

The Play and the Plan

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David was young when he met Goliath who, supposing that David was afraid, taunted him saying, "Come to me." David answered, "Wait till I get a little bolder (boulder)—a smooth one." Goliath, the scriptures say, "disdained him: for he was but a youth." When David swung his sling, that was the first solid idea that had ever entered Goliath's head.

King Saul had armed David with his helmet of brass and his coat of mail. But "David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.

"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts." (1 Samuel 17:38-46.)

IMMUNIZATION

You young adults have invisible Goliaths to conquer, both physical and spiritual Goliaths. You will need to be trained how to protect yourself against them.

When you were children, you went through a program of immunization. Antibodies were injected into your system to protect you should you be exposed to contagions, an enemy so small as to be invisible.

Until recent years, one was required to carry an International Certificate of Vaccination when traveling abroad. That certificate recorded your immunization against certain diseases, and one was required to present it with a passport at the ticket counter. Without it you were not allowed to board a plane destined for some countries.

On one occasion, about midnight, I handed my passport and certificate of vaccination to an agent in Los Angeles. I was told that one immunization had expired and I would not be allowed to board the flight.

What to do? Upon learning that there was an all-night clinic near the airport, I rushed there by cab, received the injection, had my record stamped, and raced back to catch the plane.

Thereafter I was more careful to check my records. Even after the regulations loosened up, we still pay sensible attention to protecting ourselves when traveling abroad. I do not know how many times I have been exposed to, yet spared from, serious illness by having submitted to the momentary discomfort of an inoculation.

IMMUNIZING THE SPIRIT

While you can protect your body from contagious diseases with the proper serum, we cannot immunize our minds and spirits that way. We immunize our minds and our spirits with *ideas*, with *truth*.

It is my purpose to do just that, inoculate you with an idea, a truth, which, if admitted into your thinking and into the cradle of your feelings, may protect you against wicked spiritual diseases to which you are exposed every day of your lives.

THE GREAT PLAN OF HAPPINESS

The course of our mortal life, from birth to death, conforms to eternal law and follows a plan described in the revelations as The Great Plan of Happiness. The one idea, the one truth I would inject into your minds is this: *There are three parts to the plan. You are in the second or the middle part, the one in which you will be tested by temptation, by trials, perhaps by tragedy.* Understand that, and you will be better able to make sense of life and to resist the disease of doubt and despair and depression.

THE PLAY

The plan of redemption, with its three divisions, might be likened to a grand three-act play. Act I is entitled "Premortal Life." The scriptures describe it as our First Estate. (See Jude 1:6; Abr. 3:26-28) Act II, from birth to the time of resurrection, the "Second Estate." And Act III, "Life After Death or Eternal Life."

In mortality, we are like one who enters a theater just as the curtain goes up on the second act. We have missed Act I. The production has many plots and subplots that interweave, making it difficult to figure out who relates to whom and what relates to what, who are the heroes and who are the villains. It is further complicated because you are not just a spectator; you are a member of the cast, on stage, in the middle of it all!

MEMORY VEILED

As part of the eternal plan, the memory of our premortal life, Act I, is covered with a veil. Since you enter mortality at the beginning of Act II with no recollection of Act I, it is little wonder that it is difficult to understand what is going on.

That loss of memory gives us a clean start. It is ideal for the test; it secures our individual agency, and leaves us free to make choices. Many of them must be made on

faith alone. Even so, we carry with us some whispered knowledge of our premortal life and our status as offspring of immortal parents.

You were born in innocence, for “every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning” (D&C 93:33). And you have an inborn sense of right and wrong, for the scriptures tell us in the Book of Mormon, we “are instructed sufficiently that [we] know good from evil.” (2 Nephi 2:5)

We progress or we are held back in life within the limits imposed by spiritual and natural law which govern all the universe. We sometimes wonder, *if* the plan really is the great plan of happiness, why must we struggle to find fulness of it in mortal life?

If you expect to find only ease and peace and bliss during Act II, you surely will be frustrated. You will understand little of what is going on and why it is permitted to be as they are.

Remember this! The line “*And they all lived happily ever after*” is never written into the second act. That line belongs in the third act when the mysteries are solved and everything is put right. The Apostle was right when he said, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Corinthians 15:19.)

Until you have a broad perspective of the eternal nature of this great drama, you won’t make much sense out of the inequities in life. Some are born with so little and others with so much, some in poverty, with handicaps, with pain, with suffering, premature death even of innocent children. There are the brutal, unforgiving forces of nature and the brutality of man to man. We’ve seen a lot of that recently.

Do not suppose that God willfully causes that, which for His own purposes, He *permits*. When you know the plan and purpose of it all, even these things will manifest a loving Father in Heaven.

THE SCRIPT

There exists something of a script for this great play, the drama of the ages. It outlines in brief form, at least, what happened in Act I, the Premortal Life. While there is not much detail, it makes clear the purpose of it all. And it reveals enough of the plot to help you figure out what life is all about.

That script, as you should already know, is the *scriptures*, the revelations. Read them, study them. They tell you “what man is,” why God is “mindful of him,” and why we are made a little lower than the angels” or as Joseph Smith translated it, “a little *less* than the Gods, and yet “crowned ... with glory and honour” (Psalms 8: 4-5)

The scriptures speak the truth. From them you can learn enough about all three acts to get your bearings and get direction in your life. They reveal that, “Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth”, and that “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 9:23-24): Act I, Act II, and Act III.

You can learn of things as they were, as they actually are, not just as they appear to be, and you can learn of

things as they are to come. What happens to you after the curtain comes down on this second act of mortal life, we take on faith. Each of us writes our own ending to Act II.

THE PLAN

I have studied this script, the scriptures, even memorized parts of it. I’m sure you have. Let me tell you in brief headlines what the scriptures say about this drama of the ages, *The Great Plan of Happiness*.

Brief Overview of the Plan--The spirits of men and women are eternal (D&S 93:29-31). All are sons and daughters of God and lived in a premortal life as His spirit children (Heb. 12:9; Num. 16:22; D&C 76:24). The spirit of each individual is in the likeness of the person in mortality (D&C 77:2), male and female (Abr. 4:27; Moses 6:9, 10; D&C 132:63). All are in the image of heavenly parents.

In the Council of the Gods the plan of the Eternal Father (Alma 34:9) was sustained. It provided for the creation of an earth (Abr. 3:24) whereupon His children would receive physical bodies (see Abr. 4:26-27; Moses 6:3-10) and would be tested according to His commandment. (Abr. 3:25). Each spirit in premortal life was provided opportunities for learning and obedience. Each was given agency (see Al. 13:3-5).

A Grand Council in heaven was conveyed. The divine plan required one to be sent as a Savior and Redeemer to fulfill the plan of the Father. The firstborn of the Eternal Father, Jehovah, willingly volunteered and was chosen (Abr. 3:19, 22-27; Moses 4:1-2).

Most sustained this choice. Others rebelled and there was a “war in heaven.” Satan and those who followed him in rebellion against the Father’s plan were cast out and denied mortality (see: Rev. 12:7-13; Moses 4:3; D.&C 29:36; 74:23).

Those who kept the first estate (you are among them) were to be added upon with a physical body and were permitted to live upon the earth in this planned second estate (see: Abr. 3:26). Each was appointed the “times and the bounds of their habitation”. Some were foreordained to be prophets (see: Abr. 3:23; alma 13:7-9)

An earth was then organized (Abr. 5:4). Adam and Eve in a paradisiacal state were the first man and first woman. They were married eternally (Moses 3:23-24) and were given commandments. They were in a state of innocence and knew no sin (2 Ne.. 2:23).

Eve, beguiled by Satan (Moses 4:6, 19) transgressed and was to be cast out of the Garden. Adam chose to obey the first commandment to multiply and replenish the earth (Moses 2:28; 3:17; 4:13; Al. 12:22). He with Eve was subject to the Fall which introduced mortality to the earth Adam and Eve became the first parents of the family of all the earth (2 Ne. 2:20).

Angels were sent to reveal to Adam the eternal plan of redemption (Moses 5:4-9; 6:48-62; Al. 12:29-34- D&C 29:40-42) and an atonement was wrought by Jesus Christ. Through the atonement the effects of the Fall,--mortal death and spiritual death--could both be

overcome. Christ unconditionally provided a resurrection for all mankind and thereby overcame *physical* death.

But to overcome *spiritual death*, which is separation from God, requires that we be obedient to the laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ (A. of F 1:3).

These principles and ordinances were instituted before the foundation of the world. They are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved by the same requirements. The priesthood administers the ordinances of salvation. The keys of the priesthood control the use of the priesthood.

When you die, you are introduced to the spirit world. It is happiness, a paradise, for the righteous. It is misery for the wicked (Al. 40:11-14; 2 Ne. 9:10-16). In either, we continue to learn and are accountable for our actions (D&C 138:10-22).

After all have been dealt with equally, a judgment will be rendered. Each will be resurrected in his or her own order (1 Cor. 15:21-22). The glory one receives, however, will depend on obedience to the laws and ordinances of our Father's plan (1 Cor. 15:40-42; D&C 88:21-24, 27-32).

Those who have become pure, through repentance, will obtain eternal life and return to the presence of God. They will be exalted as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (D&C 76:94-95; 84:35; 132:19-20; Romans 8:17).

Provision is made in the plan for those who live in mortality without knowing of the plan. "Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; -- because of the atonement; ... they are delivered" (2 Ne. 9:25).

Without that sacred work of the redemption of the dead, the plan would be incomplete and would really be unfair.

The ordinances of the temple, the endowments, the sealing in eternal marriage are worth all the preparation required. Do not do anything which may make you unworthy to receive them or Act III of this eternal drama will be less than you are now free to make it.

That is a brief overview of this eternal drama as recorded in the scriptures. When you understand it, it will give you purpose and direction in life. Then you will have your *feet on straight* and *head on the ground*. (I put that in to see if you are paying attention and also to illustrate that there is humor and enjoyment in life--they are a part of the plan!)

The Villian in the Plan--There is, of course, a villain in all this, the adversary, the schemer, the destroyer. He got off track in Act I. He has sworn to spoil the plan for everyone. And he has legions of angels, dark angels, to help him do it. He, too, has a plan called "the cunning plan" (2 Nephi 9:22), "a very subtle plan" (Al. 12:4), a "secret plan" (Hel. 2:8), the plan of destruction (3 Ne. 1:16).

"He persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

We are in Act II--Now, here you are on stage in Act II of this eternal drama, your own second estate.

You live in the last days, a dispensation of intense testing and unequalled opportunity. Paul, the Apostle, wrote a remarkable prophecy to young Timothy. He said, "In the last days, perilous times shall come" (2 Tim. 3:1). He described our day in accurate detail.

He wrote of men becoming "lovers of their own selves." He spoke of disobedience to parents, of "despisers of those that are good". He even saw those who "without natural affection" (2 Tim. 3:2-3) could abuse little children, and those who now rally in protest for the abandonment of those standards without which civilization will not endure.

Now when enough people protest limits on conduct, the limits are moved farther out and behavior that was once-prohibited is reclassified as moral, legal, and socially acceptable, and people rally and protest to make it so. The bonds of marriage and kinship are seen as bondage rather than as sacred ties.

Home and Family Critical to Plan--The home, the family, absolutely critical to the Plan, are now besieged. And you are on stage in the center of it all.

Just as the air you breathe may expose you to deadly virus, the thoughts you think may introduce spiritual diseases which, if untreated, may be spiritually fatal.

But Paul's prophecy of the perilous last days included an antidote, the immunization, which can protect, even cure, you. After describing those who are "ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), he counseled:

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them." Know who is teaching you.

"And that from a child *thou hast known the holy scriptures*, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

"*All scripture is by inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:14-16; italics added).

For example: 1 Nephi, chapter 8, in the Book of Mormon, describes the great and spacious building. Put those verses together with 2 Timothy, chapter 3, from the New Testament, and you will see the world in which you live. Read those scriptures thoughtfully.

You will learn that the plan is fair; however it appears, it is fair. Alma told his son that the commandments were not given until after the plan was revealed, saying:

"God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption." (Alma 12:32; italics added). And listen carefully.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "all beings who have bodies have cower over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him." Lest unwittingly you give him such permission, let me alert you to ideas floating around that are spiritually dangerous. For an example, take the word "freedom."

FREEDOM -- AGENCY

A little twisting the word *freedom* can lead to the loss of it. Individual freedom without responsibility can destroy

freedom. For example, right now there are many who indulge freely in that which the Lord has forbidden, and now, as a result, following—compelled, I suppose—by physical impulses, they are prisoners to an incurable disease and they expose the innocent, as well.

It is in the name of freedom that terrorists now seek to destroy the institutions of society, which were established to guarantee freedom. Read the first few verses of Helaman, chapter 12, and you will learn why terror will yet be visited upon mankind. Interesting to find that word *terror* in the Book of Mormon.

We often speak often of *agency* as a divine right. The only agency spoken of in the revelations is *moral* agency! This, the Lord said, is given “that every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78). If you do not temper freedom with responsibility and agency with accountability, they both will self-destruct.

DIVERSITY

Another example: Diversity is a very popular word which self-destructs if handled carelessly. Properly respected, diversity is the friend to the word *choice*. But, like freedom, diversity can devour itself and choice will disappear.

Beware of those who teach a diversity in which everybody, every philosophy, and all behavior must be accepted everywhere with standards adjusted to accommodate and to please everyone. They are really arguing for their own brand of conformity.

For example, if we change the standards at Church schools, and there are some who really press for that, so that we conform more to the world, we lose the very idea of an education rooted in faith in the Restored Gospel. Then there will be no choice, and diversity will have eaten itself up.

The hidden trap connected with diversity is that a misunderstanding of it can cause you to accept what is and lose sight of what *ought to be*.

We must and will maintain high standards in the Church in the name of choice and diversity. We have the right to create environments in our Church schools, in our Institutes of Religion, and individually in our minds, in our homes, in the Church at large to create a Zion.

THE CHALLENGE OF LEARNING

Those of you who attend Church schools are under the influence of teachers whose dedication and commitment will be a blessing to you for as long as you live. Their purpose is to open your mind to the secular and spiritual truths which will ensure a happy life.

Whether they teach secular subjects or classes in religion, their teaching and their behavior is a worthy example to follow. They enjoy the full trust of the Brethren and their service deserves the gratitude of all members in the Church.

Reluctantly I alert you to the possibility that among

them are one or two who deliberately inject students with diseased ideas. The test depends on whether they are teaching *about* false standards or theories or philosophies or whether they are *advocates* of them. You must discern whether you are being taught about an *ideology* or proselyted to it.

A teacher (and I remind you they are few) who advocates false philosophies or lower standards of conduct supposing to prepare students for the realities of life, is as foolish as a woman I learned about in a junior high health class.

Upon learning that the neighbor children had chicken pox, she sent her children to play with them so that she could get that out of the way. When one of the neighbor children died, she learned to her horror that it was small pox, not chicken pox, to which she had exposed her children.

You probably will not meet such a teacher in Church schools. But, should that happen, do not be intimidated by one who advocates philosophies or behavior that are in opposition to the standards set by the Lord and entrusted to His servants, those who have established, who finance, and who are responsible to administer our schools, our Institutes of Religion.

Students in our schools have both the right and the responsibility to challenge such teachings. That may be part of your test. A student or a teacher who feels uncomfortable in our environment is free to choose another, but they are not free to substitute their own ideals or standards of behavior for those expected in an institution supported by the tithes and offerings of the Saints.

STATE SCHOOLS

You who are in state colleges have a different challenge. For the most part, your professors will be men and women of integrity and you can trust them. But, here, too, there are those few who do not deserve your trust. This may well be your greatest test in school. The tests on paper by comparison are only incidental.

Remember what Paul told young Timothy: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Tim. 4:14)

There are angels to attend you. “Angels,” the scriptures tell us, “speak by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 32:3). You have received the Holy Ghost as a gift at the time of your confirmation as a member of the Church.

You will be guided as to how to meet these challenges and become stronger for having met them.

FLIGHT TRAINING

An experience. At the end of advanced flight training during World War U, it was customary for each instructor pilot at our base to invite his cadets to a dinner the week before graduation. Final decisions on graduation were yet to be made and we were all very sensitive that it was by the word of our instructor that we would get our commission as an officer and those coveted silver wings.

Our instructor took us to a noisy road house near the

air base in Marfa, Texas. He said, "The drinks are on me! Drink up and enjoy yourselves!" I managed to get by on soft drinks until the cadet sitting next to me blurted out, "Captain Goff, do you know what Packer is doing?" I gave him a jab with my elbow and whispered to him something that had to do with his not living very long. And before long no one seemed to be paying much attention to anything and I survived the challenge.

I suppose I handled that as best I could. Looking back on it, I think there would have been a much better way. I could have, and I should have, told my instructor of my convictions, that my faith prohibited me from drinking liquor. If I had done so, surely I could have avoided that crisis.

If your professor is reasonable, you might tell him that your church encourages you to learn about all things, but your faith gives you reasons for not accepting every theory or philosophy that anyone believes to be true.

Sometimes even that may not be advisable. Just remember, you are not alone. You have the spirit of inspiration to guide you in your studies, your tests, and in your contacts in the world. Have courage and remember who you are and that you are on stage in Act II of the great plan of redemption. You can know by the Spirit those teachers you can safely trust.

A knowledge of the plan of happiness can help you through the difficult times and you can face problems you otherwise could not endure.

For example: Some years ago a president of a student stake asked if I would counsel with a young couple. The stalwart young man and his lovely wife had recently been told, with some finality, that they would never have children of their own. They were heartbroken as they sobbed out their disappointment. What they wanted most in life, what they had been taught and knew was an obligation and a privilege beyond price (part of the Plan), they now were to be denied. Why? Why? Why?

I consoled them as best I could and offered comfort that really was insufficient to quiet the pain they felt. As they were leaving the office, I called them back and said: "You are a very fortunate and very blessed young couple."

They were startled and the young man asked why would I say such a thing as that. Did I not understand what they had told me? Why would I say they were fortunate and blessed, when they were to be denied the thing they wanted most, children of their own.

I answered, "Because you want them. In the eternal scheme of things that will be of inestimable and eternal value." The Lord has said that He "will judge all men according to their works; according to the desires of their hearts" (D&C 137:9). Many people now do not want children or want few of them or consider them a burden rather than a blessing." They were a very blessed young couple.

When you understand the plan, you can cope with challenges in life which otherwise would be unbearable.

Now, when I speak of the law and of rules, I always get a letter or two pointing out a variation or an exception. There is an old saying that the exception proves the rule.

That's a true statement.

You be careful that you don't look for exceptions as an excuse to avoid keeping the rules and don't trust those who do. If something has to be labeled an exception, really it does prove the rule.

THE BROKEN CARVING

Now, if you suppose some of you because of mistakes you have already made, think that you have lost your future. Let me in conclusion teach you this—one more inoculation:

For a number of years I found relaxation in carving and painting songbirds, at times spending a full year on a single carving. That suggests how much time I had now and again. Once I had a newly finished carving on the back seat of a car driven by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle. He hit the brakes suddenly and the carving was thrown to the floor and damaged.

Elder Tuttle felt terrible, supposing he had ruined a year's work. When I waved aside his apologies, he said, "You sure don't seem to be upset about it." To reassure him, I said "Don't worry, I made it; I can fix it." Actually it had been broken and fixed many times while I was working on it.

Later Brother Tuttle likened that experience to lives, broken or badly damaged, supposedly ruined with no hope of repair, not knowing that there is a Maker, a Creator, who can fix any of his creations no matter how hopelessly broken they seem to be.

God bless you, you precious youth of the Church, you young adults all over the world. Last week we met with your counterpart in Seoul, Korea; the week before in Tokyo, Japan. Young hopeful Latter-day Saints, who are the strength of the Kingdom of God upon the earth. God bless you as you find your way. Remember, there is no final curtain on the Third Act of this great drama. It goes on eternally.

I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that you as young members of the Church may look forward to a wonderful life of challenges and happiness and responsibility. It is a wonderful time to live and to be young. I envy you. As I said in the beginning, you are young and I am not. And yet in the eternal scheme of things, I am just as young as you are. Maybe a little closer to the final curtain on Act II, but I know, for I have seen a little behind the curtain into Act III and bear personal witness that the gospel is true, and bear witness of Jesus Christ.

In closing, I invoke a blessing upon you, you young men and women who hopefully are looking for a companion, you newly married men and women starting a family— looking forward to the adventure in life, may the power of the Lord watch over you and his Spirit attend you. The Holy Ghost will bless you with a testimony.

Fear is the antithesis of faith. In this Church, we do not fear. I have been sitting in the councils of the Brethren now for some thirty-four years or so. I have seen disappointment, shock, and concern. Never once, for one second, have I ever seen any fear. And you should not.

May He bless you as you find your way. I am sure He will and bear that witness to you and invoke that blessing upon you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.