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The Savior's Missionary Training Sermon in 3 Nephi

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Robert A. Cloward

Several years ago, as I sat at my desk at the Knoxville Tennessee Institute of Religion, I heard a knock at the front door. This seemed odd, since students regularly entered and exited the building as they pleased. Answering the knock, I found on the porch a man with shoulder-length brown hair and a flowing white robe. He asked if he could come in to share a message with me. Curious, I invited him in and offered him a seat. The man told me the world needed people who were willing to pattern their lives exactly after Jesus' example. He nodded when I asked if that were the reason for the hair and the robe. I inquired what church he represented. Uncomfortable with the question, he said he was simply a follower of Jesus Christ. I asked more pointedly, "Who feeds you?" He replied, "You do."

The visitor justified his response by quoting two verses from the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:31, 33). Apparently, he wasn't supposed to take thought for his needs, but I was!

I relate this experience to emphasize the simple truth that it *matters* how we interpret the words of scripture. As I looked

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at that man, I saw a life profoundly affected by the Sermon on the Mount—in *the wrong way*.

The words of the Sermon on the Mount are among the most familiar and beloved in the Bible. The Book of Mormon counterpart, which I call the Sermon in Bountiful, blesses us with a second scriptural context for these holy words. Many Latter-day Saints have been uplifted and edified by the Savior's teachings and have found applications for them in their lives. Not all interpret or apply the same, however, and some find parts of the sermon difficult to understand. On several occasions I have heard Church members remark that the sermon is perplexing because of its wide variety of topics. They find themselves groping for a thread to tie the diverse parts together. It is my hope in this paper to show that the scriptures reveal this thread. Once discovered, it ties the sermon together into a coherent and lucid whole, as seemingly unrelated topics take their proper places, and already familiar words reveal the fulness of their meaning.

Alternative Approaches to the Sermon's Unity

Any attempt to tie the Savior's sermon into a whole presents important implications for the interpretation of the parts. We must carefully judge each suggested unifying theory to be sure it properly guides our interpretations. A few examples from the variety of approaches to the sermon will suffice for illustration. (See Bauman for an extensive history of interpretations.)

Many non-LDS and a few LDS commentators claim that chapters 3–5 of Matthew contain a collection of pericopes or sayings of Jesus originally delivered separately over the extended time span of his earthly ministry. They claim that Matthew reconstructed them as if they were spoken together. One author states: "No proper exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount can ignore the results of more than two hundred years of historical-critical research into the New Testament. One of these results is the determination that the Sermon on the Mount

in the First Gospel is not a speech made by Jesus but the literary work of the Evangelist Matthew” (Strecker 11).

Those who propound this view credit Matthew with the sermon frame, editing teachings taken from Mark’s gospel, the sayings source (Q^{Matt}), and other isolated special material (Strecker 14). The standard argument begins with the observation that Matthew cited many teachings which appear in very different settings in the other synoptic gospels. Luke, for example, whose abbreviated version of the Sermon appears in chapter 6, introduces the Lord’s prayer and the teachings on the eye single and asking/seeking/knocking in chapter 11; the teachings on judging, alms, and seeking first the kingdom of God in chapter 12; the teaching on the strait gate in chapter 13; on salt in chapter 14; on divorce, the tittle of the law, and God versus mammon in chapter 16. The argument continues that perhaps Luke placed these teachings in their correct chronological order and historical settings, while Matthew artificially redacted them into a hortative sermon.

Although Jesus did repeat some of his teachings on several different occasions during his ministry (see Matt 13:31; Luke 13:19; 17:6), the Book of Mormon provides a much more significant counterargument to the claim that Matthew 3–5 is a concocted collection of Jesus’ teachings. After delivering the Sermon in Bountiful, the risen Lord told his Nephite audience, “Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father” (3 Nephi 15:1). This indicates that the Sermon in Bountiful was an intentional repetition and that both the teachings and their frame were the Savior’s own and not the literary work of the evangelist Matthew.

Some have said that the main purpose of the sermon was Jesus’ announcement of the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the coming of a new and higher law. Because Latter-day Saints have access to unique truths about the relationship between the old and the new laws, some have emphasized this in their interpretations (Monson, preface). This emphasis can lead to over-generalization, however. The fulfillment of the old law

and its augmentation with the new is a prominent theme in Jesus' sermon, but to make this concept the centerpiece is to misinterpret the second chapter (Matt 6 and 3 Nephi 13) and to lose the meaning of much of the first and third of the three chapters as well.

Many who quote the Sermon on the Mount tacitly assume that its wide array of topics is available for whatever a person might wish to mine. They pull out this piece or that piece without regard to the original context. This approach presupposes by default that the sermon is a diverse series of topics of advice or counsel addressed to the general membership of the Church. Such a view is hazardous. Ignoring context may lead one to misconstrue or even wrest the intent of the Savior's words.

Another approach is elaborated in a recent book which suggests that the sermon is "a temple text" or "a sacred temple experience" (Welch 14). This new interpretation requires the reader to draw "possible inferences" from background information, since proof of the theory is obscure or nonexistent in the scriptures. Latter-day Saints love the ceremonies of the temple and are fascinated with the unfathomable implications of temple ordinances, but portraying the sermon as a veiled synopsis of the temple endowment seems to look beyond the mark.

If the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful are not a literary collection of Jesus' sayings, or the inaugural presentation of the new law, or a catalog of general advice, or a sacred temple experience, what might they be? Two sources of evidence motivate another approach to the Savior's words. I believe they indicate that Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–14 are best interpreted as *missionary training sermons*. The first source of evidence for this interpretation is the settings of the sermons in the Bible and the Book of Mormon; the second is the witness of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

A Missionary Training Approach

1. Both sermons have missionary training settings.

It is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful share similar settings and a common purpose. Three observations make this clear.

First, Jesus himself said his Sermon in Bountiful was the same as his earlier Sermon on the Mount (see 3 Nephi 15:1). The Lord's own linking of the second presentation to the first justifies direct comparisons of their words and purposes. It does not seem reasonable to suppose that he used so many of the same words on two different occasions for different purposes.

Second, we note that both sermons were delivered prior to the labor of missionaries. This is very clear in Luke's account. Sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, Luke 6:17–49 is undoubtedly Luke's version of the same sermon as Matthew 5–7, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie concludes in *The Mortal Messiah* (2:115–18). In Luke, the sermon is prefaced by the call of the Twelve (Luke 6:13–16). In the sermon itself, these disciples are trained in the presence of a great multitude. Jesus then trained them further by personally modeling what he had taught them to do. He returned to Capernaum, healed the centurion's servant, went to Nain and healed the widow's son, counseled the disciples sent from John the Baptist, chided the Pharisees who had rejected John's baptism, and ate and taught in the house of a Pharisee. Then, "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him" (8:1). He told the parables of the soils and of the candle on a candlestick; he taught that his mother and his brethren were those who hear and do the word of God; he calmed the storm on Galilee; he cast an evil spirit out of a man into a herd of swine in Gadara; he returned to Capernaum and healed Jairus' daughter and the woman with a twelve-year flow of blood. All these demonstrations had their root in the teachings of the sermon. Jesus was modeling missionary ministry.

After watching Jesus do these things, the Twelve were ready to serve on their own. Note the opening of Luke, chapter 9:

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. (vv 1–5)

Jesus chose the Twelve, taught them what he expected of them in their missionary labors, and showed them what they were to do. When they had been trained, he gave them power and dispatched them on missionary journeys of their own. The two phases of this training were (1) the sermon and (2) their observation of his example. Scripture records that the Twelve enjoyed outstanding success and returned to give their report (Luke 9:6, 10).

Similarly, the Sermon in Bountiful serves as a prelude to missionary work by those whom the Savior trained there. After the first day of Jesus' teaching in Bountiful, the multitude immediately responded to his command to testify of him. Initially, they gathered all their acquaintances from round about to hear the Savior's words:

And it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had ministered unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude. Yea, and even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and insomuch did they send forth unto the people that there were many, yea, an exceedingly great number, did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude. (3 Nephi 19:2–3)

The multitude of righteous Nephites and Lamanites recognized the importance of the Savior's command to come unto him. They made no delay in spreading the word of his visit. When

they had gathered as many as they could, Jesus' Nephite Twelve organized the larger multitude into teaching groups (3 Nephi 19:5) and proceeded to share with them all the Savior's words of the previous day (v 8). The disciples taught as Jesus had taught. Receiving the words with joy and desiring to receive the Holy Ghost, the people went down to the water and were baptized, after which they received the promised, sublime gift of the Holy Ghost and were "encircled about as if it were by fire" (vv 9–14).

But this first night's effort was only the beginning of the disciples' missionary response to the Sermon in Bountiful. Chapter 26 of 3 Nephi reports that after the Savior ascended for the last time from his personal ministry among them, the disciples launched an intensive missionary thrust:

And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost. And many of them saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written. And they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another. And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them. And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. (vv 17–21)

The labors of these missionaries culminated in the conversion of all the people in the land and the establishment of a church which enjoyed nearly two hundred years of peace (4 Nephi 1:1–3). It is clear that the two presentations of Jesus' sermon, the first in Galilee and the second in Bountiful, preceded great outpourings of missionary labor which met with powerful success.

Third, the audiences of both sermons consisted of disciples who were to serve as missionaries, and who were selected for their attendance at this missionary training. In Matthew's account, Jesus' audience consisted of his Twelve, additional disciples and a curious multitude. Jesus was not teaching the multitude, however. In fact, Matthew specifically states that he

left the multitude before beginning the training: “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them” (Matt 5:1–2).

Luke’s record shows that many of the multitude followed Jesus and heard his words. Luke distinguishes between the disciples, to whom the sermon was directed (6:20), and the multitudes, who came to hear him and to be healed (vv 17–19). He explains that Jesus taught the disciples “in the audience of the people” (7:1). However, the missionary call was extended only to the disciples.

In the Sermon in Bountiful, Jesus called his Nephite Twelve to missionary labors: “Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 11:41). Thereafter, he exhorted the multitude, “about two thousand and five hundred souls” (17:25), to heed the words of the Twelve and to be baptized by them.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. (12:1)

But Jesus didn’t stop there. He then extended a missionary call to *the entire multitude*, promising great blessings to those to whom they testified, who would receive baptism and the Holy Ghost. Addressing the multitude, he said:

And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall

be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 12:2)

In both the Bible and the Book of Mormon contexts, the sermons were directed to a group of people especially selected by Jesus Christ to be his missionary witnesses.

To summarize point one, Jesus overtly linked the two presentations of his sermon. They share a common purpose. Both preceded heaven-blessed missionary labors, and both were given to groups the Savior had selected for missionary service.

2. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible restores the missionary training purpose to the biblical account and supports that interpretation of the Sermon in Bountiful.

One of the great contributions of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) is its restoration of the reason—the “why”—for certain passages of scripture. This is certainly the case for the Sermon on the Mount. Since the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Bountiful are much the same in wording and purpose, we cannot ignore the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible in our search for the meaning of 3 Nephi 12–14 in the Book of Mormon.

For each of the three chapters of the Sermon, the JST independently specifies and illuminates its missionary training purpose. In JST Matthew, Jesus began by promising the blessings of the Holy Ghost and the remission of sins to those who would believe the testimony of the disciples and accept baptism (5:3–4). In chapter 6, he commissioned the disciples, saying, “Go ye into the world,” and “ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people” (vv 25–26). In chapter 7, he taught them the very words they were to say to their hearers: “Now these are the words which Jesus taught his disciples that they should say unto the people” (v 1; see also vv 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16). These precious restorations are found only in the JST. They are not in the King James Version. They supply the much sought “why” of the Sermon on the Mount.

To summarize point two, Jesus was training missionaries in the Sermon on the Mount. The JST makes this plain. This is the thread that ties together the Savior's biblical sermon. Latter-day Saints have access to this thread; the rest of the world does not. We must not ignore or downplay what has been vouchsafed to our dispensation by revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The JST restorations suggest that the Sermon in Bountiful was also a missionary training sermon. The same thread of unity can enlighten our understanding of the book of Mormon context for the Savior's teachings.

Interpreting the Sermon in Bountiful According to its Missionary Training Purpose

I will now discuss the significance of the missionary training frame for the interpretation of the Sermon in Bountiful in 3 Nephi 12–14. For the purposes of this discussion, I have divided the sermon into seven sections as follows: (1) the Beatitudes (12:1–12); (2) the teachings on salt and light (vv 13–16); (3) the fulfillment of the law of Moses (vv 17–18); (4) the new commandments and their relationship to the old law and the new law (vv 19–48); (5) the warnings on hypocritical behavior (13:1–24); (6) the requirements of full and part-time ministers (vv 25–34); and (7) the admonitions to the multitude on doing his will in their missionary ministries (chapter 14). As will be seen, each part of the sermon finds its place in the unified whole. Each is relevant and intended. No part is superfluous—none extraneous to the central purpose. Armed with the Savior's divine training, the Nephite and Lamanite witnesses were well prepared for their call to serve.

1. The Book of Mormon “beatitudes” (3 Nephi 12:1–12) are descriptions of the effect of the gospel on people the missionaries would encounter in their labors.

The “blessed” statements, or “beatitudes,” which open the sermon are not so sterile of context in 3 Nephi as they are in

Matthew in the King James Version. In Bountiful, Jesus explicitly stated his purpose for this list of benedictions. This purpose is found in the Beatitudes which precede the familiar eight of Matthew chapter 5 in the King James Version. Before speaking of the poor in spirit, the risen Lord had already pronounced blessed those of the multitude who would give heed to the Twelve and who would believe in him and be baptized. Thereafter, he pronounced blessed those who would respond to the preaching of the multitude by humbling themselves and being baptized (3 Nephi 12:2). From the beginning of the Sermon in Bountiful, therefore, blessedness resulted from *response* to the preaching of the gospel.

Elaborating on the forthcoming missionary experience of these witnesses, the Savior then listed eight characteristics they would encounter in their investigators. Some, he said, would be poor in spirit. That means exactly what it says: *poor* in spirit, *lacking* in spirit. All too often, the phrase is equated with humility. Such distortion is born of the misinterpretation that the Beatitudes define qualities we should *seek* in order to obtain blessedness. Blessedness comes from responding to the gospel and being baptized, not from the initial characteristics of the hearer. Jesus taught, "Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (3 Nephi 12:3; emphasis added). No one who is poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. The blessed ones who inherit that kingdom are those who *come unto Christ* through the waters of baptism when his gospel is preached to them.

Similarly, the Beatitudes do not teach us to seek mourning or meekness, or to hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to be blessed. Only by actually coming unto Christ do such people achieve blessedness. Being merciful, pure in heart, or a peacemaker seems advisable, but it would be inaccurate to say that Jesus taught us in the sermon to *seek* these traits, and he certainly didn't intend that we *seek* to be persecuted for his name's sake! The reward of the persecuted, be they investiga-

tors or missionaries, comes in heaven and only if they do what is necessary to get there (3 Nephi 12:10–12).

2. “I give unto you to be the salt” or “the light” (3 Nephi 12:13–16) was a charge to the missionaries for the work of their ministry.

As Jesus’ missionary witnesses, the Twelve and the multitude were to be as salt to the earth and light to the people. In Galilee, Jesus taught that Moses and the prophets had been as salt and likened their writings to salt which is good (see JST Luke 14:35–38). In Bountiful, the salt of scriptural witnesses, which had previously brought responsive Nephites and Lamanites to Christ, was now to be supplemented with newly trained witnesses. They must let their light shine “before this people” (3 Nephi 12:16). Jesus again commanded the Nephite and Lamanite multitude to hold up their light so that it could shine “unto the world.” “Behold, I am the light which ye shall hold up,” he said, “that which ye have seen me do” (18:24).

3. The fulfilled law would have to be carefully taught to Nephite and Lamanite investigators (3 Nephi 12:17–18), including those who may have recalled the heresy of 3 Nephi 1:24.

Shortly after the appearance in the Western Hemisphere of the predicted sign of Jesus’ birth in the land of Jerusalem, some began to preach that “it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses” (3 Nephi 1:24). This heresy showed a partial but erroneous understanding of the scriptures. Its proponents understood that the law of Moses would be fulfilled in Christ, but they misunderstood the timing and nature of that fulfillment. In his sermon, Jesus gave an unmistakable timing signal to his missionary witnesses: “For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled” (12:18). The law had remained intact until the time of Christ’s resurrection. Now it was fulfilled.

4. The new “commandments” and their relationship to the old law and the new law, if correctly taught by missionaries, would establish the fact of the completed Atonement for Nephites and Lamanites (3 Nephi 12:19–48), many of whom had been aware of its significance for generations.

The relationship between the performances and ordinances and the commandments of the law of Moses and the way to look to Christ for a remission of sins was not new to righteous Nephites. Their scriptures contained Nephi’s enlightening explanation:

And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away. (2 Nephi 25:24–27)

In 3 Nephi 12:19–20, Jesus spoke of the law and the commandments which he had given to the people. The law, mentioned at the end of verse 19, had been given by him long before and was now fulfilled. The commandments, however, were the new commandments he had just given: to believe in Christ and repent of sin, to come unto him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and (as seen in verse 1 of the same chapter) to be baptized in order to receive the visitation of the Holy Ghost. He continued, “Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, *which I have commanded you at this time*, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (v 20).

Jesus was reemphasizing that through repentance the people could take advantage of his accomplished atonement and go on to perfection (JST Heb 6:1–3). Nevertheless, he knew that the transition to a new system of law would not be easy. In fact, the first question asked him when he finished his missionary training involved a lack of understanding of the change to a new law (see 3 Nephi 15:2).

Jesus knew the importance of training his missionary witnesses and taught the spirit of the new law with illustrative examples. When viewed as six illustrations of a single principle rather than as six new laws, Jesus' sayings in 3 Nephi 12:21–45 make much more sense. In fact, three of the illustrations commend and expand the existing Mosaic law rather than replace it. Jesus gave the guiding principle at the end in verses 46–47: “Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new.” The focus of the new law is the perfection of the heart. This is sufficiently demonstrated so that the Savior's missionaries would have ample means to explain the new orientation to their hearers.

5. Hypocrisy had stood between those who had the old law and their coming unto perfection. Missionaries were given specific training for setting a proper example in true versus hypocritical giving, prayer, fasting, and use of wealth (3 Nephi 13:1–24).

In Jesus' new commandments, inward worship was more important than outward form. He therefore taught his missionary witnesses how to set the example in their religious acts. In his teaching on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, he specifically mentioned that they were to avoid hypocritical patterns. Acting in religious ways to be “seen of men” (3 Nephi 13:1, 5, 16) was contrary to the inner perfection he adjured. Moreover, the Savior warned the missionary multitude against the lure of worldly wealth: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (3 Nephi 13:24).

6. The Savior clearly differentiated between requirements for full-time and part-time missionaries (3 Nephi 13:25–34).

An important transition statement in 3 Nephi 13:25 sets off the next section of Jesus' sermon in Bountiful from the previous sections. From 3 Nephi 12:1, we know that all the sermon to this point had been addressed to the multitude. Now, in 3 Nephi 13:25, he switches his focus to the Twelve. If we, as readers, fail to notice this change, we might incorrectly apply to ourselves the Savior's directives to take no thought about food or drink or clothing. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (v 33), though often quoted out of context to apply to everyone, is actually counsel directed only to those involved in full-time ministry. Jesus promised his Twelve that their needs would be met if they would build his kingdom as their first priority. For the rest of us, whose ministry is only part-time, we must indeed take thought for our physical upkeep and not expect that God or others will take care of all our needs.

7. Stern admonitions were given to the multitude that they must do more than just come unto Christ; they must do his will in their missionary ministries (3 Nephi 14).

Judging others equitably, maintaining high personal standards, setting a proper example, selecting carefully those with whom they should share sacred things, learning to righteously seek the gifts of God, living the Golden Rule, discerning false prophets—these were the final matters of training Jesus offered to his missionaries for their ministry. As with earlier topics discussed by the Savior, these are only properly understood when seen in a missionary context. Consider, for example, 3 Nephi 14:6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." The Savior is commanding that his missionaries withhold from unworthy hearers the holy and sacred things. He has given a similar command in our dispensation. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord

instructed the Church: “For it is not meet that the things which belong to the children of the kingdom should be given to them that are not worthy, or to dogs, or the pearls to be cast before swine” (D&C 41:6). Like the missionary witnesses in Bountiful, the early Saints were to refrain from sharing certain sacred things with those who were unworthy and would misuse them.

The Savior ended his sermon to the Nephite and Lamanite multitude just as he had ended his initial earlier commission to the Twelve (3 Nephi 11:39–41)—with the parable of the wise and foolish builders. To receive the call to serve and then not to do the will of the Father would be to emulate the false prophets, to whom the Lord would say, “I never knew you” (14:23). To serve righteously would be to build upon the rock and thereby survive the storm and be raised up at the last day (vv 24–25; 15:1).

After completing the Sermon in Bountiful, the Savior began a very different kind of teaching. The fourteen subsequent Book of Mormon chapters (3 Nephi 15–28) contain answers to questions, priesthood leadership training, patterns for ordinances and prayer, healing of the sick and blessing of children, scriptural exposition and prophecy, and a broad range of additional instruction not found in Matthew or Luke. The three chapters in 3 Nephi 12–14 and their New Testament counterparts therefore stand apart in their missionary training purpose from the remainder of Jesus’ personal ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites.

Conclusion

Missionary work has always been a primary and essential aspect of gospel dispensations, and the dispensation opened by the Savior among the Book of Mormon peoples in the first century AD is no exception. Spreading the invitation to come unto Christ to receive the ordinances and blessings of the gospel was vital to the Church Jesus organized among the Nephites and Lamanites. Just as he had previously done in Galilee, Jesus

selected, commissioned, and trained twelve to be his leading ministers in missionary service.

The Sermon in Bountiful, like the Sermon on the Mount, seems intended to train these ministers. Its diversity of topics are bound together by a missionary training thread. Commentators and students of the scriptures who fail to recognize this framework have misinterpreted the Beatitudes, misapplied Jesus' teachings about salt and light, missed the intent of the "take no thought" command, the Golden Rule, the injunction against casting pearls before swine, and many other such passages. Recognizing the missionary training context presents the teachings of the Savior in a different, and I think, proper light.

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