



By **Elder L. Whitney Clayton**

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

Rooted in

One of the most troubling scenes in all scripture is recorded in the Book of John. It occurred after the Savior had suffered incomprehensible agony for our sins and mortal weaknesses in the Garden of Gethsemane (see D&C 19:15–18).

This scene also followed His betrayal and arrest and happened after the night of indignities and physical abuse He suffered at the hands of the leaders of the Jews. It came after He was brutally scourged by Roman soldiers acting under the direction of Pontius Pilate. It occurred after the crown of thorns was pressed onto His head.

Pilate concluded that Jesus had done nothing that merited crucifixion. He ordered that Jesus be scourged, a form of extreme but normally not-fatal physical punishment. Perhaps Pilate hoped that by thus torturing

and humiliating the Savior, he would persuade the leaders of the Jews that Jesus had been taught a terribly painful lesson and been made a public example. Perhaps he hoped to awaken some sense of mercy in them. Thus, following the scourging, Pilate ordered that Jesus be brought into public view.

“Behold the Man!”

“Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

“When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him” (John 19:5–6).

As critically important as the rest of the story is, I stop with Pilate’s words: “Behold the man!”

In this article and the next, Elder Clayton and his wife, Kathy, testify of the Savior and of His ability to help God’s children reach their eternal potential.

Christ



Pilate's plea was profoundly ironic. Jesus's physical appearance at that moment was marred, but there never had been until then, and has not been since, any man or woman who more richly deserved to be "beheld." His life was perfect. He was without peer. No one had ever lived as He did. No one ever would. He possessed every virtue in its consummate form.

The Savior had every power of self-control. His emotions and feelings were perfect, as were His thoughts. His understanding was unlimited. He alone was truly worthy of being beheld—from every perspective—and of being examined, measured, and worshipped. No view into His mind, heart, and feelings would or could

possibly disappoint. His appearance did not reflect it then, but Jesus was the embodiment of the abundant life.

So it was not His appearance at that moment of suffering that we should remember first and foremost (see Isaiah 53:2). It was what He was inside that afflicted physical tabernacle that meant absolutely everything for all of us. What He was made possible what He did. It was the magnificence of what He was that invites our attention.

What we should see as we "behold the man" is His crescendoing triumph over the forces of evil, even though it did not then appear to be a victory at all. It was His perfect calm in the center of the most violent storm any human would ever suffer. Every

diabolical device the enemy ever invented had been or soon would be unleashed against Him. He overcame and conquered them all. He stood before Pilate in perfect peace and composure.

His dominion over the physical elements of the world and the conditions of mankind was demonstrated beyond doubt. He commanded evil spirits. He healed the sick and gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He restored the dead to life, including children He returned to their parents. He perceived the thoughts and feelings of everyone. He forgave sins and cleansed lepers. He carried the burden of the sins, pains, illnesses, and failings of all humanity the night



before the scene with Pilate. Ironically, He even suffered for the sins of those who at that very moment were mistreating Him.

“Behold the man” indeed. He is the Son of the living God. He is the exemplar of life, the One sent to show the way and to be the Way. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) for all of us. With those three words, “behold the man,” Pilate unknowingly and unintentionally expressed the simple formula for achieving the highest purposes of life.

When Pilate asked the Jews to behold the Savior, he pointed them and us toward the One, the only one, who can make our lives abundant and our “salvation perfect.”¹ Thus the commandment “Look to God and live” (Alma 37:47).

What we should remember when we behold Him is that because of Him, and all He did and all He was and is, we too can triumph. We also can overcome. We can live abundantly in the midst of trials. If we choose to “behold” Him and accept and apply His saving gospel, He will save us. He will rescue us from the effects of our own fallen natures and foibles, and He will save us from sin, from spiritual mediocrity, and from ultimate, eternal failure. He will purge, refine, beautify, and eventually even perfect us. He will give us joy and peace. He is the key to abundant life.

A Sermon of Seedlings

My wife, Kathy, and I live on a hillside. A species of trees—the scrub oak—grows there. Unlike large and mighty oak trees, scrub oak trees never get big, but they are hardy and beautiful.

A few years ago we placed a large flowerpot on the walkway that leads to the front door of our home. We planted colorful flowers in the pot, which sits under the branches of a scrub oak tree. When the season changed and fall began, the scrub oak tree began to drop its seeds, or acorns, and a few fell into the flowerpot.

One spring day I noticed that a few seedlings had sprouted. We didn’t want anything but flowers in the pot, so I started to pull the seedlings out of the potting soil. To my surprise, the roots were three or four times longer than the visible part of the seedlings above the surface of the soil.

In Utah, USA, the summers are hot, with little rainfall, and the winters are cold, with wind and snow. But the deep roots of the scrub oak seedlings quickly get down through the surface soils. This allows more exposed root to draw moisture and nutrients from the soil. The deep roots also firmly anchor the trees to hold them erect and steadfast in the wind, beginning when they are young. Deep roots make survival easier for the scrub oak.

As the seedlings eventually grow to their full height, their roots continue to nourish, protect, and sustain them.

We can take a lesson from the scrub oak. We all have experiences that are like hot summers and cold winters. We have easy times and hard times, successes and failures, times of health and sickness, periods of happiness and moments of sorrow. Life isn’t static. It isn’t smooth.

Life is similar in other regards as well. We are all surrounded by the culture and traditions of our native communities and countries. Some of those influences are good, and some are bad. Some will lift us, and others will diminish and degrade us. Our homes may be blessed by the light of the gospel or be blighted by failure to keep the commandments of God. The examples of friends may be terrific or terrible. None of us knows where life will take us. We can’t fully predict our future health or wealth. We can’t foretell the influence of war or weather. Variable circumstances beyond our control press challenges on all of us.

But unlike trees, we can choose to deliberately develop the spiritual root structure for our lives. We decide where to set our roots down and how deeply to sink them into the soil. Daily decisions make tiny, almost imperceptible differences in the roots of our faith, the effect of which becomes foundational.

Rooted in the Savior

Because we don't know when or how our own challenges will come, or how long our personal seasons of winter or summer will last, we should set down our roots as deeply as we can into the only true source of nourishment for our souls, the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants our lives to be abundant. He invites us to come unto Him. He said, "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

We build strength of soul to weather the storms of our lives by learning of Him. We learn by study and by prayer. We learn by watching righteous examples. We learn as we serve others in order to serve Him (see Matthew 25:40). We learn as we seek to emulate Him in any way we can.

Listening means heeding and hearkening, not just hearing. We listen to Him in private scripture study. We listen in sacrament meeting and in the temple. We hear Him in the "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). We listen to Him in the voice of living prophets and apostles.

Careful listening reminds us that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We strengthen our roots with incremental, one-step-at-a-time growth. As we listen, we follow the path He

walked. He is the path that leads to the abundant life, and He is the light that illuminates it (see John 8:12).

Keep the Commandments

There is no secret or surprise about what we can and should do to develop our roots: we keep the commandments of God. Our ability to do His will grows as we do His will. It becomes easier because we grow in conviction and faith. When we faithfully persist in applying the fundamentals of the gospel in our lives, the Lord blesses us with increased inner strength.

Worthy, thoughtful worship makes an important contribution to the depth of our spiritual roots. Reverently attending sacrament meeting and partaking of the sacrament with real intent make the Sabbath day more than just another Sunday. We cannot truly sink our roots deep unless we "always remember him" (D&C 20:77, 79). When we prepare ourselves before our meetings, the Sabbath becomes a richer experience for us. As we contemplate our need for forgiveness and the blessing of always having His Spirit to be with us, we begin to see the chapel as a sanctuary and the sacrament as a time of sanctification.

For that reason, there are some things we should always take with us when we go to church. Foremost among these are a broken heart

and a contrite spirit. We should go eager to seek and feel the blessings of the Savior's Atonement. Similarly, we should always leave some things at home. Thoughts of sports, work, entertainment, and shopping ought to be left locked in a closet inside our homes to be opened on any day other than the Sabbath day. Genuine worship promotes real conversion. It helps us send the roots of our faith down deep, where we find a spiritual reservoir, which "shall be in [us] a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

Paul wrote:

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

"Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught" (Colossians 2:6-7).

If we don't experience personal storms and drought, our roots never have the chance to become strong. Ironically, smooth sailing is its own test—and a difficult one. The absence of problems can soften us if we aren't careful. We may "not watch [ourselves], and [our] thoughts, and [our] words, and [our] deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith" (Mosiah 4:30) without a trial that bends our knees and works on our hearts.

Life has a way of bringing distress to all of us even when we are doing

our best. Unless we make terrible choices, which always results in tragedy, we usually don't choose when or how the problems of life will knock on our doors. But we surely do decide each day how we will prepare for them. Thus the reminder from Joshua: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

Here's another reminder:

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13–14).

We shouldn't be surprised when we suffer a failure of faith if we walk on the margins of the strait and narrow path. What we do and don't do really matters because actions have consequences, as does inaction. When we become inattentive to the small, daily, repetitive but essential actions of belief, we weaken our roots. Over time we slowly draw away from God.

Thus, the way we speak to each other, the books and articles we read, the television shows and movies we watch, the things we don't read and would never watch, and the jokes we choose not to listen to or repeat all reflect where we are on the strait and narrow path—in

the center or on the edges. We can't claim to be nourishing our roots if the things we do and don't do aren't calculated to make us better Saints. Safety is found only in the center of the strait and narrow path.

The Path to Peace

There is no better pattern of life anywhere, no surer way to find peace and the pathway forward, than by following the Lord Jesus Christ. His is the only name given under heaven with the power to make our lives more heavenly (see 2 Nephi 31:21; Moses 6:52). There is no one else we can "behold" who has the saving, renewing, transformative power the Savior does.



Jude's words capture the inevitable emptiness of life that eventually envelops those who choose anyone or anything other than the Savior: "Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 1:12).

Our souls should be so deeply rooted in Christ that we will be able to endure any challenge, triumph over any affliction, withstand any attack on our faith, and become like oak trees—firm, immovable, and steadfast. That kind of rootedness transcends time and outlasts every enemy, even the most subtle, invisible, and insidious ones.

We learn from Helaman how the promise of rock-like strength depends on our building our lives on the Redeemer, "a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall" (Helaman 5:12). Isaiah captured in just a few words the essence of what it means to be rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ and to bring to fruitage in our souls something of the attributes of the Savior. He wrote, "And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isaiah 58:11).

The Savior Jesus Christ is the exemplar of every virtue. He was

the one perfect man ever to live. He atoned for our sins. Through His Atonement we can become women and men of Christ. We can be cleansed, changed, healed, and refined. Our souls can become things of beauty.

May we "behold the man" more completely. May we emulate Him more worshipfully. May we follow Him more eagerly. May we sink our roots deeper in the soil of salvation until we rest on Him, the Rock of our Redeemer. May we increasingly enjoy the blessing of the abundant life He offers. ■

NOTE

1. See "O God, the Eternal Father," *Hymns*, no. 175.

