, "Lessons from Liberty Jail," *Ensign*, September 2009, 28.
5. Richard G. Scott, "Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 1992, 31, 33.

6. Richard G. Scott, "To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 2008, 42.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, "Healing the Sick," *Ensign*, May 2010, 50.
8. Oaks, "Healing the Sick," 50.
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12. *Gospel Principles*, 103.
13. Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4.
14. Benson, "Beware of Pride," 7.
15. *Addiction Recovery Program: A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2005), iv.