

Denver Snuffer Podcast 159: Remembering Easter

In this episode, Denver discusses the events that culminated in the act of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sacrificing his life for us.

DENVER: ...I had just turned 12 at the start of the month, and...

Three out of four of my grandparents had died before I was born. The only living grandparent that I had when I was born was still around when I was 12. And she wouldn't die for many years.

I had not seen or heard of anyone in my family or in my immediate circle of friends who died. The only real death that had intruded into my awareness was President John Kennedy, and that seemed fabulously theatrical, distant, and more like theater than reality. But in August of 1965, we moved from elementary schools to the junior high school; there were East Elementary (where I went to school), and there was North Elementary, and there was West Elementary. And there were kids in the town that (and the surrounding area) that you never met, because if they didn't go to your elementary school, you wouldn't cross their paths. But when they combined into the junior high school, kids from all over came. And there was one kid in particular that I became pretty good friends with in fairly short order. Among other things, we shared a study hall, and he was an absolute cut-up. He was capable of extraordinarily effective mischief. He knew how to make a pencil stick to the ceiling of the study hall. And he knew how to time things when the teacher's back was turned. And he and I became really quite good friends for as short a time period as we had from August 'til October. I think I liked him more than anyone else that was in my immediate circle of friends.

And on Friday, September 29th, all the buses lined up; this kid lived way out of town in a little place called Bruneau. He was bused in from Bruneau so he had a long bus ride to get home. And as he was getting ready to get on the buses, I was hanging out with them until the buses were to depart. My last words to him (which were intended to be funny) was, "Don't go and get yourself killed this weekend." And so my buddy, Waldo—Waldo Shetler—got on the bus and took off.

On Saturday, he was killed. And on Monday, we heard the story that down in Bruneau, he was riding his bike, and a hay truck hit him and killed him. That was the first time that death entered into my consciousness. And I don't recall at that moment being as sad as I was shocked, surprised, troubled, trying to figure out what this new reality meant. But because Waldo Shetler was the first person in my life who died, the first person of any proximity, I've thought about him every time death gets close again.

I've known a few people who were resigned to dying—they were in hospice; they had a terminal illness; they had a terminal problem that they knew they were not going to survive. And I've told quite a number of people in that position, "Hey, when you get to the other side, will you let Waldo Shetler know his buddy Denver still remembers him and thinks about him? And someday I'll come look him up personally, but you tell him I said

hello." So I don't know how many messages Waldo's received over the years since he died. He was about seven months older than me, and he turned 12 much earlier in the school... Well, actually, he turned 12 before the school year began. But he's buried in Bruneau at the Bruneau Cemetery. And I've never made it back there to visit the grave of Waldo, but I think I'd like to do that—because what he represents in my consciousness is the introduction of death into this life, awareness of it at a personal level.

Well, Easter's coming up on Sunday the 17th of this month. And when Steve asked us to talk, one of the things that came first in the conversation was we oughta talk about Easter, say something about Easter, so that it doesn't come and go without notice. There's a passage—it's early in the Book of Mormon; in our Scriptures, it's Second Nephi chapter 11, verse 8—where, recording about their religion and how they practiced it, they write, *We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies that our children may know to what source they may look for the remission of their sins.*

You know, if you're talking, and you're rejoicing, and you're preaching, and you're prophesying... For those who are living, the remission of sins is the great thing that we can experience and long to have and want to receive an inheritance of. But in the bigger picture, it's the resurrection on Easter morning that is the great triumph because it breaks that enemy that God introduced at the time of the fall that will ultimately cost every one of us our lives. John's prophecy about the judgment and the end of times (when we finally get down to the very end) reflects this. He writes this in Revelation chapter 8, verse 8: *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.* "Wipe away all [the] tears from their eyes...there shall be no more death." I mean, death has taken quite a number of people; in fact, of late, it's taken a number of people that I know and have been friends with, and I'm sorry to see them part. And the first great thing that gets wiped away is death—and then our sorrows and our crying and our pain. But that loss of life—that ending that cuts off your association for a temporary time—always leaves us, I think, in a position of thinking back about losses and of our own death—because it's inevitable; it's coming; it's unavoidable; and in some respects, depending upon the condition that you wind up in, it's a release (and a welcome one at that).

Well, Christ's accomplishment, His great achievement, began in Gethsemane and culminated with the resurrection. What I find interesting is that when the Lord has taken the time to talk about His experience, what He talks about is not the experience on the cross, and He doesn't talk about the crucifixion. When He spoke (in modern revelation) about what it was that He had accomplished, the place where He goes to is Gethsemane.

In the T&C (T&C 1—it's the Joseph Smith History) in Joseph Smith History 17, at paragraph 5, he says,

Repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger that your sufferings be sore.

What I find interesting is that the way in which He's going to smite us, He defines as by "the rod of my mouth," meaning that the words He speaks are what will cause us this pain and the suffering.

Your sufferings be sore, how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I God, have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer if they would repent. But if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I, which suffering caused myself even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain and to bleed at every pore and to suffer both body and spirit, and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink. Nevertheless, glory be to the Father and I partook, and finished my preparations unto the children of man. Wherefore I command you again to repent, lest I humble you by my almighty power, and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree, you've tasted, at the time I withdrew my spirit.

See, the place in which He suffered body and spirit and would that He "might not drink the bitter cup and shrink" was in the garden. And so, He doesn't mention the crucifixion; He focuses upon the suffering that went on in Gethsemane—which also was covered, yet again, in the revelations that have come in this continuance of the Restoration, and that's in T&C section 161, which starts out describing:

...a view of the Lord kneeling in prayer...in a dark place. The air was heavy and overcast with [shadow]. The man beheld the Lord praying in Gethsemene on the night of His betrayal and before His crucifixion.

All the Lord had previously done in His mortal ministry by healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, restoring hearing to the deaf, curing the leper, and ministering relief to others as he taught was but a prelude to what the Lord was now to do on this dark, oppressive night. (T&C 161:1-2)

And then it describes how the Lord, in prayer, began vicariously suffering. And He goes through these waves of torment, which was the Lord kneeling in prayer, exposed to the guilt, the shame, the recriminations, the difficulties, the pains of both offending God and your fellow man AND **being** offended by your fellow man, and the torment of the mind and the spirit and the soul in trying to overcome and reconcile yourself back into the presence of God the Father; shedding all of what you **feel** when you are smitten by the rod of the mouth of that pure being who is God the Father, and the recognition that you are out of adjustment/you are out of sync with the Almighty; you are not good and pure and holy, and you are in the presence of a good and a just and a Holy Being.

The Gospel reflects that an angel came strengthening Him—which is not altogether an accurate description of what went on. He... The Father's presence never left the Son throughout all His sufferings. And indeed, part of the Son's sufferings was caused by the necessity to reconcile peacefully His experience of this unclean, unworthy state (with the feelings of shame and guilt that are caused by not being reconciled with God), and then overcoming that and being able to reconcile Himself again with the Father and coming to a

place of peace and harmony and at-one-ness with the Father that this awful experience had disrupted. It shattered the harmony that existed between the Father and the Son that had existed throughout His entire ministry, and it put the Son into the same position as the worst of the sinners who had jarringly disassociated themselves unworthily with the Father. And now here He is—feeling all of that—but being in the presence of the Father, as if He were advanced to the moment of the final judgment and coming before the bar of a perfect and pure God—but doing so unprepared, unworthy, unreconciled, unrepentant, and filled with guilt and shame. And all of that was put upon Him so that He could reconcile Himself to the Father, reconcile Himself and overcome the feelings of guilt and remorse of sin.

The Lord is ever willing to forgive us. But once we are forgiven, then the obligation is imposed upon us to forsake our sins and then go on as worthy as we would be had we not sinned in the first place. We have to leave that behind us. He readily forgives. But once forgiven, we're supposed to not only confess but to forsake our sins. And the forsaking of the sin and the leaving of the temptation behind becomes an enormous challenge for us—and it was the challenge that He faced in Gethsemane. And it's **the place He goes to**—now that He's gotten through the entirety of this Atonement, and He's worked it all through. He doesn't go to the cross; He doesn't go to somewhere else. He goes to this moment—this profound, jarring disassociation that existed between Him and the Father that He had to find a way to overcome and to reconcile in order to be, once again, in harmony with Him—and He facilitates our ability to do exactly the same thing by taking upon Him (vicariously, through that suffering/through that price that He paid) the ownership and forgiveness for everything so that He **can** forgive.

But forgiving is the limit of what He can do. He can't make us better. He finished His preparations. And then, having finished His preparations, He says, "Therefore I command you to repent. I don't want you to go through what I went through. I'll forgive you, but I command you: Repent, confess them, forsake them, leave them behind you, and become something bigger, better, more reconciled to God through the love that you ought to have in your heart," for the fact that He has been willing to re-accept you, He has been willing to comfort you, take you in and embrace you as a member of His family, able to stand clean before Him because you've abandoned what it was that separated you.

If you read through that section 161 material (which I'm not going to do; I've done it just recently, reading an excerpt in one of the conferences recently), you'll find that the Lord overcame the separation that drove Him away from the presence of the Father—because of guilt and because of shame, because of this intense feeling of unworthy betrayal—He overcomes that through love. He overcomes that through finding His way back to the harmony that preceded all of this. So, I'm not gonna read 161 any further, but I would commend it to you.

What I find interesting is that we have discussions that brush up against what the Lord had done (in Alma and in Isaiah and other places) that talk about how He goes through what He went through in order to understand and gain the knowledge necessary in order to succor us and to reconcile us. So, He's not coming to minister as the forgiving Savior, ignorant of what it takes in order to overcome sin. He comes fully understanding the nature of what it

is that makes us recoil from the presence of God. He gets it. He's been there. He's been through that. And when He looks upon us, He can look upon us with compassion **and understanding** because by His knowledge, He can justify us by leading us from this state of disharmony (and this state of opposition, shame, and guilt) back into a state of cleanliness and the feeling of reconciliation with God.

So, as we approach the Easter season, it all begins after He has implemented the sacrament, and He's gone up to Gethsemane, and He's gone through this experience. He then gets arrested in the garden, and the incident gets described, perhaps most interestingly and most revealingly, in John's account:

They come. They're armed. They have spears. They have their armed people ready to inflict violence should the necessity present itself. And Christ asks them whom they seek? And they tell him that they're looking for this Jesus. And He says, "I am He." And the account is that they stumbled backwards and fell down. It's almost a comic moment in the account because here you have a personage who is unarmed and subject to arrest, and people with both the authority to come and take and arrest Him and the arms with which to accomplish it even if He should oppose them. And He identifies Himself as the one they come... "I am He," and they step back on one another's feet and trip and fall backwards. That little moment right there tells you something. Our Lord, after having gone through what He went/engaged in what He suffered was so intimidating a presence that it made the men who came to arrest Him cower in His presence. They were physically intimidated by what it was that His **countenance** portrayed. (That countenance would be one of the reasons why, once they'd subdued Him, they took some delight in abusing Him.) It's...

It really hearkens back to an analogous, earlier circumstance when there was a messianic (semi-messianic) figure in the form of Samson, who the Philistines could never defeat. He crushed them; he killed them; he subjected them; he defeated them; he alone... I mean, "heaps upon heaps with the jawbone of an ass, I've killed a thousand." He was able to overcome them. But when they finally got him to break the last thread of the covenant that he had been strengthened by (and not until he had broken the last thread of the Nazarite Covenant by allowing the secret out and the hair to be cut) and they took him prisoner was he finally defeated. And what did they do? I mean, they took great delight in doing to this clearly superior individual the kinds of things that humiliate him to make them feel better about the crushing defeats he had administered to them over time. They blinded him. They tied him to a millstone. They drove him like a dumb ass. They mocked him. They spit at him. They did all they could. But they made the mistake of allowing the hair to grow out and for him, in his penitent state, to draw upon the covenantal status that had put him in that position at the beginning. And one of his last acts was then to bring down the temple that they brought him to (to mock him) by pulling down the main support beams and crushing them.

Well, that vengeance, that fury, that desire to abuse—to take what is clearly the superior and to subject him to the inferior—was what, after the surrender, the Lord was put through for some period of time, and then he was lashed, and then he was presented, after having been sufficiently humiliated, as one of two candidates for release. But they said, "Give us Barabbas, the other one who claims to be the son of God. Give us [indecipherable]; give us

the scapegoat, and let's kill the other one." And so, once again, the ceremonies under the Law of Moses come back to reflect the reality of the end of what the Lord was going to be put through.

There are prophecies about what He would endure. There are descriptions that are given of what He went through and why. But when we finally get to the point that He's about to surrender His life, we get one of the most extensive and remarkable prophecies in all of Scripture in the 22nd Psalm, which the Lord (after all He had been through while still alive) began to sing while He was on the cross:

My God, [my God,] why have you forsaken me? My God, hear the words of my roaring. You are far from helping me. Oh my God, I cry in the daytime, but you answer not, and in the night season, [am I] not silent. But you are holy that inhabit the Heavens. You are worthy of the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in you. They trusted and you did deliver them. They cried unto you and were delivered. They trusted in you and were not confounded.

But I am a worm, and loved of no man, a reproach of man and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing [that] he delighted in him.

But you are he that took me out of the womb. You did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from the womb. You were my God from my mother's breasts.

Be not far from me — for trouble is near — for there is none to help. ...They gaped upon me with their mouths like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my inward parts. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, my tongue cleaves to my jaws, and you have brought me into the dust of death. For dogs...encompassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tally all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture. ...be not far from me, O Lord. O my strength, hasten to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword.

...I will declare your name unto [the] brethren. In the midst of the congregation will I praise you. You that fear the Lord, praise him; all you, the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all you, the seed of Israel. For he is not [departed] nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. Neither has he hidden his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of you in the great congregation. I will pay my vows before them that fear him. (Psalms 22:1-5 RE)

...and so on. This is the hymn that the Lord went to in the final moments of the last breaths that He was able to take on the cross. And then, having achieved exactly what He intended to achieve and reaffirming that what He was going through was, indeed, exactly what needed to be accomplished in order to fulfill the purposes of God, He then announced with a loud voice (some of the Gospel writers say He shouted with a loud voice), and then He

gave up the ghost. But one of the Gospel writers tells us what it was He shouted, and it was, "It is finished!" which was a shout of triumph, not of defeat. And so, He sings a psalm that tells everyone exactly what is going on is what the Messiah was expected to go through, and then He shouts out a triumph call, and He gives up the ghost.

Those that were there on that day, looking upon the scene... First of all, if you understood the words of the psalm, if you've memorized the words of the hymn (which most Jews would have done), would know that He was confronting their rejection of Him as the Messiah right up to the very end. And those that heard Him shout out the victory and give up the ghost would have undoubtedly wondered, "How is it? How is this possible? How was that a triumph?" What was it that He was achieving in the moment that He ends the life here and moves on to whatever it is that comes next—some of them thinking that is nothing, and some of them thinking that is Elysian Fields, and some of them thinking that's just a slumber that will await later resurrection. But whatever it was, the Lord (in the minds of those that heard) was announcing His triumph, that He was moving on there.

And we have other news from other sources—including Peter's Epistles where he talks about the Lord then going into the world of spirits to declare a message among the dead—about the possibility now of changing their lot and improving their condition. And He spent (as they reconcile time, according to the Jews in that day) three days and three nights in the tomb. And then on the first day of the week as it was then reckoned—it was actually the seventh day, but we were off by a day ever since the fall of Adam because the day of rest was disrupted by the fall—but on the first day of the week according to what they reckoned at that point (the actual intended day of rest according to the creation that was disrupted by the fall), the Lord came forth out of the tomb and was resurrected while it was still dark. We have an account of that also in that section 161 about how once He had come out of the grave...

When I saw His resurrection, I was surprised to see it was still dark. When Mary realized it was Jesus, she embraced Him joyfully. She did not timidly reach out her hand, but she readily greeted Him with open arms, and He, in turn, embraced her. It is difficult to describe what I saw of the incident, apart from saying the Lord was triumphant, exultant, overjoyed at His return from the grave! She shared His joy. I was shown the scene and do not have words to adequately communicate how complete the feelings of joy and gratitude were which were felt by our Lord [on] that morning. As dark and terrible were the sufferings through which He passed, the magnitude of which is impossible for man to put into words, these feelings of triumph were, on the other hand, of equal magnitude in their joy and gratitude. I do not think it possible for a mortal to feel the fullness of either. And, having felt some of what He shares with His witnesses, I know words are inadequate to capture His feelings on the morning of His resurrection. He had the deep satisfaction of having accomplished the most difficult assignment given by the Father, knowing it was a benefit to all of His Father's children, and it had been done perfectly.

Mary and Christ embraced. There was nothing timid about the warm encounter she had with Him. Then He said to her, "Hold me not" because he had to ascend, return and report to His Father. (T&C 161:29-30)

...and so on. You really don't get Easter and understand what Easter represents until we have begun in Gethsemane and ended at the resurrection and the joy that was experienced there. It's as if the Atonement takes the scale of negativity and the scale of positivity and it drives the needle as far down as it is possible to drive the needle down to one extremity at the end of the worst, most awful, most dreadful possibility that exists in the entire universe—and then takes that same needle and drives it on the scale upward to the point that it exceeds joy so great that when men are exposed to a little of it, they are overcome, and their physical body faints from the exultation of what it was that the Lord experienced.

Easter represents all of that. Easter represents the great and the dreadful, the magnificent and the awful, the most terrible, the most wonderful; it represents it all. And our Lord—after having gone through all of that—continues to bear testimony to us in the Restoration Scriptures to say, "Here's, now, what I've done. I've accomplished all my preparations, and I've made it possible now for you."

*I command you to repent — repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore — how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer **if they would repent**; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, ...to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit — and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink — Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (JSH 17:5, emphasis added)*

That's all He could do. That's all He has done. That's the great accomplishment that He has obtained for us. He finished His preparations unto the children of men; it's all been prepared. So now that it's all been prepared and He's told us, I've given you... It's all ready to go. Wherefore, now—as a result of this preparation, as a consequence of everything I just told you:

Wherefore, I command you again to repent lest I humble you by my almighty power, and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken. (Ibid.)

See, He wants us to be freed from the valley of the shadow of death through which we will pass. And He promises us that no matter how bitter death may be, He's gonna wipe away every tear, and He's gonna defeat the grave. But that can't make us individually worthy. The only way that we can become individually worthy is if we do as He instructs us to do, acknowledge our own many shortcomings, and then turn around to face God and leave behind us all the things that are unworthy, unacceptable, disobedient; all of our jarrings; all of our contentions; all of our pride; all of our efforts to raise ourselves at the expense of others; all of our ambition, our desire for control and compulsion and dominion, our desire to be profiting at the expense of others. In many respects, it requires Zion for us to fully repent, and yet Zion requires us to be something very different than what we are because we **don't** treat one another the way that equality imposes upon us. We **do** cheer against one another and look to get ahead and then to leave others behind. We **do** falsely assume

ourselves to be something bigger and greater and more holy than we are when, in fact, if we are serviceable to the Lord and we're able to move something along in His era and it turns out to be something great, **that isn't us**. We don't have anything of which to boast. None of us ever have; none of us ever will—no matter how great a thing the Lord may cause to happen through the service that He asks you to provide. In the end, you probably don't do as good a job of doing what He's commanded as He could do it Himself. And yet, if it's serviceable, and it works, and it accomplishes something good, then the gratitude and the praise and the rejoicing of all that belongs to God, not to us. I think we've accomplished many, many remarkable, wonderful things. **But that's not us**. We've been led along by a merciful, kind, guiding light that has made the task doable by the light that He has provided to us, and we have nothing of which to boast for ourselves.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

The foregoing excerpts were recorded on April 3rd, 2022 during a fireside held in conjunction with the upcoming Stand Independent general conference scheduled for late September, 2022.