

**Willow Creek Stake Conference**  
**Saturday Adult Session**  
**March 18, 2017**  
**President Esplin**

**Introduction**

- **Dallin Oaks 1988**
  - Law school teacher.
    - Method of teaching – discipline is to concentrate classroom instruction on the difficult questions – the obscure and debatable matters that lie in the fringes of learning
    - Law teachers believe that the simple general rules are so obvious that students can learn them by independent study. As a result teachers spend little time to basics.
    - We do that too often in gospel teaching. “We neglect to teach and testify the simple, basic truths of paramount importance. This omission permits some members and nonmembers to get wrong ideas about our faith and belief. “
    - What do members of the LDS Church think of Christ?
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- **Israel 1984 – Passion week**
  - Via Dele Rosa – Palm Sunday
  - NPR Reporter – What does Christ’s crucifixion mean to you?
  - Dumb founded. Didn’t know what to say.

**Remarks**

**Gethsemane**

- **Someone else in the Garden of Gethsemane**
  - Mosiah 3:7 “And lo he shall suffer **temptations**, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people”
  - CS Lewis
    - “No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is; after all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives into temptation after 5 minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people in one sense know very little about badness. They’ve always lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it; and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means – the only complete realist.”

**Crucifixion**

**Symbol of the Cross – symbol of Christianity**

- Mark 15:21 “And they compel one **Simon a Cyrenian**, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.”
  - Cyrene – modern day Libya – a non Jew
  - Alexander and Rufus – non-Jewish names, but clearly known to Mark’s readers.
  - Romans 16:13 “Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine”
  - Ossuary found (box with bones of dead) in Kidron Valley – “Simon of Cyrene” marked with Christian markings.
  - Could Simon have come across the Savior in his final hours and been converted with his family?

## Resurrection

- **Easter Evening – The Eleven**

Luke 24:36-

36 ¶ And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, **Peace be unto you.**

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39 **Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.**

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

41 And **while they yet believed not for joy**, and wondered, he said unto them, **Have ye here any meat?**

42 **And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.**

43 And he took it, and did eat before them.

44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

- Apostles frightened – Shalom Aleikem (familiar greeting – peace be unto you)
- Thought he was a spirit – **didn't understand the resurrection (handle me)**
- Eats fish and honey comb – teaching
- John 20:21-23

21 Then said Jesus to them again, **Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.**

22 And when he had said this, he **breathed on them**, and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost:**

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

- Baptized and now Confirms with Holy Ghost – realized 50 days later on Pentecost
- Special witnesses – sends forth
- Power given to remit sins (Matt 16:19)

- **Thomas – 1 week later**

John 20: 24-29

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

- **Thomas was not present on Easter Evening**
- **One week later – Sunday, New Sabbath evening. Doors shut**

- 'Doubting Thomas' unfortunate name.
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  - John 11:16 – When Savior announces his intention to go to Bethany to see Lazarus – “Let us also go, that we may die with him”. Courageous
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  - o \* Peter armed with sword – cuts ear off High Priest servant (aiming for head)
  - o \* Gethsemane Arrest – ‘I am’
  - J Judas leads a ‘band of men’ (Gr) Cohort/’great multitude’ – hundreds
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  - o \* Matt 26:53 – 12 legions of angels x 6,000 = 72,000 angels
- 51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear.
- 52 Then said Jesus unto him, **Put up again thy sword into his place:** for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.
- 53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than **twelve legions of angels?**
- Thomas understood where this was headed – realist?
  - Other 11 Apostles – not apparent they understood.

“I remember very well the last charge that Joseph Smith gave to the Apostles. We had as little idea that he was going from us as the Apostles of the Savior did that He was going to be taken from them. Joseph talked with us as plainly as did the Savior to His Apostles, but we did not understand that he was about to depart from us any more than the Apostles understood the Savior.” Wilford Woodruff

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.  
 27 Then saith he to Thomas, **Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side:** and be not faithless, but believing.

## Caravaggio Painting

- Beautiful masterpiece of Caravaggio – Doubting of Thomas – 1601
- Painting has a geometric pattern – a simple pyramid
- The three apostles here represent the cluster of the first believers of the church
- They are barricaded in a room – there is a small crowd but Caravaggio edits the other people out of the painting in order to focus total attention on the action taking place
- Caravaggio chooses this intimate group - Peter at the top of the pyramid, John to the right, Thomas in the center, and of course the Savior to the left
- The most dramatic light falls on the upper arm of Christ’s shoulder
- There are three hands that direct your attention to the gash in his side - two of them belonging to the Savior, and the finger of the apostle Thomas
- The painting is so powerful that I believe that Caravaggio is declaring his own faith here – it was so well received that he made a copy of it for another patron
- The tips of the noses in the painting contribute to the intimacy – form a soft oval structure – shows their shared inspection the gash from a large Roman spear.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

- Now he knew literally and physically that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. Signs follow faith – Special Witness.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

- Blessed are they that have not seen but have believed.
- How like Thomas we all are
  - o Overcoming Doubt is part of the test of mortality.
  - o Very few come to a position of assurance without first wrestling with some uncertainty.

- **Heirs of the Celestial Kingdom**

D&C 76:74 Terrestrial “These are they who are **honorable men of the earth**, who were blinded by the craftiness of men.”

D&C 76:79 Terrestrial “...These are they who are **not valiant in the testimony of Jesus**, wherefore, they obtain not the crown over the kingdom of our God.”

D&C 76:69 Celestial “These are they who are **just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant**, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.’

D&C 76:101 Telestial “But received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus, neither the prophets, neither the everlasting covenant.”

- **Elder John Lasater Story in Morocco**

- Part of official US government delegation to Morocco
- Visiting some ruins – 5 black limousines sped across Moroccan countryside.
- Noticed leading limousine pulled off to the side of the road.
- Pulled over, Old shepherd with flowing robes talking to the limo driver.
- Small flock of sheep numbering 15 – 20 nearby.
- Accident occurred – the King's vehicle had struck and injured one of the sheep belonging to the shepherd.
- The driver was explaining the law of the land – because the King's vehicle had injured one of the sheep, he was now entitled to 100x the value and the meat divided among the people.
- My interpreter said- “But the old shepherd will not accept the money, they never do.”
- Why? “Because of the love he has for each of his sheep”.
- The old shepherd reached down, lifted the injured lamb in his arms, and placed it in a large pouch on the front of his robe. He kept stroking its head, repeating the same word over and over again. When I asked – Oh, he is calling it by name –
- As predicted by his driver, the money was refused – with injured one tucked safely in his pouch – disappeared into the beautiful desert of Morocco.

- Each evening at Sundown – shepherds bring flocks to a common enclosure. One shepherd employed to guard gate until morning.
- Shepherds come one by one and call sheep by name. They do not respond except to their shepherd's voice.
- John 10:2-5
  - 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
  - 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.
  - 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.
  - 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.
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