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GREATER VIEWS ON THE VERY POINTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

W. Jeffrey Marsh

BERTEL THORVALDSEN'S INSPIRING *CHRISTUS* statue depicts our Lord and Savior just as the scriptures describe Him, beckoning to us with open arms in a most pleasant manner as if saying: "Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28); "Learn of me" (Matthew 11:29); "Come, follow me" (Luke 18:22); "I am the light" (3 Nephi 18:16); "I have set an example for you" (3 Nephi 18:16); become "even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27); "Do the things which ye have seen me do" (2 Nephi 31:12). The Book of Mormon clearly declares that there is "no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord" (Mosiah 3:17). The Savior's example and teachings are "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) for those seeking eternal life.

The scriptures not only proclaim that there is only *one Savior* for all mankind; they also declare that there is only *one plan* for the salvation of all—"one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians

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4:5)—or, in other words, one body of eternal truths, principles, and ordinances that will enable mortals to reenter and dwell in God’s presence. This body of saving doctrine is referred to as the first principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Articles of Faith 1:4). This doctrine of Christ, which was understood by the ancient prophets, has now been restored to the world in these latter days through the Book of Mormon. Thus, the Book of Mormon is not just “Another Testament” that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of all mankind, but it also declares that to come unto Christ we must also come to know “the very points of his doctrine,” in order to “know how to . . . be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14).

The Book of Mormon sets forth and defines the doctrine of Jesus Christ in three distinct passages which were all given by the Savior Himself (see 2 Nephi 31:2–32:6; 3 Nephi 11:31–41; 3 Nephi 27:13–21). Each of these sermons begins and ends with the Savior’s affirmation that “this is my gospel” or “this is my doctrine.” Although this doctrine is discussed or described in various other places throughout the Book of Mormon, these three sermons provide us with the clearest description of the “very points” of Christ’s saving doctrine.

The Savior explains in these Book of Mormon passages that the doctrine of Christ is of God, meaning that it originated with the Father (see 3 Nephi 11:32) and is “the only and true doctrine of the Father” (2 Nephi 31:21). Acceptance of this doctrine will lead to greater faith in both the Father and the Son (see 3 Nephi 11:35; 2 John 1:9). The Savior further testified that the Holy Ghost will confirm this doctrine to every person who desires to know of its truthfulness (see 3 Nephi 11:35–36; 2 Nephi 31:16, 18). He indicated that all the promises contained in this doctrine will be fulfilled by the Father (see 3 Nephi 27:13, 18), meaning that if we accept and live by the doctrine of Christ, we will receive eternal life and eventually inherit all the Father has.

The Book of Mormon explains that we are responsible not only to believe this doctrine but also to act upon it. The Book of Mormon declares the doctrine of Christ to be that all people, everywhere, are commanded to repent and believe in Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi

11:32, 37; D&C 10:67), be baptized in His name by His authority in the same manner He was baptized, receive a remission of sins by the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 31:17–18), and endure to the end in faithfulness (see 2 Nephi 31:20). Even the Savior Himself obeyed this doctrine, was baptized, received the Holy Ghost, and endured faithfully in order to fulfill all righteousness (see 2 Nephi 31:4–10).

We are commanded to follow His example, accept the principles (faith in Jesus Christ and repentance), and receive the ordinances (baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost) as He did. “Follow thou me,” He commands, “and do the things which ye have seen me do” and be saved (2 Nephi 31:10, 12; see also 3 Nephi 27:21). Once we have accepted this doctrine, it then becomes incumbent upon us, indeed we are commanded, to “go forth . . . and declare the words [of Christ’s doctrine] unto the ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 11:41) so that others may also receive salvation.

Why is it important for every person to understand and accept the doctrine of Christ? Was this particular doctrine of Christ taught by former prophets? What additional enlightenment does the Book of Mormon proffer about this important doctrine?

ALL MUST KNOW AND ACCEPT THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

It is impossible to know how to be saved by Jesus Christ without knowing the doctrines He taught. No other book of scripture teaches the “very points of his doctrine” (1 Nephi 15:14) with such clarity and power as does the Book of Mormon. According to the Savior, the things written in the Book of Mormon “throw greater views upon my gospel” (D&C 10:45). Three times in revelation, Joseph Smith was informed that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9; see also 27:5; 42:12).

The Savior further testified that the Book of Mormon was purposely designed by Him to bring people to the “true points of my doctrine, yea, and the only doctrine which is in me” (D&C 10:62; see also 10:63). He declared that it contains “the doctrine which the

Father hath given unto me” (3 Nephi 11:32). The major authors of the Book of Mormon similarly testified that they recorded only those things they were commanded by Jesus Christ to write, so that “the children of men . . . may come unto the fountain of all righteousness [Jesus Christ] and be saved” (Ether 8:26; see also 2 Nephi 33:10–12; 3 Nephi 26:12; 30:1; Ether 4:5).

President Howard W. Hunter challenged Latter-day Saints to “come to the fountain of righteousness” by increasing their understanding of the Savior: “We must know Christ better than we know him; we must remember him more often than we remember him; we must serve him more valiantly than we serve him. Then we will drink water springing up unto eternal life and will eat the bread of life.”¹ As Elder Carlos E. Asay noted, the Book of Mormon not only testifies of Christ but also offers “the instructions . . . that mark clearly the path leading to Christ.”²

There is no salvation in false doctrine, no redeeming power in misunderstandings about Jesus Christ, His divinity, nor His mission. As he declared, our ability to inherit eternal life is directly related to our understanding of Christ and his doctrine (see 3 Nephi 27:15–17; John 17:3, 16–17). It is the same doctrine for all people in all ages. There can be no disputation concerning this doctrine as the Savior indicated during His visit to the Nephites and Lamanites in ancient America: “There shall be *no disputations* among you . . . concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been” (3 Nephi 11:28; emphasis added).

A CORRECT KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST EXISTED FROM THE BEGINNING

Since it is critical to know and have a correct understanding of the doctrine of Christ in order to achieve eternal life, all true prophets have known and taught this doctrine. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed that “if we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it be a hard matter to get right.”³ This is especially true regarding saving doctrine. There are many opposing opinions about how salvation is obtained,

but the Savior is the source of all true doctrine and His doctrine is either revealed from heaven or remains forever unknown (see Jacob 4:8; Isaiah 55:8–9). It cannot be known in any other way. One of the key reasons the Book of Mormon has been brought forth by the Lord in these latter days is to restore a correct understanding of the plain and precious truths that the ancients had and to end the disputations over His doctrine (see 1 Nephi 13:39–40; 2 Nephi 3:11–12). Joseph of Egypt foresaw that a major accomplishment of the Book of Mormon would be to confound false doctrines and bring people to a knowledge of the Lord’s covenants by teaching what the doctrine of Christ is and why it is important to believe in and act upon it (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

Beginning with Adam and Eve, all former prophets had the doctrine of Christ revealed to them. Adam and Eve received a true knowledge of Jesus Christ and His saving doctrine at the beginning of human history (see Moses 6:53–58). The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible bears witness that Adam and Eve were taught about the atoning sacrifice and mission of Jesus Christ, that they rejoiced in knowing about “the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient,” and that they “blessed the name of God, and . . . made all these things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:11–12).

These very same points of the doctrine of Christ have been taught in every succeeding dispensation whenever authorized servants of God were on the earth (see Moses 6:50). All true prophets understood that Jesus Christ was the Redeemer of the world (see 1 Nephi 11:27; Mosiah 3:5). There has never been any other way to salvation (see 2 Nephi 31:21). Besides Adam and Eve, Enoch also taught this same doctrine to his people. He quoted to his people the very words God had given to Adam, saying, “Hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you” (Moses

6:52; see also 6:42). Noah preached the same doctrine of Christ for 120 years prior to the Flood, testifying that if his people would repent, be baptized, exercise faith in Christ, and receive the Holy Ghost, the cataclysmic flood could be prevented (see Moses 8:17, 19–20, 24). This same doctrine was renewed in Abraham’s day when he was instructed that all children eight years of age or older needed to accept the doctrine of Christ and be baptized in His name in order to be saved (see JST, Genesis 17:3–7, 11). The Apostle Paul testified that if we accept the doctrine of Christ, it will lead us to perfection (see JST, Ephesians 6:1–2). In our day these same principles are the heart and soul of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ: “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4).

Such explicit faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has always been the first principle of the gospel; it is a prerequisite to salvation, not just among Old Testament peoples who lived in the Middle East but also among the Book of Mormon peoples who lived in the New World. Over five hundred years before the Messiah was born, Nephi declared, “We believe in Christ, . . . and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; . . . 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” (2 Nephi 25:24–26). About 150 years before Christ was born, the prophet Abinadi similarly taught that Christ, who would overcome all death, is the light and life of men, the only hope for their salvation (see Mosiah 16:6–8).

Thus, the Book of Mormon clearly teaches that the doctrine of Christ was known from the beginning and that the blessings of the Atonement benefited those who lived before the time of Christ. The people repented and were cleansed and sanctified by the Atonement even before it was performed. It was as if the Messiah had already come among them: “And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare . . . that . . .

whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them” (Mosiah 3:13; see also Mosiah 16:6).

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST?

Now that we have established that belief in the doctrine of Christ is essential to salvation for all people in all ages, how does the Book of Mormon define this important doctrine?

As noted earlier, the Book of Mormon declares the doctrine of Christ to be faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion under the hands of those holding the proper priesthood authority, reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and then living in faithful endurance to the end of our lives (see 2 Nephi 31:2–32:6; 3 Nephi 11:31–41; 3 Nephi 27:13–21). Christ’s doctrine as explained here seems simple enough, yet it presents one of the greatest challenges because it requires us to become like little children in order to receive it (see 3 Nephi 11:37), and because it demands a great deal of humility in order to comply with it (see 2 Nephi 31:13; 3 Nephi 11:37). Comparatively few people in the world are willing to receive and abide by this doctrine.

In describing the doctrine of Christ, the Savior testified that it is centered in His redemptive mission. A central feature to this doctrine is that Christ came to this earth by divine appointment of the Father to perform the Atonement, to be lifted up on the cross, and to be resurrected, and thus to save and redeem all mankind (see 3 Nephi 27:13). Christ willingly chose to comply with the will of His Father (see 2 Nephi 31:7) and through His death and resurrection has provided a way for all humankind to be delivered from physical and spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 31:4). Christ alone has obtained the power to draw us unto Him and bring us back into God’s presence to be judged of our works (see 3 Nephi 27:14–15).

The doctrine of Christ promises great blessings to those who obey its precepts. Those who repent and are baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ will be filled or visited with the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 27:16; 11:35). They will experience a remission of sins by “fire” (2 Nephi 31:17). The Holy Ghost will then “tell” and “show” them all things they should do (2 Nephi 32:3, 5). Those who know “the true points of doctrine” (Helaman 11:23) can have daily revelations and experience peace. They are “numbered among my people,” the Savior declared (3 Nephi 21:6) and are “buil[t] upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39). They will be saved and will inherit the kingdom of God and have eternal life (see 3 Nephi 11:33; 2 Nephi 31:20). If they faithfully endure to the end, they will be held guiltless before the Father when Christ stands to judge the world (see 3 Nephi 27:16).

The doctrine of Christ is also accompanied by several serious warnings. Those who fail to accept this doctrine and choose not to act upon it can never enter the kingdom of God (see 3 Nephi 11:37–38). If they refuse baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and by His authority, they will be “damned” (3 Nephi 11:34). According to the justice of God, no unclean thing can enter into His kingdom. Only those who have “washed their garments in [Christ’s] blood, because of their faith” (3 Nephi 27:19), and have repented of all their sins, been baptized, and endure in faithfulness to the end will be allowed to dwell in God’s presence for all eternity. Failure to do so results in their being shut out from the presence of the Father forever (see 3 Nephi 27:17).

The Savior further warned that whosoever declares “more or less than this, and establish[es] it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil” (3 Nephi 11:40). The Apostle John counseled that if any come among us teaching any doctrine other than the doctrine of Christ, we are to avoid them (see 2 John 1:10). Men and women are free to believe the doctrine of Christ or not, but the Book of Mormon assures that those who accept this doctrine are choosing “liberty and eternal life” (2 Nephi 2:27).

One of the tests of mortality is our degree of willingness to receive truth. We do not have the luxury of choosing how we will be saved. There is only one plan for the salvation of all mankind. There

are no other alternatives. In a modern revelation, our Heavenly Father declared, “I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world for the redemption of the world, and have decreed that he that receiveth him shall be saved, and he that receiveth him not shall be damned” (D&C 49:5). In counseling with his wayward son, Alma warned Corianton not to “risk one more offense against your God upon *those points of doctrine*, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin” (Alma 41:9; emphasis added). In like manner, if we turn away from the doctrine of Christ as explained in the Book of Mormon, we also run the risk of offending God.

We simply cannot afford to be mistaken in regard to this doctrine. The Book of Mormon, therefore, is an essential key to our salvation because it plainly teaches this doctrine. We not only need to know the Redeemer better, as President Hunter suggested, but also needs to learn the “very points of his doctrine” (1 Nephi 15:14) in order to know how to be saved, and the Book of Mormon is the instrument God provided to make that possible. Its title page states that it came forth so that we might “know the covenants of the Lord . . . and . . . [be convinced] . . . that JESUS is the CHRIST.” The Prophet Joseph Smith testified that in this respect, “the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth” (introduction to the Book of Mormon, paragraph 6).

THE KEEPER OF THE GATE

By His example, our Savior showed us the straitness of the path and the narrowness of the gate by which we all need to enter. The Book of Mormon explains that although He was holy and without sin, Christ demonstrated His humility by obeying His own doctrine—by keeping the commandments of God to be baptized, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in faithfulness (see 3 Nephi 31:8; D&C 20:22). “Now this is the commandment,” He in turn says to us, “Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20).

The prophets in the Book of Mormon solemnly testified that Christ is the keeper of the gate leading to the celestial kingdom, “and he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). Why is He there? The Book of Mormon answers: He stands with open arms to greet us (see Mormon 6:17). “He denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). “Come unto me,” He promises, “and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:34); “Come unto [me] and partake of [my] goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Whether or not we will have the privilege of greeting Him at the gate of the celestial kingdom will be determined by what we choose to do with His doctrine. In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord indicated that those who rebel and fight against the testimony of Jesus will come forth in the Resurrection after extensive personal suffering, without any glory, and will suffer the second death—a permanent separation from the presence of God (see D&C 76:35–38; Alma 12:16; Helaman 14:17–18). Joseph further learned that those who receive not the testimony of Jesus will inherit the telestial kingdom—the lowest degree of glory in the Resurrection (see D&C 76:99–100). The Savior also revealed that those who have the opportunity and refuse to receive the testimony of Jesus in mortality but afterward receive it—or those who receive it but are not valiant in it—will inherit the terrestrial, or second, degree of glory. But those who receive the testimony of Jesus and believe on His name and are baptized in His name, according to the commandment which He has given, will be washed clean of their sins, be sealed up to eternal life, and inherit the fulness of the Father in the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 76:50–56; Helaman 3:27–30). Thus, what we decide to do with the testimony (or doctrine) of Jesus will ultimately determine what He does with us.

The Savior has declared and the Father has promised that if we will accept the doctrine Christ taught and “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men, . . . feasting upon the word of Christ and endure to the end,” we shall have eternal life (2 Nephi 31:20). The

doctrine of Christ will show us what we need to do in order to return to God's presence. If we accept the "principles of the doctrine of Christ," we can "go on unto perfection" (JST, Hebrews 6:1). This doctrine enables us to "come unto Christ" in order to "be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32). His beautiful and divine entreaty still stands: "Come unto me and be ye saved" (3 Nephi 12:20).

The Lord expects us to know the very points of His doctrine, and the Book of Mormon is the means He has provided to help us learn them. We can be grateful, therefore, that God has seen fit to restore the doctrine of Christ in its plainness to us.

NOTES

1. Howard W. Hunter, "What Manner of Men Ought Ye to Be," *Ensign*, May 1994, 64.
2. Carlos E. Asay, *In the Lord's Service: A Guide to Spiritual Development* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 146.
3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 343.