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The Debt We Owe

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Abstract: This article discusses how Jacob (2 Nephi 9) taught concerning the Atonement and mission of Jesus Christ, and our debt to him. Out of love members of the Church should show deep gratitude by obedience and in humble prayer.

One of the most enlightening discourses ever delivered in regard to the atonement is found in the ninth chapter of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. It is the counsel given by Jacob, brother of Nephi. It should be carefully read by every person seeking salvation. We have been taught that the greatest gift of God is eternal life, and eternal life comes through obedience to all of the commandments and covenants given to man by our Heavenly Father. There is an overwhelming lack of understanding in the world in relation to these principles of salvation and exaltation given to prepare mankind for a place in the kingdom of God, and this lack causes many to stumble. There is no excuse on the part of members of the Church for they have received the necessary revelation directly from the heavens in this Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. The great mission of the Son of God has been revealed in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants more clearly than any other place. Many passages that have been misunderstood, and therefore mistranslated in the Bible, are clarified in these sacred volumes.

The greatest debt we owe is to our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, for the great blessings of immortality and eternal life. Immortality is the gift vouchsafed to every soul, for the edict has gone forth from the throne of God that the resurrection must be just as broad as the fall. Adam was the person who brought death into the world, and no member of his family is held accountable for death and therefore will receive the resurrection. It is through the love and mercy of the Son of God for humanity that this redemption comes. His extreme suffering and cruel death upon the cross brought to pass the atonement for Adam's transgression and redeems every creature who partook of the fall from the grave, including his bitter enemies who cried out against him—"Let him be crucified!" Yes, they also are beneficiaries of the atonement and shall receive the resurrection although they will likewise suffer for their dreadful sin.

Let us reflect on some of the great truths portrayed in Jacob's message which was written, not only for his own people but for the benefit of the entire world.

"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, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

"Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—

Your Question

ANSWERED BY JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH
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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 lain down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more." (2 Nephi 9:6-7.)

Before continuing with this discourse, let us pause and consider the expression that death comes to fulfil the "merciful plan of the great Creator." Many mortals do not believe that death is a merciful plan. It is the prevalent belief that Adam committed a dreadful sin in partaking of the forbidden fruit. Commentators have written that this act was "man's shameful fall," as though through partaking of the fruit Adam and Eve brought into the world a condition of misery and death that could have been avoided; and Adam and his posterity could have lived in peace, love, and contentment, free from death had not they transgressed. Mother Eve had revealed to her the true purpose for the fall wherein she said:

"... Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient." (Moses 5:11.)

The fall therefore was a necessary part of the plan of salvation, and Jacob speaks of it as a "merciful plan of the Creator." Surely no one wishes to remain in mortality when he becomes old and helpless. Death comes to all as a merciful, and not a fearful thing, especially to the person who dies with the assurance of a righteous resurrection. Lehi, father of Jacob, informs us that "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy." (2 Nephi 2:25.)

The fall of Adam and Eve gave the human race the privilege of mortal existence which otherwise they would not have received. Thus all the experiences

gained in mortality would have been lost to us if this divine plan had not been adopted. We must not think that the death of the body is the end of man and that when we die the body returns to the earth to rise no more. Jacob has pointed out clearly what the consequences would have been if the physical death were the end of the mortal body, and how the Father had prepared the way for man's redemption, through the atonement of Jesus Christ. This redemption was the plan adopted before the foundation of the earth.

"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, to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

"O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.

"And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

"And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. (*Ibid.*, 9:8-12.)

What could be more dreadful than such a fate as that the body should be eternally destroyed, and the spirit be left as it was before the mortal life? What could have been gained? Yet there are many who have departed from the teachings of the Savior who deny the resurrection. The main purpose for our mortal existence is that we might obtain tabernacles of flesh and bones for our spirits that we might

advance after the resurrection to the fulness of the blessings which the Lord has promised to those who are faithful. They have been promised that they shall become sons and daughters of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and if they have been true to the commandments and covenants the Lord has given us, to be kings and priests and queens and priestesses, possessing the fulness of the blessings of the celestial kingdom. This great promise was made to the spirits of men before the foundation of the earth was laid. The Lord has renewed this promise to us if we will patiently endure the ills of the flesh as well as receive the blessings and go through the trials and tribulations faithfully to the end.

Our Redeemer so loved the world that he volunteered to come and suffer by the shedding of his blood and thus pay the debt of the fall and make it possible for every soul to gain a place in his celestial kingdom. No one can fully realize the price that Jesus paid to make our salvation and exaltation possible. He has described it in the following words:

"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 men." (D&C 19:16-19.)

Is it possible to think of any fate that would be as terrible as to be denied the resurrection, our spirits becoming subject to Satan forever? How grateful to our Redeemer every soul should be to think that Jesus so loved the world that he was willing to suffer and redeem every soul from death and give us the resurrection of the dead. Surely every member of the Church of Jesus Christ should be willing to show gratitude by obedience to the Savior's commandments. No mortal can fully realize the price that he paid. No mortal could have stood the anguish and suffering of such a sacrifice. It was a sacrifice that a God had to endure. It is an insignificant price we are asked to pay, and we should be willing to pay it in the spirit of thanksgiving, love, and obedience to every divine command. As he loves us, so we should love him, showing our deep gratitude in obedience and in humble prayer.