Good morning everyone, I would like to say that I am grateful to be here but I probably shouldn’t lie over the pulpit so it would be best if I didn’t say that. So, with that said I guess I will have to just dive right into my talk.

Brothers and sisters this is a very special time of year, a new year. We are blessed to start out 2018 with, one might say, a clean slate, or even a new beginning. This time of year sees a lot of us changing directions, making new goals, and wanting to do better and improving our lives. We are changing our aim and trying to refocus our lives on the things that matter most.

One of my goals this year is to focus more on the Savior and living a more Christ centered life. What does this mean?  I would like to share a story with you about a young man who is doing just that, striving to live a more Christ centered life by giving up worldly things.

STORY:

There are two things that are very uncommon in the BMX world - leaving energy drink sponsors by choice and doing anything in the name of religion. This story has both.

I want to provide you with a little back ground first! Colton Satterfield, is considered one of the best BMX bike riders in the world, and he’s consistently ranked in the top 5 among Big Air Triple competitors.  He won consecutive gold medals at the X games in 2014 and 2015. He is at the top of his game, but now he is making headlines for a different reason.

Colton has decided to leave Monster Energy due to "personal religious reasons."   I would like to share his official statement with you -

"I want to thank everyone at Monster for all they have done and do for action sports. I have chosen to part ways for personal religious reasons. Some of the marketing and logos that are meant to be edgy simply are edgy in areas that I personally could no longer support. I wish all the great people there the absolute very best and I thank them for their kind understanding.

He went on to say, this was not a decision I made lightly. Getting such an energy drink sponsor is a big achieving step in action sports; they provide more than just financially, they help their athletes in many ways. (keep in mind that Monster Energy is one of if not the largest sponsor in action sports.) The decision was not a light one by any means. I regret something seemingly so small, to some, as logos and various marketing, has to divide us; but I know it is the correct decision for me.”

While many will disagree with or do not understand Colton's viewpoint here, you have to give him credit for putting his personal morals above a paycheck. Colton is a one-of-a-kind individual and puts a lot of thought into every decision he makes. He also does double flairs on giant quarter -pipes.

Colton added this follow up to his initial statement -

"I can imagine some non-religious people thinking this is wild or crazy, and not that long ago I would have been one of those people. Previously I had been a far too logical person in life to go deeply into religion and still am that logical minded person. But I had a strait up real and wildly profound experience that shockingly confirmed serious religious truth to me. I had always been one to learn as much as I can. This experience was at the end of a knowledge or a deep world wisdom, most don't find, that seemingly discounted it; then that 'wisdom' was confounded as the bible describes and had my eyes opened in a real profound way. Some perceived 'wisdom' of the world is certainly a stumbling block that ensnares if one is not careful.  There is an actual dark side of things that deceives. Most who find this 'knowledge' sit in their pride of having it and don't actually step back and analyze it and can be pulled down into darkness; those who analyze it fully are already - or then become - Christians. My experience was profound.  Whole countries don't allow missionaries or other religions because their leaders trust this false or highly partial wisdom so hard. It is also wild to later read prophets of old, like Paul and many many others, who were wise dudes that essentially described every step of this knowledge that leads 'wise men' away and then describes each step up to the confounding and true light for those who seek. These were real, and actual very wise dudes of old.

Colton finished up by saying: so for me, I do my best to walk uprightly before a very real and good God and, with some of their marketing and logos, it just wasn't something I could keep supporting. God is very real, Christ in actual reality lives. That's from a dude who has to logically understand things all the way around. Christianity is actually totally real. I was furthermore blown away to see the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) religion understands literally everything in a very clear way. I know them to have the entire fullness of the gospel of Christ. It is His church. Something not long ago I would have sadly laughed at. But it is in actual true reality. God can show you this far better and more profound than even logically getting it. The highest form of wisdom is being humble before God. Everything else falls. It's true. A truth that is sadly scoffed at by many before ever given a fair shake. A truth too precious not to share. Love is what’s up. It's real."

Brothers and Sisters, I don’t know what kind of deal Colton had with Monster but I can imagine and as he said it was not an easy sponsor to walk away from.  Just as this young man gave up worldly possessions to focus on the savior and live a more Christ centered life, what are we willing to give up? Cell phone time and social media? Tv time? Our drive for bigger, better, and more in many areas of our lives that in the end really do not matter? When we give these things up are we then willing to replace them by doing righteous and wholesome activities that help us focus and draw nearer to Christ?

This is not a new principal. Striving to live a more Christ centered life is something that was taught back in the Book of Mormon times.

ALMA 22

In Alma chapter 22 we read the story of Aaron teaching King Lamoni’s father about the creation, the Fall of Adam, and the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. The teachings of Aaron inspired the king deeply. The king’s response to Aaron’s teachings is found in verse 15 of the same chapter: “And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.”

How many of us would be willing to give up “all that we possess” to feel this great joy of which Aaron taught the king? As I have pondered this question I realized that I would struggle to do as the king was so willing to do. It has helped me to realize the importance of living a Christ centered life and the need to always be striving to live that way.

STORY:

This past summer I had the privilege of going for a flight in a hot air balloon with my daughter Sabrina. When we arrived we signed waivers, got in a van and headed out. We stopped to check the air in one area and it was too windy so we went to another area. Fortunately the air in this location was calm enough for us to go.  The men who were taking us got the equipment and balloon off of a trailer and laid it out on the ground. It took all of us, as they started putting the hot air into the balloon, to hold it as it filled. When it was time for lift off we all climbed in the basket together. The heat ‘burner” unit kind of looked like a cotton candy machine that shot flames out the center of it. It was CENTERED right in the middle of the basket where the heat could be focused right in the middle of the balloon. The fire wasn't a steady flow, but a consistent burst. When they wanted to change directions, they would pump the bursts of flames more rapidly while staying consistent.

It was beautiful to be up so high floating in that basket. It was amazing to have our view opened up so fully as compared to being on the ground where we could only see right around us. Being up high enabled us to see so much more.

As we were floating there were other balloons around us. Some went up faster than others Some went higher than others. It was a unique experience for each balloon and the people in that balloon.

As we were going I was thinking about our safety and well-being. I was grateful for our guide and his knowledge, and our flame throwing cotton candy maker in the center. That's what our guide was focused on the entire time. Without that “burner unit” we would've been in some big trouble.

Our lives can be likened to a hot air balloon ride in a couple of different ways:

-we can't get ourselves off the ground, we need others and most importantly, like the fire at the center of the balloon we need the Savior to be at the center of our lives.

-just like it was up high in the basket where our perspective was so broad and clear, if we have our focus CENTERED on the Savior we will have a better perspective and desperately needed clarity in our lives to bless us as strive to live better and make righteous choices.

-lastly, as the flame was consistent and steady to keep the balloon up and going, we need to keep our fire and desire burning steady and consistent. This method will help us draw nearer, stay centered, and be forever focused on the Savior. It will be a unique and individual experience for each of us just as it was for the balloons.

It is my hope and prayer as we start this new year that we can all make a better effort to live in such a way that Christ becomes more the center of our lives. To focus more on what the Savoir would have us do and wants us to become rather than what we would want. I would like to bear my testimony that Christ lives, that he loves us, and that he wants us to put Him as the center, and the focus of our lives. I bear testimony that the B of M is true and that Joseph Smith translated it through the power of God. That he was called to usher in the fullness of the gospel in the latter days. I know that President Monson is a prophet called by Heavenly Father to lead us today.