

Come Follow Me Class Insights 18 D&C Sec. 45 - Class Transcription

I'm Taylor, and I'm Tyler. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants section 45. This - this is a beautiful section filled with incredible prophecies, promises, and revelation for us.

To help us make sense of this section, we're not going to spend a lot of time on outside historical events taking place other than two things: number one, Joseph – as the Church has started to gather to Kirtland and as success starts to build, what always happens every time you start growing and building and things are good? There's opposition. And there's been intense opposition that's arisen against the work and people publishing all kinds of things about what you should or shouldn't believe regarding this movement.

The second thing is Joseph has been translating the Bible and he's still working his way through the book of Genesis, but there are some things happening in the world in 1831, across the world that these early members of the Church are getting ear of what's happening and they're starting to wonder, wait? Is this the end? Is this the end times? And there's a ton of interest in Matthew, chapter 24 because that's the chapter in the New Testament, that, we call it the Olivet Discourse where Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives, explaining to his apostles about what the destruction will look like and the events that we call the signs of the times, and there's a lot of interest in that, so that's going to come into play here in section 45.

So to begin, we just want to start with a question. What is truth? How do you know if something's really true, because we live in a world that is making millions of truth claims. So pick it up for us, Taylor, in verse 1. How does the Lord set the stage for us to be able to answer this question and move forward?

He uses this word hearken which, incidentally, is the same word that begins the beginning of the Doctrine and Covenants. It's about hearing God, and how many times do we have this word listen or hearken show up just in this section? It's multiple times. And then I'll also point out that when the Doctrine and Covenants was first published - before it became the Book of Commandments, they published it in newspaper form – and section 20, this section is one of the first sections published, and God wants people to hear, hear him, follow him.

Yeah, it's interesting, if you think about where you tune your ear, where you tune in. Think about the way our bodies are created. You generally walk and move the direction you're facing, the direction you're looking, the way you're focusing, and I love the fact that here he gives you some rationale, some reasons why we should look up rather than just outward at the world's experts.

Look at verse 1. In fact, this particular Come Follow Me Insights episode we would invite you and encourage you to open your scriptures and follow along, because we're going to be doing a lot of study as we go through many of these verses together. Look at verse 1: "hearken, O ye people of my church, to whom the kingdom has been given." Now notice he says, I've given you the kingdom. The kingdom of God is on the earth. It's called the Church. You're part of a kingdom,

and we all know who the king is. It's not Joseph, and it's not your bishop, and it's not your stake president, and it's not our Prophet today. The king is Jesus, and he's given us his kingdom; we're part of that kingdom. Again, "...hearken ye . . . give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth, who made the heavens and all the hosts thereof, and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being." Brothers and sisters, here he is saying, I created the very earth on which you are standing. I've inspired all the inventions and all of the major developments that have occurred among humanity. Listen to me, trust me, look to me, tune your ear to me.

I like what he does in verse 2. In case you happened to be asleep in verse 1, he says: "And again I say, hearken unto my voice." He just -- whenever anything is repeated, that means it's something important that needs to be listened to. You underline, you bold; repetition indicates importance.

It's fascinating to me to study history and to study the scriptures, especially the ancient scriptures like the Old and the New Testament and even the Book of Mormon in that context of what he now says next, verse 2. He says: "Hearken to my voice, lest death shall overtake you; in an hour when ye think not the summer shall be past, the harvest ended, and your souls not saved."

Brothers and sisters, there are – there are so many causes that you can take up – that you can devote your whole life, your time, your energy, your talent, your attention to, and you can put your whole soul into those efforts, and some of them are better than others, but at the end of the day, most of these earthly movements and earthly causes and earthly efforts don't have the power to save us. They don't have the power to bring us peace when we need it the most. They can be really, really worthy causes, but at the end of the day, if we will keep a laser focus on things that matter most and put them in their proper place, it's President Benson who said, if you put God first, put God at the center of your life, then he will help you order those other – other responsibilities and causes and efforts that you have and put them into their proper place, and he said some of those things will fall out of your life altogether.¹ They're just not worth your time.

So here's this plea in verse 2 to listen to him. Hearken to me lest you get to the end of a long life pursuing what you were really, really filled with excitement and you thought it was the end-all, be-all, only to get to the end to realize, oh, this isn't – this isn't what the purpose of my life really was supposed to be.

I remember years ago I was a pizza delivery guy; maybe I was just interested in the free pizza I could get at the end of my shift, and I remember one day looking at the wall; there was a notice from the company saying, you know, if you work this many hours, we'll give you a free car. And you know, here I'm driving a pretty old, beat up car, and I thought, man, that would be nice to get a free car. Well, I had benefitted from the public school system, so I knew a little bit about how to do math, and I actually ran the numbers and I realized I would have had to work for about ten full years, full time, with that company to get a car. And I started thinking about that and I'm, like, why

¹ Benson, Ezra Taft. "The Great Commandment." *Love the Lord*, 20 July 2021, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1988/04/the-great-commandment-love-the-lord?lang=eng.

would I want to give ten years of my life to this particular company just to get a car, which itself would probably be useless within five or ten years after I get it, and it relates to this point that I could have spent ten years of my life working for somebody else so they can give me a car, or I could choose other things that mattered more. Now, there's nothing wrong with working for ten years or getting a car or any other possible, righteous desire, but those things usually might fall on the outside, and the point here, is when we put what matters first, everything else falls into place. We shouldn't give our lives away for things in the long run that really don't matter very much.

You know, to sum this up as we now transition into verse 3 and beyond, it's – it's like this. You have an altar, symbolically. And we come and we make sacrifices. We place things on the altar. When you sacrifice something, the thought is, okay, I'm going to get something in return. Something's going to be given to me for having made that sacrifice. Brothers and sisters, the world is offering you lots of altars on which to make sacrifices, on which to devote your life, your energy, and your effort, but they can't always guarantee what you get in return. It's only the Lord Jesus Christ who can absolute – with absolute certainty guarantee an amazing return on our mortal sacrifice investment that we make. And, by the way, sometimes, Elder Maxwell was the one who said, sometimes we make offerings to the Lord and then we hang around waiting for a receipt.² Can I just say, what an amazing thing that Christ gives us his gospel and he's restored his Church and he allows us to make sacrifices on that altar, and we don't need to stand around waiting for a receipt. He is a giver of all of the very best gifts and those gifts have eternal and infinite implications for us, not just in this life but into the eternities.

And so I think this is an important thing for us to point out as we launch into this section is that sometimes, as we study Church history and as we go through the Doctrine and Covenants, let's just be honest, it's easy to focus on the struggles, the trials, the opposition, the storms, the awfulness, and the mobs, and the difficulties that these people are facing, and they are. We're not taking anything away from that; those things are absolutely in play here, but perhaps, perhaps we could focus a little bit more, or spend a little bit more time talking about, yes, bad things are happening to these people, but wow! God is being good. And sometimes we overlook the goodness of God in our own daily lives because we're focused so much on the opposition and the troubles and the setbacks and the failures and the sins and the temptations and the things that are – that are pulling us down. If we spend too much time focusing on those, instead of turning upward and focusing on him, life can get pretty discouraging pretty quickly.

Listen again to what God says. He says in verse 3 the same theme of hearkening: "Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him." The next couple of verses, imagine a courtroom and the advocate is the one who speaks on your behalf. It actually comes from the word of – the word vocal, and what's interesting is that God already has asked us multiple times in the first several verses to hear him, to listen, to hearken, and it's his voice. He is

² Maxwell, Neal A. "Apply the Atoning Blood of Christ." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 20 July 2021, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1997/10/apply-the-atoning-blood-of-christ?lang=eng.

the one vocating, vocally, he's at the pleading bar of God on our behalf. So this courtroom is very interesting. We're put in front of the judgment bar of God, and obviously we've all sinned, and Satan wants to accuse us that we do not deserve to be in the presence of God, and who steps in? Who becomes the mediator or who is the mediator who advocates in our behalf, telling the Father, behold the evidence of my body? This person who has had faith in me deserves to be in thy kingdom; I have paid the price. That is a very powerful concept. What are some other things going on here?

Yes, don't you love the fact that throughout scriptures, Jesus will use a variety of fields of study or expertise to try to teach and connect with people, so you'll get examples that are more pastoral, using shepherding and sheep herding and the flocks analogies. You'll get other places where he'll use more medical terms, and physical body being hurt and needing to be healed and he's the physician, the healer. You'll get others where he uses legal terms, lots of those, I'll come back to those in a minute. You get farm analogies. You get financial analogies, banking and interest and investment. You get all of these different areas, all trying to teach you that you can't do it without him.

You'll notice in the legal realm that Taylor's introduced us to here with advocate, you've got other places in scriptures where he uses words like mediator, intercessor, a refuge, a defense, a counselor, all of these could be tied back into a legal theme, and ultimately, he tells us in other places that he is also going to be a judge, but in this particular case, he's representing us, as Taylor said.

So you have – you have Heavenly Father filling this role in this particular court scene, and then you have a defense attorney which is this advocate; he's advocating vocally our cause, and then you can plug your own name in right here, me. So he's standing betwixt you and justice, to use Abinadi's phrase from the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 15:9). He's going between us, and he's representing us, and he's pleading our cause, and there's a lot of evidence, and he becomes our chief witness as well. Jesus – it's interesting, in a courtroom analogy, throughout scriptures when you cobble together all the different times when Jesus uses courtroom words, at one time or another, Jesus is in every role in the courtroom except for one with regards to people who are tried. He's never the accuser. He's never the one who's trying to destroy you if you have faith in him. Now there are other places where he absolutely is pouring out judgment, so he'll even fill that role at times.

But in this case, isn't it fascinating that Jesus is witnessing for you in front of the Father, hmm, and then in your baptismal covenant, he says, will you stand as a witness of God at all times, in all things and in all places that you may be in, even unto death? He invites you and me to take the witness stand for God when we're facing the world, and his – the return on that investment, so to speak, on that sacrifice, if it is a sacrifice, is, I will then take the witness stand for you when it really matters. When the outcome of that court's decision has eternal implications, I will be on the witness stand for you, because you were on the witness stand for me and for God at that time.

Now look at verse 4. Here is the evidence that Taylor had talked about before as the defense attorney, so to speak, saying, "Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified." Did any of you notice what's missing in verse 4? Jesus didn't say a word about how good I am or about what you've done to deserve eternal glory. He didn't say, look how – look at what Tyler promised to do. Look at what he accomplished. Look at the mission he served; look at the children he tried to teach and love and do the best he could as a father. He didn't mention any of that.

I'll never forget a faculty in-service. It was the last lecture after retirement of an incredible teacher in my department of ancient scripture named Stephen Robinson. He retired, came back and gave his last lecture to the faculty, and in this he worked us through a little exercise that I'll never forget. He said, I want you to turn to your topical guide in the back of the Bible and look up the word earn. And he said, let's just read a few of the verses that teach us what we need to do in order to earn heaven. So I dutifully turned in my topical guide and, lo and behold, I couldn't find the word earn. I could find earnest but earn was not there, and then Brother Robinson said, oh, oh, that's my bad. Earn is not a scriptural term. Let's look up the word deserve. What do I need to do to deserve heaven? So dutifully I turned and tried to find the word deserve, the whole time Stephen Robinson's standing up front, kind of smiling at us, and as you guessed, we couldn't find the word deserve. And he said, isn't it interesting that something so important as what I need to do to earn or deserve heaven, they forgot to include in the topical guide.³ And then his conclusion, he said, look up the word merit, because that's the scriptural term. And, by the way, this is not a fool's errand. You can actually find this one. And if you want an incredible experience, we would encourage you and invite you to look closely at the topical guide entries for merit. What do I need to do in order to merit eternal life? Go to your topical guide and look up the scriptures, just the little excerpts of the scriptures that have the word merit and see what you have to do in order to merit heaven.

So notice, if you did that, there was a common theme in all of the scriptures mentioned there. It had very, very little, if anything at all, to do with what I do. To merit heaven means that I simply trust and have faith in and covenantally connect with the person who gives me salvation. That's it. It's his merits, it's his mercy, it's his grace alone by which I can be saved, and we see that portrayed here. Brothers and sisters, this is amazing. Verse 3, 4, and 5 is phenomenal because this isn't some prophet or some teacher or just a random person giving us their opinion. This is Jesus himself telling you what he's doing right now for us. He's pleading our cause. He's just not – he's not a new lawyer just graduated from college and passed the bar exam barely and now this is his first case. He's really, really good at anything he undertakes to do, and right now he's being your advocate and he's really good at it, and it all has to do with him offering the evidence of his infinite

³ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The. *A Topical Guide to the Scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. Deseret Book Co., 1977.

atonement in our past. That's what we use in order to merit heaven. It's his incredible works and his grace.

Look at verse 5: "Wherefore, Father," the wherefore is a cause and effect trigger. The cause is everything that came in verse 4. What is the effect? What is the outcome of all of that suffering, the bloodshed and the death of him who did no wrong? Look at verse 5. The effect is: "Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life."

Brothers and sisters, we've said it before, we're going to say it again. Our job, your job, is not to be perfect in such a way that we then earn heaven or deserve heaven, where we come up to the pearly gates and say, here's all of the evidence that I have for why I belong in heaven, so let me in, I've earned it; I deserve it. I worked, I sacrificed, I did all of this for you, therefore, you have to let me in. It doesn't work that way. If you think that the pearly gates are going to be legalistic in that sort of a way where I can set out all the evidence that tells how I deserve heaven, well, then other evidence could be laid on that table as well, evidence where it would be very clear that I don't deserve or that I didn't earn heaven. Thank the Savior that I don't have to work my way into heaven.

I have to have faith in Christ. I have to repent of my sins, I have to trust him, I have to come to him, I have to be willing to enter into that covenant connection with him and then keep reestablishing that covenant, making it fresh, making it new, making it more meaningful and purposeful as I work my way through this – this spiritually maturing and growing lifetime as I seek truth, as I seek to tune my ear and my eye and my feet and my path towards Jesus. It's my job to trust him and to love him and come unto him, and it's his job to save me. It's not my job to save myself. I am not my Savior, and no person on this planet, no horizontal relationship is your Savior. No cause on this earth that's worldly can save you. Only Jesus can save you.

Now does it make more sense, perhaps, why President Nelson has repeatedly told us there is nothing happening on this earth that is more important than the gathering of Israel? ⁴ What is the gathering of Israel? It's bringing people into this covenant, into this connection with the Lord their Redeemer so they can begin this long, covenant path journey, walking side by side with the God who created this earth and the heavens, who's giving them life and who promises to save them and plead their cause if they'll just continue to do their best to have faith in him and trust him.

What I love about this is this whole introduction is done is all about getting us to trust God. I mean this section is fabulous. There's so many amazing things here. Some of you might find there is a cause of fear or concern because there's a discussion of the last days and of the Second Coming, and God does not tell us these things to make us freak out or be afraid or worry or bite our nails. It's, how did he begin this? He's like, just trust me, I've got this, just listen to me – again verse 6, hearken. How many times does he use the word listening, now hearken verse 1, hearken verse 2,

⁴ Larcabal, Charlotte. "A Call to Enlist and Gather Israel." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, July 2021, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2019/03/president-and-sister-nelsons-devotional-for-youth/a-call-to-enlist-and-gather-israel?lang=eng.

hearken verse 6, listen back in verse 3, he is the advocate, he's got this. Trust God. Sure, he might lay out some general ideas of how the world will end, but he doesn't reveal that so we worry or we spend all of our time working on calculations. He simply wants us to know he's in charge. He knows what's going on, and I love that he spends the time making sure that we feel completely grounded, that here we are being protected by his defense so that when we are before the judge, we can be at peace through his blood and merits.

Now I think we probably ought to also point out that sometimes when we use this courtroom analogy, if we're not careful, sometimes we'll try to take the analogy too far, and in this case, or in this context, if we're not careful, we'll make it feel as if God or Heavenly Father or our heavenly parents are angry with us, like, as if they're just waiting to smite us down, strike us down for our imperfection, and so Jesus is now having to plead our case to calm him down so that we can have place in heaven. If we're not careful, that's how it can sometimes come out.

The reality is, justice cannot be robbed, or the Book of Mormon teaches us, God would cease to be God (Alma 42). So eternal justice has to be upheld, which says that when there is a breakage of law, there is a punishment that has to be meted out. There's a price that has to be paid. I love verse 4 again because it's the price tag. You could label verse 4, the price that was paid to pay off justice for your soul and mine. This is the price tag hanging off of us that Jesus had to pay in order to redeem us and to make it so that mercy could be fully extended to us while justice is fully paid off. Both justice and mercy find their fulfillment in Christ alone. There's no other way to find the balance point between justice and mercy.

And so the idea is, we don't want you to picture coming into the presence of your heavenly parents and having them frowning at you, waiting to be convinced that there's something worth saving here. Keep in mind, your heavenly parents gave you life, and they prepared everything for you to be able to grow and progress in the premortal realm as their spirit children, to the point where you could grow no further technically until you came down to this earth, and that's where we pick up this absolute need for the Savior Jesus Christ to come and to be our advocate, our intercessor, our mediator, our counselor. And back to the courtroom analogy one more time, isn't it fascinating? In the New Testament in the book of Revelation, one of the titles given to Satan, Lucifer, is the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of our brethren, the ultimate finger pointer, the one who's trying to get everybody in trouble, the one who's saying, he did this wrong, she's – she fell short here (Rev. 12). That's the devil's role, and, by the way, have you noticed in the New Testament how multiple times in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, people will come to Jesus and they'll accuse somebody else. They'll point a finger of accusation and tell Jesus what somebody's doing wrong, and never once that I can find, unless I'm misreading the accounts, never once do I see Jesus saying huh, thank you for letting me know. Good job. And then turning and rebuking the person that was being accused. I can't find that once. Every time anyone accuses in the New Testament, Jesus turns to the accuser and helps them understand some principle of the gospel or points them back to the Old Testament or to the Law of Moses or to something to get them focusing

on what they can do to fix the situation, rather than worrying about what they want Jesus to do to other people to fix the situation.

So as we move forward into the rest of this section, I think that's an important principle to remember, that Satan would have us point fingers at each other and horizontally to say, they're the problem, that group's the problem, this situation's the problem and if only that weren't like that, then I could be happier. He wants you putting all of the change and all of the need for adjustment out there. I love the fact that Jesus always brings that conversation back to me and him, where those moments come when he -- when he will calm you down, and in my context he'll say, oh, Tyler, don't worry about her, or them, or him. Let's work on you and me. Let's build this relationship stronger. Let me show you some things you can do better. And I've found that that gives me hope to be able to improve.

Okay, now look at verse 6 again. We've already covered part of it, but, "Hearken, O ye people of my church, and ye elders listen together, and hear my voice while it is called today, and harden not your hearts." You've heard it multiple times, hearken, hearken, hearken, now hear, listen, harden not your hearts. We've talked about this before, but I think it's interesting that in English, the first four letters of the word heart form the word hear and the middle letters are ear. He wants you to open your hearts, soften your heart, so that you can hear. And who is it that we listen to? It is He to whom we listen and it is somewhat of an art form. We've covered this before in the past, but in a world that is filled with voices, and they're all clamoring for your attention, they're all pleading for you to pay your money and your devotion and use your energy and effort and time in building up all of these causes. And some are worthy causes and they need your time and attention, but not your core time and attention like what we're talking about in a scripture context. So he's pleading with us.

Now look at verse 7: "For verily I say unto you that I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the light and the life of the world -- a light that shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

I want to add a second witness to this conversation about light and all these - this strong reasoning. It's interesting that light, he talks about how it cannot be comprehended. Comprehended actually means to be contained or controlled, and light cannot be controlled by darkness. It just can't. Darkness actually has no power, but light does. And so as we look about at the qualities of Jesus, he's the one who has power, and he wants to empower us. The darkness cannot control us, it cannot contain us, and if we have a light of Jesus Christ, we then have the power, as it says earlier, in order to obtain eternal life. So again, all these things that Jesus is saying early here in this section is trying to convince the hearers, the people in 1831, all the early saints and all of us today, that we can fully trust him and we must now do. It's not just enough to hear, we have to now act on what we've heard to be true.

Look at verse 8: "I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not; but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles, and to become the sons of God; and even unto

them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life." Again, the ability to get eternal life is given by Christ. He's the one who gives that power. We don't earn it, we don't deserve it, we don't go and get it ourselves. It's given to us.

And then look at verse 9: "Even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me." And his invitation, verse 10, begins with a wherefore, so the cause is in verse 9, the effect is, the outcome of all of this that's been prepared by him is this invitation: "Come ye unto it, and with him that cometh I will reason as with men in days of old, and I will show unto you my strong reasoning."

Brothers and sisters, you're noticing that God always seems to begin with themes like hearing, hearkening, listening, and seeing, and seeking understanding light and truth, let it come in so you can see things clearly, not in the dark, but out in the open, you're seeking truth, things as they really are, as they were and as they are to come, so that you're not deceived. Now that you see clearly, now do it. Change. Trust me enough to actually, if you love me, keep my commandments. Follow the covenant path that I've given you.

So I love the action words. Again, from the beginning, it's hearken, hear, listen, see, and now he shifts in verse 10 to come. Come, follow me. The whole curriculum for the Church is called Come, Follow Me. It's not just come, listen to me, or come, see me, it's Come, Follow Me, because that's how you become like him, is by following him and doing the things which we've seen him do, with his help, and when we struggle, we turn to him and plead with him to forgive us as we repent in faith, knowing that he will. He'll keep working with us on that covenant path.

Now as we transition into the next phase of this section starting in verse 11, you'll notice that the Lord introduces Enoch and the city of Enoch in verse 12, where they had been separated from the earth and they've been reserved, they've been set apart. This city that they then call Zion that Enoch went to all this work to build Zion, but they're separate, so there's a whole bunch of bad stuff going on out in the world around them, but they're – they're safe, they're gathered.

And what's beautiful about the word – the meaning of the name Enoch, it means dedicated. Think about all the ways we use that word. We dedicate temples. We dedicate chapels. We might dedicate a grave or we dedicate our lives, and what I love about this is that Enoch was dedicated to building Zion. So it's interesting that here in the early church, the saints are learning about Enoch, they're learning about Zion, and they're learning about the dedication that is required for us to be able to make a Zion community.

Love that. So Enoch's efforts were to go into this – into this environment that wasn't great, and he invites people to leave the world and the stains and the soils and the struggles of the world, and come to Zion, come to the safe place in this covenant, and you'll notice how he describes it in verse 13. These people confessed they were strangers, or the footnote tells you sojourners and pilgrims on the earth. There comes this time where you look at all of the terrible things going on in the

world at large, and you feel like you're a stranger, like a sojourner, a pilgrim on the earth trusting - trusting in God. But, verse 14, they "obtained a promise that they should find it and see it in their flesh." That promise is, it's the whole message of the restoration of the gospel in the latter days. It's to build Zion in the whole world, and we gather to the safe place, which is the stakes of Zion. That's how God does his work today, is to gather us into the fold with the body of saints wherever you live and wherever you may move throughout your life.

Okay, so now we jump into verse 16. And in verse 16 through 59 you could somehow in your scriptures make a note or bracket these off, so some way to organize your page if you would like – you don't have to – but somehow show that this is Jesus now giving Joseph a repeat of Matthew chapter 24, which is going to be given again later when he does the translation of the New Testament, Joseph Smith Matthew. So you're going to get Matthew 24, Joseph Smith Matthew when he does the JST of Matthew 24, and D&C 45. This is one of the few places where you get a three-peat of a particular block of scripture, and this happens to be one of them.

So if you look closely, verse 16 through 24, let me bracket it out this way so that it makes a little more sense for you; 16 through 24 is going to give you the historical context of the destruction of Jerusalem, okay? So what happens is, Jesus in Matthew chapter 23, he has a pretty long chapter where he's teaching the people there that the scribes and the Pharisees are hypocrites, those who have been in conflict with him, and if you read Matthew 23, he just keeps going through this long list of things that they're teaching or doing that aren't correct.

And then he makes some interesting prophecies and he leaves the temple, comes to the top of the Mount of Olives, and you can picture this setting with him directly to the east of the temple with the Kidron Valley in between, the Garden of Gethsemane is going to be on the right at the bottom of the hill, and you can picture being with Jesus and his apostles looking across at this giant temple structure, this temple mount, and that's when he opens up section – or Matthew 24 which we're now getting in this section starting in verse 16, and he's describing the destruction that's going to come to the temple, and you'll notice you get prophecies such as verse 18: "Now ye behold this temple which is in Jerusalem, which ye call the house of God, and your enemies say that this house shall never fall." So the disciples' enemies in this context would have been the Sanhedrin and the leaders of the Jews, the chief priests of the people, they say this temple can never fall.

Keep in mind, Jewish tradition is it's been forty-six years in the construction process begun by Herod. It's taken ten thousand workers to do this job, a thousand priests, a thousand wagons; this is a gargantuan construction project with huge buildings and the leaders of the people, the chief priests, are saying, this temple can never fall. And Jesus is saying, no, it's going to fall, and verse 20: "This temple which ye now see shall be thrown down that there shall not be left one stone upon another. And it shall come to pass, that this generation of Jews shall not pass away until every desolation which I have told you concerning them shall come to pass."

Within a gen-, within thirty years what's going to happen is Vespasian and Titus are going to come to Jerusalem. The Roman army with three huge groups are going to come in and besiege the city

of Jerusalem, and starting in 68 it's going to start ramping up. In 69 AD, Vespasian is going to get called out of Jerusalem to go back to Rome to be the emperor, to become the new leader after Nero committed suicide in June of 68, so Vespasian – Vespasian leaves, and he puts his son Titus now in charge of finishing up that campaign against the Jews in Jerusalem, and it's going to culminate and finish in 70 AD. When the Romans finally take this huge temple mount structure, it's the last hold where the people of the Jews have gathered together, when they finally breach the temple and come in, they're going to literally lay that temple flat; they're going to destroy every building on that temple mount.

If you go to Jerusalem today, there's actually a place on the southwest corner of the temple mount where you can walk – you can walk down underneath what used to be Robinson's Arch, and you can see stones, huge stones, that are just in heaps on the ancient street there. They're still there. Two thousand years later you can see stones that were cast down off of the temple mount, and they're sitting there to this day, the prophecy having been fulfilled.

And what is really sobering about all this is one of the reasons why Jerusalem fell is because of the political infighting of the people. It turns out that the Jews were fighting with each other over power, and there was actually insurrection and murders and mayhem and violence, and in some cases, the Jews believed that more chaos would hasten the coming of the Messiah who had already come. Jesus never asks us to be violent or to cause insurrection. He asks us to look to him, to love him, and to love our neighbor. So there are many powerful lessons to learn from the prophecies we get in Matthew 24 of what was going to happen a generation or two after the time of Jesus, because the people would not learn to love their neighbors, but they instead chose to fight over political power and to have violence and insurrection to overthrow their own government because they wanted the Messiah to come.

Just as a little tangent, a little side note here, this particular chapter of the New Testament, Matthew 24, is one of the - one of the reasons why many biblical scholars today will claim that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had to have been written post 70 AD, because they say, man, all this detail and all of the descriptions of the destruction of Jerusalem under the siege of Vespasian and Titus, it's too specific. There's no way he could have gotten all of this right.

Brothers and sisters, one of the claims of the scholarship world today is that there is no such thing as revelation and prophecy. There is no way you can know what happens in the future, and so they'll make a lot of their conclusions based on that major premise, that Jesus couldn't have known all of this, so therefore, all of these scriptures in the New Testament had to have been written after it happened, and they said, yeah, Jesus said this was going to happen and this was going to happen and now they're telling it as they watched it happen.

But as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I think we have a beautiful foundation on which to proclaim to the world that prophecy and revelation and the spirit of the Lord's power with not just prophets, but in this case with Jesus himself, is this ability to know exactly what's going to happen in the future. Now why do I bring that up and why is that a big

deal? Because, brothers and sisters, we don't worship a God who's working his way through time discovering what's going to happen as things unfold. We worship a God who knows the end from the beginning, who knows everything that is knowable in eternity, and he has a perfect plan laid out for you and me to our marching our way through time discovering things as they unfold, but trusting in an infinite God who knows exactly what he's doing, and he's given us prophecies and revelations that are coming in the future.

Now watch the transition. Verse 24, so all of this was the destruction that was going to happen within a dispensation, or, sorry, within a generation. Verse 24: "This I have told you concerning Jerusalem; and when that day shall come, shall a remnant be scattered among all nations." So now you get this scattering of the Jews out of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and previous to that, clear back in 721, the ten tribes – 721 B.C., the ten tribes having been scattered, now we transition to our times.

Verse 26 or, sorry, 25: "But they shall be gathered again; but they shall remain until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And in that day shall be heard of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men's hearts shall fail them, and they shall say that Christ delayeth his coming until the end of the earth. And the love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound."

Brothers and sisters, you're seeing an interesting phenomenon in our world. You're seeing that all of these prophecies in Joseph Smith Matthew, in Matthew 24, and here in Doctrine and Covenants 45, he's telling you about wars and rumors of wars and the love of men waxing cold and iniquity abounding. It's --the best example I could give, I think, is Jesus's parable of the wheat and the tares, where you get these two plants that look very similar, and they're growing in the latter days, and they grow side by side together. He had planted the wheat with his servants in Matthew 13, and at night, the devil and his servants came and sowed tares. They threw out weed seed, and now it's all intermixed in the field, or the earth, growing side by side, and some of Jesus's apostles or disciples said, should we go and pull out all of the tares? And Jesus said, no, let them grow together until the harvest, because then it will be very clear.

As you watch all of these prophecies be fulfilled over and over and over again, don't be shocked that the longer you give plants to grow in the field, the more they look like what they were meant to grow up to become. The tares are going to look more and more and more like tares and the wheat is going to look more and more like wheat, the longer it has. So as we live in the dispensation of the fulness of times, it doesn't apply just to righteousness; it also applies to wickedness. There was never, and I think – I think this is very safe to say, there was never a better time across the entire world for a daughter or a son of God to be good than right now. We've never had so many temples, we've never had so many stakes and wards and saints across the world, we've never had a better infrastructure of the Church technology-wise, scripture-wise, broadcast-wise, publication-wise, than we have right now. And with a click of a mouse you can access untold volumes of incredibly uplifting and powerful and inspiring words to help you and resources to guide you on the covenant path. Never a better time to be alive than right now.

But much like Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities, the way he opens it, these were the best of times and these were the worst of times. I think the same could be said of evil. If you want to be bad, if you want to follow the devil, I don't think there was ever an easier time to do that than there is right now. In the olden days you had to go kind of searching for bad things to do. Today, they come right to you. They knock on your door. They show up in your inbox. They flash up on your screen. These things to pull you off of the covenant path, they are all around you. The wheat and the tares literally are growing side by side. So, why is that important to understand? Because as you see tare-like things increasing in the world, just know that God isn't playing catch up, he's not playing keep up. In fact, one of the first things we get of a dialogue between the Lord and the devil in the Garden of Eden is when the Lord tells Satan, "dust thou shalt eat all the days of thy life", in the Book of Moses (Moses 4:20; Genesis 3:14).

Brothers and sisters, I don't know exactly what God meant when he told Lucifer that. But in my own simplistic way, I can picture him saying, you're always going to be behind. It's a - from my perspective a simple way of saying, eat my dust. You're always going to be behind; you're always going to nipping at the heels. We don't need to fear these things that are described here. We don't need to be afraid of Satan and his power and his kingdoms and the upheavals in the world today. We just need to have faith in God. We need to trust Christ. We need to follow him.

So, look at verse 28: "When the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel." So yes, there is a lot of darkness on the world, but a light has burst forth onto the scene, and we have the option now to come and walk in that light rather than remain in darkness and to remain blind.

I love – I love verse 31, 32, the juxtaposition here, in fact, let me, let me interrupt by, notice the very first word of verse 32 – but – it sets up this counter between what you're going to read in 31 and then what we're going to study in 32. So let's pick up the beginning, 31: "There shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing scourge; and a desolating sickness shall cover the land." As a global population, we've been wrestling with COVID 19, with this corona virus. A virus that is what? One thousandth the size of a grain of sand. It is so small and yet it has created such a global upheaval. You could see with a minor mutation how quickly anything could spread and wipe out bigger portions of the population.

You're seeing that with all of man's wisdom and all of our mortal knowledge, we still struggle with certain things. But if we turn to the Lord – now watch this – verse 32 – but – so this is the counter to all of the oh, no, we're really helpless when it really comes right down to it – verse 32: "But" in spite of all that, "my disciples shall stand in holy places and shall not be moved." I love that. Stand in holy places. Come to Zion. Stand in holy places. What are the holy places? I think we would have to start with the home and then we go to our Church settings and especially the temple, stand in holy places. A holy place is to stand with General Conference, listen to the words of our leaders, those inspired speakers who give us directions so that we don't need to be afraid. We don't need to look around and see verse 33, the earthquakes in diverse places and many desolations and then

harden our hearts, because we're in the process of softening ours so that we can hear him more clearly with that ear that's inside of our heart.

Look at verse 35: "I said unto them," by the way, verse 34 and the first five words of verse 35, you could mark those off. These are additions that add further clarification to Matthew 24, so these aren't in Matthew 24. Verse 34 is not there. "Now, when I the Lord had spoken these words unto my disciples, they were troubled." Rightly so. They're sitting there probably thinking, oh, no, this is terrible stuff. And then these five words are also added: "And I said unto them," now this is where we pick back up with Matthew 24, "Be not troubled." Oh, if you could mark those three words, be not troubled.

And, brothers and sisters, it doesn't have to be wars, it doesn't have to be a virus, it doesn't have to be that pandemic or social upheaval or political unrest or diseases or loss of, it could be anything. But his invitation is the same. Instead of looking at all of the different problems and focusing on the problems, he focuses on the solution, and there's only one solution, and it's him. He says, "Be not troubled, for when all these things shall come to pass, ye may know that the promises which have been made unto you shall be fulfilled" (Doctrine and Covenants 45:35). I love that. When you see these bad things happening, don't let that trouble you. Let that gladden your heart to say, oh, he told us this was going to happen, he's keeping his promises, and if he's keeping his promises on that, he'll keep his individual promises with me – that covenantal connection.

And then he gives you the parable in verse 36 that then leads into 37: "Ye look and behold the fig trees, ye see them with your eyes, and ye say when they begin to shoot forth, and their leaves are yet tender, that summer is now nigh at hand." Ooh, that's interesting. Hmm, I wonder if there's a connection here where the Lord picked, of all the different plants he could have picked for this parable, he picked the fig. Huh. One of the other places where a fig leaf or fig leaves come into the story happens to be in the Garden of Eden right after Adam and Eve partake of the fruit and realize that they are naked, that they're exposed. What did they do? They took fig leaves to sew aprons to cover their nakedness.

Years ago a member in my – in our ward when we lived up in Providence, he had a fig tree, and he heard me share this example, and one day he brought over some fig leaves, they're large, and he gave them to me, that he had plucked off of his tree. I quickly laminated one of them so that it was preserved at that size and shape and color, and then I left the other one out on the table for a couple of days. It only took a few days for that fig leaf – because it had such a big surface area – to wither and to dry out and to curl up and become really crumbly to the point where it was really hard, actually put it into a lamination sheet and get it laminated. Brothers and sisters, fig leaves don't make great coverings if you're looking for clothing because of how quickly they dry up and decay and crumble and fall away.

Isn't it interesting that Adam and Eve covered themselves with figs – fig leaves --because they were afraid at that moment of the coming of the Lord into the garden? And now he uses the analogy of when you see fig leaves growing, you know the summer is nigh. He brings us back to the fig

tree. Isn't it fascinating that the thing that the Lord replaced their fig leaf aprons with was a coat of skins, which means Adam and Eve had to watch an animal die, or two animals, one each, die in order for them to cover their nakedness with something that wouldn't wither and decay quickly, but something that would actually protect them from their exposure to a lot more than just the elements, but their exposure to justice and the law and eternal consequences for decisions that would be made using their agency that may not always be appropriate.

So, as we look forward to the coming of the Lord, I love the fact that he's saying, you just watch as these prophecies begin to get fulfilled more and more and more. It's as if the fig tree is now putting forth its leaves and you know summer is nigh. And look at verse 39: "And it shall come to pass that he that feareth me shall be looking forth for the great day of the Lord to come, even for the signs of the coming of the Son of Man." I find it interesting that he didn't refer to it as the great and dreadful day of the Lord like he does in most other places. Here he just says, you're looking forth for the great day of the Lord. Why? Because you trust him.

Now he's using the word he that feareth me, I think in this context of an Old Testament context, not of a oh, no, God's going to smite me down, but it's more of a reverential sense of a knowing fully who I am, who he is, and how desperately I need him. It's the fear of the Lord is a little different than waiting for an angry God to smite me down kind of a context.

So then he gives us some of those additional signs of the fig tree starting to put forth its leaves. In verse 40 through 44 you get everything from the fires and the blood and the vapors of smoke and the sun darkened and the moon turned to blood and the stars falling from heaven, all of these – these unfolding events. I believe that most generations before us have seen world wars or major wars that are more regional in nature, lots of cataclysmic events with nature and destructions and upheavals, diseases and pestilences spread forth from time to time across the earth, and many, many, many generations previous to ours have read the scriptures and wondered, is it going to happen in our day? And this leads especially in an internet-enabled culture for a lot of people to set themselves up as a light for telling you what you should or shouldn't believe regarding the Second Coming.

I have to be – we have to be careful not to try to tell you what to believe or how to live your life, but I'll just give my personal approach to say, I'm going to follow the Prophet, and when our prophets, seers, and revelators give us direction regarding how to prepare for the Second Coming and any information about the Second Coming, I listen and I do my best to hearken and obey the things that I hear. But there are a lot of people on the internet, in the blogosphere, and on social media, who love the sensational, love trying to connect dots with prophecies in the Old Testament and the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and try to put a mark on the calendar of when Jesus is going to come, and there have been so many of those marks that have been put on the calendar that have come and have gone, and yet the number of people doing that hasn't decreased. In fact, it's probably increased.

So rather than telling you what to believe or what not to believe, I'm just going to tell you what I believe. I believe that the Lord will reveal his secrets to his servants the prophets, not to a blogosphere or social media icons. When he is putting things in place to accelerate his work, there's a system that he has in place to do that, and we sustain those individuals. So I would just encourage all of us to spend more time reading the recent General Conference addresses from prophets, seers, and revelators, spend more time doing that than we spend scouring the internet for what the world experts would say about the coming of Christ.

Now to speed things up, verse 45 through 47, he discusses the resurrection at his coming and the beginning of this millennium that's going to take place, so you get the incredible destruction in verse 48: "And then shall the Lord set his foot upon this mount," the Mount of Olives where he's giving Matthew 24, "and it shall cleave in twain," it's going to break open, split in two, "and the earth shall tremble and reel to and fro," and then all the nations of the earth are going to mourn, and verse 51: "Then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?" And he will say, I am the Lord. "I will say unto them; these wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God." The Messiah will have come again.

Then you begin this millennial reign where Satan is bound, in verse 55, and he describes, verse 57: "They that are wise and have received the truth, have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide," he's giving us the interpretation of the parable of the Ten Virgins. The five wise virgins aren't just members of the Church, they're members of the Church who have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide and have not been deceived. "Verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day." And the earth's going to be given to them for an inheritance. It's a beautiful promise.

Look at verse 59: "For the Lord shall be in their midst, and his glory shall be upon them, and he will be their king and their lawgiver."

Brothers and sisters, let me just say this, you don't have to wait for the millennium for Jesus to be in your midst. The promise is where two or three are gathered in my name, there will I be in their midst. That promise is sure, that even though you can't see him, he's with you, and he will help you stay on that covenant path.

Now, you get this great gathering effort that's described, starting in verse 64, so he finishes the Matthew 24 and then Jesus gives you his own interpretation of Matthew 24, all the way to the end of this section, and it all has to do with going out into the world, gathering people into Zion, into the fold of God to become the elect of God, to become part of the five wise virgins in that parable. That is our message to the world, that our God reigneth, that yeah, there are terrible things happening on the world or in the world and all around us, but there are incredibly beautiful things happening, that if you focus on those, then you can see that the wheat and the tares really are growing side by side, and our invitation to all the world is to just trust Jesus, have faith in him,

follow his appointed servants that he has given us to the earth, on the earth, today to help us stay in that covenant relationship with him and move forward on the covenant path.

In closing, I know with all my heart that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ, that he will come again someday, and it will be according to heaven's time, not earth's time. And in the meantime, I don't need to wait for the millennium to recognize his presence and his hand in my life and in the life of those around me. We hope that you know how much you're loved, and we leave that with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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