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Alma 12:5-6, The Power of an Embrace

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Alma 12:5-6, The Power of an Embrace

Alma continued to instruct Zeezrom:

5 Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee. Now I would that ye should remember that what I say unto thee I say unto all.

6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity (Alma 12:5-6).

An honest, heartfelt embrace is much more than just a symbol of love.⁷⁹² It is the way we take other people into our Selves—the way we offer our Selves to them—an invitation to make each a part of the other's being. The greatest of all human powers may be found in a tender, meaningful embrace. The scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, frequently celebrate the magnitude of a similar, but eternal, embrace.

One of the most beautiful testimonies of the Savior recorded anywhere in the scriptures is this reflection spoken by Lehi: “But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul

⁷⁹² A personal note from LeGrand Baker: I was only seven years old when my Grandpa, Claude Vincent Baker, died, and I have only one short memory of him. There are some recollections of the circumstances surrounding the incident, but they are memories of the context of the event, and not really of my Grandpa. The year was 1945. He and Grandma lived on their ranch in Boulder, Utah, far from any good doctors. Grandpa was very ill, and had come to stay with us while he saw a doctor here. The doctor put him in the hospital, and he died there. The circumstances surrounding my memory of him are these: He was sitting on a chair in our living room, and he motioned for me to come to him. When I did, he lifted me up and sat me on his lap. I remember those things, but they do not really count as memory of him. The single thing I remember about him is how I felt when I sat on his lap. He wrapped his arms around me and held me up tight against his chest and I was encompassed in his love. I felt his love for me, and I knew that I was truly, truly loved. That hug and the warm feeling that went all the way through my young body as I sat there enwrapped in his arms is my only memory of the reality of my Grandpa. The memory does not fade. Whenever I think of him, or see his picture, I re-experience the overwhelming warmth of that embrace.

That seems so right to me. If I could have chosen to retain only one memory of my Grandpa, the one I would have chosen would have been the beauty of his love. Similarly, if I could choose to leave only one memory to my family and to my friends, that memory would be a hug.

In the Book of Mormon.

from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15). The Lord promised a similar blessing to Oliver Cowdery:

20 Behold, thou art Oliver, and I have spoken unto thee because of thy desires; therefore treasure up these words in thy heart. Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love.
21 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God (D&C 6:20-21).

The people we hug become a part of us. That is most true of the Savior, as Lehi said, for it projects his lovingkindness into the eternities. It is an encounter with pure love, and it is above all things most powerful, most liberating, and most precious. There is a sharp contrast between an embrace of love and the “chains of hell” that Alma described to Zeezrom. Alma did not speak of loving, tender, outstretched, beckoning arms, but rather provides a very different picture:

5 Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee. Now I would that ye should remember that what I say unto thee I say unto all.
6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity (Alma 12:5-6).

The prospects of the confining, restricting, damning encirclement with which Alma forewarned Zeezrom are as real a possibility as is an embrace of love. That was Alma’s message to his antagonists.

In the remainder of chapter 12, Alma drove home that contrast by describing the eternal implications of our keeping or our not keeping the covenants we make with God. He said that if we keep our covenants, then the expanse of eternity will open to our view and present us with limitless possibilities. But, on the other hand, if we choose not to keep our covenants, then that view of eternity will implode on us and its power will turn from a freedom to act according to our own wills to the impotency of our having surrendered our wills to the devil, letting him use the power of our personalities to accomplish his purposes. Satan has no power of his own which he can wield against the righteous, so he must entice those who seek self-aggrandizement in the wrong places to do his bidding.

When there are none willing to serve his purposes, Satan can accomplish nothing and, therefore, “Satan shall be bound, that he shall have no place in the hearts of the children of men (D&C 45:55).⁷⁹³

What Alma will tell us, in this and the following chapter, is that we cannot avoid an eternal embrace, but we can choose whom we will embrace and whose power we will assimilate into ourselves when we do.

Alma 12:7-8, Zeezrom's Response

7 Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God; and he was also convinced that Alma and Amulek had a knowledge of him, for he was convinced that they knew the thoughts and intents of his heart; for power was given unto them that they might know of these things according to the spirit of prophecy.

8 And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works? (Alma 12:7-8).

Ordinary people cannot know what another person is thinking. However, the Spirit can make a righteous person privy to another person's thoughts. Since Mormon was not present, it is very unlikely that he knew such intimate details of the story unless he had access to a fuller account of Zeezrom's testimony than he has given us. It is also possible that Mormon is reminding us of the message in an important psalm that was sung during the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama:

⁷⁹³ See Revelation 20:2; D&C 43:30-3,1 84:100, 88:110.