

On The Moment Of Truth

A Talk Given In Sacrament Meeting
Sterling Park Ward
Ashburn, Virginia Stake

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Introduction

Good morning, brothers and sisters. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Calvin Andrus. Our family has been in the ward 29 years. We have many good friends in the ward, as well as many friends who have come and gone. Our family has been so blessed by kindness and help we have received here. We love you.

Let me also take a moment and express the sadness and loss we feel at the passing of Sister Schulkins. We are also strengthened by the courage and strength shown by Brother Schulkins during this time of tremendous grieving. Are prayers are with you, John.

I teach the Gospel Doctrine class in Sunday School, which will start right after finish my talk today. So, I am wondering, should I give a long talk, so I only have to give a short lesson in Sunday School. Or, should I give a short talk, but then have to give a long lesson in Sunday School. What do you think? I know the Primary and Sunday School teachers are rooting for a long talk, and the teenagers and children are hoping for a short talk. Hmmm . . . what should I do? Maybe the teens can use their smart phones to time my talk and let me know afterward how long I did take. It means, however, that they will have to pay attention.

Dental Board Exam

While Janet and I were in graduate school in New York, we had to watch our money very carefully. During the four years we were there we could not afford to go to the dentist. After getting a job down here in Northern Virginia, we still had to manage our money strictly. We decided that I would take advantage of the Georgetown University Dental School program that only charged \$5 a visit, but the work was done by the dental students. They would only do one filling at a time, and they would only do fillings their students needed as requirements for classes. So after an initial visit, they would call me to do whatever both they and I needed done. (Unfortunately, the dental school closed down a few years later.)

This was a good arrangement for me. Except I needed some major work on one particular tooth. No student needed to do that particular kind of filling. Then one day, I got a call from a student who was graduating, and was assigned to do that kind of filing for his dental board exam down

in Richmond, VA. He paid for my transportation and lodging. The board exam started at 8 am and went until 5pm, and I had to be there the whole time.

In the morning he drilled out the old filling and then took an impression of the large hole in my tooth. Every step of the way a board examiner inspected every thing he did. The student then had to cast the large filling, bake it in the oven, polish it and glue it on to my tooth--and then have it inspected. This student was very nervous and desperately wanted to pass his board exam.

He removed the filling too early from the oven, not letting the filling cool down slowly enough, which caused it to be brittle. It cracked when he was polishing it. He then had to cast another filling. This set him back about 90 minutes. He had to finish before the deadline in order to pass the boards. He was starting to panic.

With about 30 minutes to go before the deadline, he started to put the cast filling in my tooth. As usually happens, it didn't quite fit, so he kept removing it, scraping it here and there, polishing it and putting it back in. Finally it was a perfect fit and he was putting it in for the final inspection. There was only about 7 minutes to go. Then he dropped the filling. It fell to the back of my throat. I could see the perspiration just break out on his face behind the mask. It was like time froze. He looked at me. I looked at him. He looked back at me. My gag reflex was starting to kick in. Then he cried, "DON'T SWALLOW! DON'T SWALLOW!"

It was all I could to do fight the gag reflex and not swallow. He got some long handled tweezers. I could see the board examiner standing about 10 feet away looking at the clock. The student retrieved the filling, and put it into my tooth. He pushed it down hard. Very hard. The examiner came over to inspect the work. I could see the clock. It was 5pm. The exam was over. The examiner said that the filling was supposed to be cemented in. The student didn't say anything.

The examiner said that the student must have done an excellent job scraping the cement from around the filling because he (the examiner) could not find any trace of cement (Wink, Wink).

The examiner passed the student. After the examiner left, the student took the filling out and then cemented it back in.

Let's think about that student for a minute. From kindergarten through dental school, he had gone to 21 years of school. That is a lot of classes. He probably had gotten A's in most of those classes. But at the point when he dropped the filling to the back of my throat, and the board examiner was tapping his foot, what did his academic achievements mean? Could he look at the examiner and say, "But I got an A in the 'casting fillings' class"? No. That would not have passed muster.

This was an exam to see what kind of dentist he was. It was not a test to see if he had memorized the material. It was a test to see if he had internalized the material. It was a test to see whether he had just merely studied dentistry, or if he had actually become a dentist. Being a dentist is different than studying dentistry. This was his moment of truth. Fortunately for him, and his future patients, he proved himself to be a dentist in that moment of truth.

What About Us?

What about us? Do we have moments of truth in our lives? Moments when we are put to the test, to see if we are a Christ-like person or not? Can you think of one in your life? These moments of truth don't happen every day. They come just every now and then. And, more often than not, they surprise us. The question is do we rise to the occasion, or do we falter?

Running Together

The Apostle Paul gave some advice to the Hebrews, to help us rise to the occasion. He said,

. . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, [l]ooking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . . (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Paul encourages us to use Christ as our running companion as we run with patience the race that is set before us.

Spartan Race

Speaking of running races . . . two of our sons, Ryan and Trevor, ran the Spartan Race yesterday. It was held at the Wintergreen Ski Resort, located between Charlottesville and the West Virginia border. It is an obstacle course that requires running between obstacles. In this case, the running is up and down the ski hill for a distance of 8 miles. The obstacles include crawling in mud under barbed wire, jumping over fire, carrying heavy logs, climbing over tall walls, and smiling the whole time. Just kidding, there is no requirement to smile.

There are judges at each obstacle. If a participant fails to complete the obstacle, the judge make them do 30 “burpees.” A “burpee” is a combination of a squat thrust and a push-up. They are very tiring. Some participants end up doing more than 100 burpees during the race.

Most people enter the contest as pairs or in groups of 5, 10, or 20. This provides an incentive for the group to train together and get in shape for the race. Over the last several months, our sons spent significant amounts of their free time running and working out at the gym, in preparation for yesterday’s race. This preparation is absolutely necessary in order to be able to successfully complete the race.

Participants often run the Spartan Race together. They give each other encouragement along the way. They also give each other a little bit of help, here and there. It is an exhausting experience, but one for which the participant derives great personal satisfaction as well a some well-earned bragging rights. They even get a tee-shirt! Woo Hoo!

Lessons

So when Paul says we are to run the race that is set before us, what is he talking about? He is talking about following the strait and narrow path that leads to the Celestial Kingdom. Just like the Spartan Race, treading the path to the path to the Celestial Kingdom requires lots of serious preparation. What preparation do we do to be successful on this path?

Our preparation consists of some quite simple, yet very powerful exercises. These include daily personal prayer; daily family prayer; daily scripture reading; partaking of the Sacrament weekly;

being of service both in and out of the church. As we train hard we will be prepared for the path to the Celestial Kingdom.

Also, like the Spartan Race, the path to the Celestial Kingdom is an obstacle course. However, these obstacles are often surprises that catch us off guard. These obstacles are like the surprise that the dental student faced when he dropped the filling into the back of my throat.

Some of the obstacles we face are temptations to criticize our wives or nag our husbands. Other obstacles are temptations to yell at our kids or make rude gestures to the other drivers on the Toll Road. Still other obstacles are taking credit for other people's work or besmirching someone's reputation. There are insidious obstacles like not forgiving friends and family members. And then there are big obstacles of losing a job, or as we have witnessed recently, losing a close family member. There are surprise obstacles that pop up when we are trying hard to stay worthy to go on a mission or to get married in the temple.

When these obstacles hit us, there is no time to prepare. We must prepare in advance, not knowing what they will be. These obstacles are tests of our character, to see if we will respond in Christ-like or Satan-like ways.

Like the Spartan Race, the path to the Celestial Kingdom is best traveled with others, especially family and friends. They can encourage us and help us as we struggle with the spiritual obstacles on our way. And if you are human, like me, we will--in spite of our preparation and help from our family and friends--sometimes fail those tests.

Paul tells us our most important traveling companion is Christ--the author and finisher of our faith. Instead of doing 30 "burpees" when we fail a spiritual obstacle, Christ has made it possible for us to repent. More than that, He has invited us to cast our burdens on Him. He knows the path and has already overcome every obstacle we will face.

Conclusion

As I try to be faithful in preparing myself for the obstacles that hit me, I can feel the strength of that preparation in my life. When I have been failing, I have also had the Atonement work miracles in my life to overcome the obstacles in my path. I bear testimony of the effectiveness of the Atonement. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.