

***“In the World Ye Shall Have
Tribulation: But Be of Good Cheer;
I Have Overcome the World”***

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To the paralytic man lying helpless on a bed, Jesus proclaimed, “Be of good cheer” (Matthew 9:2). To the frightened Apostles battling the tempestuous sea, Jesus appeared on the water, declaring, “Be of good cheer” (Matthew 14:27). To Nephi the son of Nephi, who was subject to an arbitrary law threatening his life and the lives of other righteous Nephites if the signs prophesied by Samuel the Lamanite didn’t occur, the Lord said, “Lift up your head and be of good cheer” (3 Nephi 1:13). As Joseph Smith met with ten elders about to be sent out, two by two, to missions fraught with trouble and danger, the Lord announced, “Be of good cheer” (D&C 61:36). In each instance the people had every reason to be anxious, fearful, and hopeless, yet the Lord directed them toward a reason to rejoice.

How does the Lord’s admonition of cheer sound when it is applied to you and me in our world today? When economic uncertainties, terrorist threats, and corruption provide top stories for the evening news, where does the good news of the gospel intervene? When we experience personal loss in so many ways and on so many days, what is left to be cheerful about?

The Key to Cheerfulness

We find the key to understanding this seeming contradiction in the context of the Last Supper. Speaking to the Apostles in His final moments before Gethsemane, Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”

(John 16:33). “How was it possible for the Twelve to be of good cheer?” Elder Neal A. Maxwell asked.

The unimaginable agony of Gethsemane was about to descend upon Jesus; Judas’ betrayal was imminent. Then would come Jesus’ arrest and arraignment; the scattering of the Twelve like sheep; the awful scourging of the Savior; the unjust trial; the mob’s shrill cry for Barabbas instead of Jesus; and then the awful crucifixion on Calvary. What was there to be cheerful about? Just what Jesus said: He had overcome the world! The atonement was about to be a reality. The resurrection of all mankind was assured. Death was to be done away with—Satan had failed to stop the atonement. [But a Few Days (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983), 4]

I wish to focus my remarks today on the role of Christ’s enabling power in our ability to feel cheer amid mortal gloom and doom. Misfortune and hardship lose their tragedy when viewed through the lens of the Atonement. The process could be explained this way: The more we know the Savior, the longer becomes our view. The more we see His truths, the more we feel His joy. But it is one thing to know that’s the right answer in a Sunday School class and quite another to experience firsthand a cheerful outlook when current circumstances are far from what we hoped. If we would develop faith to apply the Atonement in this manner and not merely talk about it, awareness of imaginary finite boundaries, inadvertently placed on the Savior’s infinite sacrifice, can be meaningful. Consider two false assumptions that, if pursued, will block our appreciation and access to the Lord’s divine assistance.

False Assumption 1—We Can Avoid Tribulation

First is the false assumption that, if we are good enough, we can avoid having bad things happen to us and those we love. If we can just keep all of the commandments and pay an honest tithing and have daily prayer and scripture study, we can appease God, earn His good pleasure, and thereby assure ourselves of His protection from heartache, accident, or tragedy. When such thinking drives us, we “want victory without battle,” Elder Maxwell observed, “and expect campaign ribbons merely for watching” (*Men and Women of Christ* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 2). So trials will surely come, including when we are trying to do everything right. Elder Richard G. Scott warned, “Just when all seems to be going right, challenges often come in multiple doses applied simultaneously.” He explains that a “reason for adversity is to accomplish the Lord’s own purposes in our life that we may receive the refinement that comes from testing” (“Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 16).

If we hold the belief that God will shield us from tribulation because of our obedience and then adversity strikes, we may be tempted to accuse God of not hearing our prayers or, worse, that He doesn’t honor His promises. Obedience to God is not insurance against pain and sadness. Some unpleasant things just come with this telestial turf. Challenges have always been included in God’s great plan to test our faith, to stimulate in us growth, humility, and compassion. Heartache and struggle were divinely designed to stretch us to where we have nowhere else to turn but to God.

The ground was cursed for Adam's sake, and Eve was promised that her sorrow (or hardships) would be multiplied (see Genesis 3:16–17). The Apostle Paul acknowledged, “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, . . . to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The Lord required Sariah to send her sons back into harm's way before she found her own conviction of God's will for her family (see 1 Nephi 5:1–8). Christ's mission was never intended to prevent hearts from breaking but to heal broken hearts; He came to wipe away our tears, not to ensure that we would never weep (see Revelation 7:17). He clearly promised, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33).

False Assumption 2—We Can Trust in Our Own Efforts

A second false assumption when we face tribulation can be just as destructive to our faith in Christ. We may conclude that hardships come because we haven't done enough good in the world.

We may believe that lifelong cheerfulness is achieved through our own management and efforts. After all, we are bright, capable, and resourceful women. When considering tribulation and the Lord's Atonement through this angle, we can look at the scripture that says, “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23), and deduce that we must first prove our worth through our obedience and our righteousness before the Lord's sacrifice will cover us or His grace enable us. Trusting in our own efforts rather than humbly acknowledging God is reflected in the term *self-righteousness*.

When we look through the lens of our righteousness and take comfort in our good efforts, the idea of depending wholly on Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:19; Moroni 6:4) seems a bit risky. Listen to a series of domino-like sentiments that such a perspective can produce: What if I depend on God, but He doesn't answer me when I need His immediate help? With all the serious problems in the universe, why would He have time or interest in my personal crisis? Then again, if I organize my life carefully and think smart, I could resist temptation and not have to lean upon on the Lord for help at all. What is more, I will then not be one of those who contributed to His suffering in Gethsemane. If I just use my skills and brain, I can actually help the Lord rather than drawing on His strength. After all, so many people around here are in worse circumstances than I.

Unwittingly, when we reason this way, we sound eerily similar to Korihor's humanistic preaching in the Book of Mormon that “every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength” (Alma 30:17), thereby arguing that his listeners had no need for Christ and His Atonement. “And thus [Korihor] did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, . . . yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms” (Alma 30:18).

Being fearful and unsettled by the unexpected, our faith in Christ fades into “gratifying our pride” by “our vain ambitions” (D&C 121:37). Such thinking easily leads to justifying wrongdoing because we are in control; we know better than others, so sin is not

a problem for us. Our efforts focus on personal success to show that we don't need anyone else. If we can just get control over our world—our addictions in all their varieties, our eating disorders and obsession with thinness, our insistence that our house always be immaculate, our fascination with outward evidence of education and success—then we can finally be cheerful. The scriptural listing of women before men in the reaction to Korihor's teachings is curious wording. I don't know all that such wording could imply, but we can at least conclude that women were not exempt and maybe even particularly attracted to Korihor's "management of the creature" philosophy.

Christ declared, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; *I* have overcome the world" (John 16:33; emphasis added). He didn't say *you* must overcome the world or that He overcame the world just for the weak ones who weren't smart enough or strong enough to do it on their own. The Savior said, "*I* have overcome the world."

Christ Has Overcome the World

Prophets in every era have testified that Christ's grace is sufficient. *Sufficient* means "enough" or "as much as is needed." Prophets also remind us of our own nothingness and indebtedness to Christ; that we are less than the dust of the earth; that without Him we are unprofitable servants (see Mosiah 2:21–25); and that

no flesh . . . can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah. . . .

. . . He shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved. [2 Nephi 2:8–9]

The Apostle Paul learned that lesson. Arguably the best prepared missionary this world has known, Paul was brilliant in languages, highly educated in the Jewish religion, and well versed in the Greco-Roman culture and philosophy of his day. Drawing on his rich education and superior intellect, he attempted to teach the intellectuals of Athens about Christ as their "unknown God" (see Acts 17:23), quoting their poets and using their philosophy. While Paul's knowledge and presentation may have been impressive to his philosophical audience, his erudite approach in Athens produced a disappointing harvest.

From Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth, where he found tremendous success. Later, in an epistle to the Corinthian Saints, Paul explained his missionary approach among them—possibly a rethinking of his experience in Athens:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. [1 Corinthians 2:1–4]

Trusting that the Lord will support us in our trials and give us what to say and do in the moment that we need it can be frightening when we have become accustomed to relying on our own familiar skills. Why was Paul willing to set aside his educational prowess when it would clearly be impressive to investigators of his religion? He explained, “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5).

The LDS Bible Dictionary describes grace as a

divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. . . .

. . . Through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, [individuals] receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. [“Grace”]

The Atonement not only blesses us after we obey but is actually the power that sustains us while we do the deed. Likewise, Joseph Smith learned that “according to the grace of the Lord” (D&C 20:4), he was given “commandments which inspired him; And . . . power from on high” (D&C 20:7–8). Because of Christ’s magnanimous grace, He gives us commandments, not to curtail and restrict, but to inspire and strengthen us to understand and accomplish all that He invites.

When we look through the clarifying lens showing that Christ has already overcome the world, the scripture “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23) looks very different. What is “all we can do?” A group of converted Lamanites, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, recognized the answer. Their leader wisely taught, “It has been all that we could do, . . . to repent of all our sins . . . and to get God to take them away from our hearts” (Alma 24:11). These humble Saints desired to please God far more than receive their kinsmen’s acceptance. They manifested their sincere repentance by burying their weapons of war and making a covenant with God.

We can do likewise. We can admit that we have sinned and need the Lord’s redemption. We can confess His power and goodness and our constant need for His sustaining and strengthening influence. We can bury our weapons of war—tools we are prone to use to survive without Him that only serve to fortify our pride and self-righteousness. And we can make and keep our covenants with Him.

I watched a young student make that connection this semester. After studying the remarkable epistles of the Apostle Paul, she commented to the class:

Paul taught that the grace of Christ will make up for everything that we lack, if we will have faith in Him. During this semester, I was called to teach Gospel Doctrine in my

ward. This was the scariest calling for me because I am just not one to stand in front of a class, especially for 45 minutes. But as I prepared for my first lesson, I remembered what Paul said about the grace of Christ. So I prepared everything that I could and then intensely prayed that the grace of Christ would make up for all I lacked. What happened was amazing. It was amazing because it wasn't me. The spirit was so strong and the lesson was powerful because the grace of Christ made up the difference between my preparation and what needed to be taught by the Spirit. His grace is a powerful gift. It is nothing that we earn.

Be of Good Cheer

Cheerfulness in the scriptural context connotes a divinely assured optimism, “a deep trust in God’s unfolding purposes” (Neal A. Maxwell, “But a Few Days,” 4), a grounded conviction that God will always keep His promises. When Christ proclaims, “Be of good cheer,” He is not requesting a naive, Pollyanna-like response to life’s cruel twists and turns. Nor is He promising a pain-free life of constant bliss. There is no respecter of persons. Tragedy and hardship do not discriminate. Our world sees opposition among rich and poor, men and women, the righteous as well as the wicked. And while increasing dishonesty and vanity in our society are self-evident, the Savior specifically prayed that God would not take us “out of the world” (John 17:15). “In this world your joy is not full,” He taught us, “but in me your joy is full” (D&C 101:36). How else do we learn that true satisfaction is found only by turning away from the world and coming to Christ?

Only after fearing the loss of her sons and realizing that her prophet-husband’s testimony of Christ was not enough to sustain her own, Sariah found the Lord herself and declared,

Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. [1 Nephi 5:8]

She discovered that Christ’s grace was sufficient. And when the sons returned to their father’s tent, Nephi reported, “Our father . . . was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad” (1 Nephi 5:1). Naturally such gladness and cheer came because her sons returned safely. But such joy is also evident in her witness that the Lord’s power enabled her sons to do good works that they otherwise would not have been able to do if left to their own means.

After suffering physical and emotional persecution throughout years of missionary labors, Paul landed in a Roman prison and then declared,

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ [who] strengtheneth me. [Philippians 4:11–13]

What does this mean for each of us here today? I can start by acknowledging that I have had tribulation from which no one else could deliver me but the Lord. Circumstances I would never happily choose have sent me to my knees and turned me to God. And, further, I anticipate additional trials down the road, because God loves me.

While the Lord clearly promises, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33), life’s challenges are rarely the same for you as they are for me. I can also acknowledge that you have challenges that I will likely never experience, challenges and crosses that will be just as stretching for your soul as mine are for me. I can resist the temptation to assume the role of the Master Physician by announcing to you in your despair, “Be of good cheer” or “I understand just how you feel,” being aware that it is from His voice that you and I both need to receive this message if we will be healed. He is the only one who truly understands our sorrow. Only He has felt our personal pain.

But I can also come to know the Lord and choose to bear witness of His supernal gift every time I have opportunity to speak or teach. I can realize that I will do more to help another person find the Lord by admitting my utter dependence on Christ in my actions and informal conversations than by parading a seemingly perfect outward appearance, which all too frequently communicates that I no longer need Him. We should be competing against sin, not trying to determine who needs the Savior less. When we acknowledge that we each face difficulties; that the Savior overcame the world; that He has lifted and strengthened and given vision to each of us in very personal ways, we will realize that we are never alone. We will feel a peace within even though the crisis without still rages. We will be filled with hope and even cheer.

Conclusion

The words of one of our sacrament hymns reflect great reason to lift our heads and rejoice:

No creature is so lowly,

No sinner so depraved,

But feels thy presence holy,

And thru thy love is saved.

Tho craven friends betray thee,

They feel thy love’s embrace

The very foes who slay thee

Have access to thy grace.

Thy sacrifice transcended

The mortal law's demand;

Thy mercy is extended

To every time and land.

No more can Satan harm us,

Tho long the fight may be,

Nor fear of death alarm us;

We live, O Lord, thru thee. ["O Savior, Thou Who Wearest a Crown," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 297, vs. 2 and 3]

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ has indeed overcome the world! As darkness has no power when light appears, so the world cannot overcome or comprehend the Light of the World (see John 1:5). He is the Victor, come to earth "with healing in his wings" (3 Nephi 25:2) for both ourselves and those who disappoint us. He will not forsake us. He leads us along even when we don't know all the answers. Like Sariah and the Apostle Paul who found His matchless love in their distress, we too can know the Savior's grace in our profound need.

As the mother hen covers her chicks with her wings, so the Redeemer will surround us with His comprehensive power if we will come to Him (see Matthew 23:37). There is room under those wings for all of us, for He declares:

Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come. [D&C 68:6]

True, we live in a time of war, a day of conflicts and terrors not only among nations but within our own hearts. But He who is the Balm of Gilead (see Jeremiah 8:22) is the Captain of all creation; only in Him is peace and serenity found. Amid all our mortal gloom and doom, Jesus Christ has overcome the world. Come, let us rejoice.