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They Did Remember His Words

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They Did Remember His Words

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Brett P. Thomas

One of the most fascinating stories in the Book of Mormon takes place in a prison. An army of Lamanites capture Nephi₂ and Lehi₂ (the second men in the Book of Mormon with those names), throw them into prison, and withhold food from them for many days. The Lamanites then took the prisoners out to slay them, but the slayings did not take place. Instead, this dark, confining prison became a sanctuary of light and power, and about three hundred souls came unto Christ, became ministers unto him, and were instrumental in the conversion of the “more part” of their people.

How did this all come about? We learn of a discourse Nephi and Lehi’s father Helaman had given them before they embarked on their mission. Though we do not know the setting and context of this discourse, its influence is unmistakable. The prison story and the conversion of the Lamanites, as recorded in Helaman 5:20–6:5, is strongly tied to Helaman’s speech which precedes it and has tremendous bearing on the meaning of what follows. By discussing the speech sequentially and the narrative that follows chronologically, I hope to show how Helaman’s discourse and the prison/conversion story are connected, how the role of remembrance affects conversion, and finally, how we can “liken” these verses unto ourselves.

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The Event—The Prison/Conversion Story (Helaman 5:20–6:5)

When the captors came to the prison to slay Nephi and Lehi, they found them encircled by a “pillar of fire” and “durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned” (Hel 5:23–24). Nephi and Lehi told the people that God had shown a “marvelous thing” unto them. The earth and walls shook immediately, a cloud of darkness descended, and thus an “awful solemn fear” came over them. They heard a “still voice of perfect mildness” whisper: “Repent ye, repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants” (vv 28–32). The darkness remained, and the process recurred two more times. The captors were so frightened that they couldn’t run away. They were stuck. They couldn’t even turn themselves around.

An ordinary man named Aminadab then entered center stage. Having once been a member of the Church but having drifted away and “dissented,” he alone saw the faces of Nephi and Lehi shine as if they were angels. He cried unto the multitude to turn around and look. And then comes a telling phrase in the narrative: “And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look” (Hel 5:37).

After being informed by Aminadab that the prophets were conversing with angels, the captors cried: “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” Aminadab replied: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (Hel 5:40–41). As they followed his counsel, the heavens burst forth in great splendor and light. Every soul was encircled as if in the midst of a flaming fire, and the Holy Ghost filled them with unspeakable joy. Angels ministered unto them from heaven and then another miracle happened: these former prisoners and captors became as angels themselves and ministered unto their people.

That’s the story. Three themes from Helaman’s speech which are reinforced by this incredible event are: (1) remember

the promises made to the fathers; (2) remember the conditions of repentance bring the power of the Redeemer; and (3) remember that Jesus Christ is our foundation.

Remember the Promises Made to the Fathers

Although the text does not specifically mention whether Nephi and Lehi remembered their father's words when they were in the prison, we may safely assume they did. Mormon implies that throughout their ministry, "they did remember their father's words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God" (Hel 5:14). Helaman admonished his sons to remember their ancestors to motivate them to do good works, not to boast, but "to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have every reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers" (v 8). One of the great blessings of remembering is turning our hearts to the promises made to the fathers. The greatest promise of all, of course, is the gift of eternal life to the faithful; the desire of all parents, like Helaman, is that their children might treasure the preciousness of that gift.

Helaman knew that if his sons could remember and treasure these gifts promised unto their fathers, they could be sparked with the hope of receiving and experiencing those same blessings. Joseph Smith taught that the ancient saints sought diligently "after a knowledge of the glory of God, [because of the] credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers" (*Lectures on Faith* 51). Elsewhere he said:

The ancients . . . obtained from God promises of such weight and glory, that our hearts are often filled with gratitude that we are even permitted to look upon them. . . . If we are the children of the Most High, and are called with same calling with which they were called, and embrace the same covenant that they embraced, and are faithful to the testimony of our Lord as they were, we can approach the Father in the name of Christ as they approached Him, and for ourselves

obtain the same promises. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 65–66; hereafter *TPJS*)

In yet another setting he said,

If there is anything calculated to interest the mind of the Saints, to awaken in them the finest sensibilities, and arouse them to enterprise and exertion, surely it is the great and precious promises made by our heavenly Father. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 163; hereafter *TPJS*)

Because Nephi and Lehi embraced and obtained the promises of their forefathers, we can be sure they immersed themselves in the records of their fathers (Mosiah 1:3–7), desiring to know everything about them, that they would more fully know how to follow their examples. Centuries earlier, Nephi₁ (son of Lehi) recorded: “My soul delighteth in *the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers*; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5; emphasis added). Time and time again, he leaned on the promises made to the fathers. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that God would deliver him and make him mighty just as He had those in “times of old” (Tuttle 72–73). Nephi stated with confidence: “The Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers” and “If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them” (1 Nephi 4:3; 17:50). I wonder though, if Helaman’s sons ever staggered under the weight of such promises and expectations? Did they ever stumble and feel like they were forever falling short? Did they know that their forefathers struggled too? Even though he had that testimony, he was painfully aware that he was human. Nephi (son of Lehi) recorded:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . . Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why

should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul. (2 Nephi 4:17, 26–27)

Those who come closer to God become more keenly aware of their own limitations and the role of Christ's grace and atonement in their lives. Nephi testified, "Cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh" (2 Nephi 4:34); he later wrote, "We know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do" (25:23). Echoing these words, Helaman counseled his sons: "Remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world" (Hel 5:9).

Such remembrance helps us cling to hope and awakens within us the precious seeds of eternal life, a testimony of Jesus Christ (see Alma 33:22–23). Recounting his own earlier spiritual estrangement, Alma² testified: "I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:17–18). The more we come to know the Son of God, the more we understand the depths he had to reach to rescue us. Charles Gabriel wrote: "I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine / To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine; / That he should extend his great love unto such as I, / Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify" (Hymns #193).

Nephi¹ prophesied that the Lord's covenant people would "come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also . . . to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. . . . Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine?" (1 Nephi 15:14–15). Surely, these "points of doctrine" would include the knowledge of human-kind's bondage and Christ's redemption. Our righteous forefathers yearned that we, their children, would know how

literally they depended on Christ as the source of their “strength and nourishment.” They would “mention the loving kindness of their Lord, and all that he has bestowed upon them according to his goodness, and according to his loving kindness. . . . In all their afflictions he was afflicted. . . . [But] in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old” (D&C 133:52–53).

An angel commanded Alma: “Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers . . . and remember how great things [the Lord] has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16). A converted Alma never forgot that command and consistently shared this message throughout his ministry (Alma 29:11–12; 36:29). Of the Saints in Zarahemla he asked: “Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? . . . Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance [God’s] mercy and longsuffering towards them? . . . Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word. . . . And they did sing redeeming love” (5:6–9).

We often note that the preface to the Book of Mormon states that the book’s purpose is to testify that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” But we often neglect to rehearse what leads to that declaration. The Book of Mormon was written to “show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Moroni’s famous promise, “by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things,” (Moroni 10:5), is not only prefaced by the exhortation of prayer, faith in Christ, real intent, and a sincere heart, but by remembrance and pondering as well: “*Remember* how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts”

(v 3; emphasis added). Commenting on these verses, Elder Carlos E. Asay has taught:

I feel strongly that reading the things of God without remembering and pondering how those things fit into the divine scheme tends to confuse, not enlighten. Enlightenment occurs and truth is revealed as things are fitted together in an understandable way. In the process, the mind is stimulated, memory is stirred, and the heart is prepared to respond to the whisperings of the Spirit. (85)

We can understand “the truth of all things” only in the context of the past, present, and future (D&C 93:24). As we grow in our understanding of the past, our vision of the future expands, and, like Nephi and Lehi, we will go forth in the present “keeping the commandments of God” (Hel 5:14). And “he that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28).

Therefore, when we receive truth and light, our perception of the present changes dramatically. The prison/conversion story begins with angry men desiring to kill the servants of the Lord, but it ends with these same men being converted by those servants and joining them in their sacred ministry.

Remember That the Conditions of Repentance Bring the Power of the Redeemer

As we have seen, remembering the promises made to our forefathers provides a wonderful spark to help us remember the grace of a loving Heavenly Father. Such memories help prepare us to receive the whisperings of the Spirit, which invite us to come unto Christ and partake of his redemptive powers. The fulness of these powers becomes available by what Helaman terms the “conditions of repentance.” Helaman counseled his sons,

Remember that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins. And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance;

therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of *the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.* (Hel 5:10–11; emphasis added)

The conditions of repentance are the floodgates to the power of God. “He suffered the pain of all men, that all men *might* repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he *might* bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance” (D&C 18:11–12; emphasis added). Jesus suffered for us, bled for us, died for us, and broke the bands of death for us, hoping that we will receive him, rely on him, and come unto him. He paid the awful price for our agency. The prophet Lehi testified:

The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. . . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil. (2 Nephi 2:26–27)

Focusing on this crucial choice, the book of Helaman notes that the captors ironically discover the shackles of their own bondage as they are overshadowed by the darkness and filled with awful fear and hear a voice from heaven calling them to repentance: “It did *pierce* even to the very soul” (Hel 5:30; emphasis added). Such piercings are painful awakenings of the awareness that we have alienated ourselves from God. “God is not only there in the mildest expressions of His presence,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught, “but also in those seemingly harsh expressions. For example, when truth ‘cutteth . . . to the very center’ (v 2), this may signal that spiritual surgery is underway, painfully severing pride from the soul” (“Yet Thou” 31).

The narrative in Helaman chapter 5 has come to its most dramatic and pivotal moment. How would the captors respond? Remembrance of wrong doing is never a comfortable subject. Laman and Lemuel complained that Nephi had “declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear” (1 Nephi 16:1). In response, they were instructed on two occasions: “the guilty

taketh the truth to be hard” (v 2); “[Y]e say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God . . . and that which ye call anger was the truth” (2 Nephi 1:26). Again, the question can be asked: How will these angry captors respond to the piercings of the Holy Ghost? It would be stretching the imagination to think that they came to the prison in a humble frame of mind. Lynch mobs seldom do.

Predictably, the captors tried to run away—the course of least resistance. Ultimately, however, everyone must face the truth, for the “voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape” (D&C 1:2). All hearts will eventually be penetrated and the “rebellious shall be *pierced* with much sorrow” (D&C 1:3; emphasis added). “Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that [His] judgment . . . is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink” (Mosiah 27:31). None can escape the choice of Christ. Contrast the captors to Nephi and Lehi: the captors were “immovable” (Hel 5:34) because of an awful fear, but Nephi and Lehi stood confidently in the midst of fire and their faces shone as they lifted their eyes and voices to heaven. They could look up to God with his image engraved upon their countenances (Alma 5:19). Because of their softened hearts, virtue and truth had distilled upon their souls as the dew from heaven and their confidence had waxed strong in the presence of God. President Benson has stated: “When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed” (61–62). Do we fall down on our knees now, humbly seeking deliverance from our redeemer or do we pridefully resist change and remain immovable and hardened to the truth? Rodney Turner has written,

Spiritual humility—the recognition of one’s dependance upon God for all things temporal and spiritual, coupled with a willingness to accept his law—is a precondition for true repentance. Some achieve

this humility only after they have been “compelled to be humble” by those “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” of which Hamlet soliloquized. Some do so only after they have been brought face-to-face with the stark truth about themselves and the God they defied, or never knew. Some will never learn humility and, therefore, never repent even when they stand before God with a “perfect knowledge” of their guilt and uncleanness. However, God’s truth will prove irresistible, and they will acknowledge to their “everlasting shame that all his judgments are just.” President Spencer W. Kimball wrote one “disbeliever”: “The time will come when there will be a surrender of every person who has ever lived on this earth . . . and it will be an unforced surrender, an unconditional surrender. When will it be for you? . . . It is not if you will capitulate to the great truth; it is when, for I know that you cannot indefinitely resist the power and pressure of truth.” (19–20)

It is significant that the captors were given power to turn about. Elder Theodore M. Burton noted that the word “turn” can often be interchanged with “repent” (96–97). Three times the voice had commanded them to repent, but they couldn’t even begin their repentance without heaven’s help. The Savior intimately knows our capacity to know and live the truth: “Ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along” (D&C 78:18). The conditions of repentance begin on bended knees, with a bowed head, and a humble confession that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior of the world.

After the conversion of the three hundred who went to minister among their brethren, we read: “The more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them. . . . And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war and also their hatred and the *tradition of their fathers*” (Hel 5:50–51; emphasis added). Mormon rigorously references the impact of these traditions from the beginning to the end of the Book of Mormon. Such repetitions warn the world of their influence. Joseph Smith, while in Liberty Jail, recorded:

Tyranny, and oppression, supported and urged on and upheld by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion, and has been growing stronger

and stronger, and is now the very mainspring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity. It is an iron yoke, it is a strong band; they are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell. (D&C 123:7-8)

Nephi and Lehi's prison experience illustrates that prisons confine not only the wicked, but the righteous as well. Many faithful Latter-day Saints battle with the dark prison of depression. Many others battle within the prison of crippled and diseased bodies. And yet, many have experienced darkness just before the light, as a kind of test of faith. While kneeling in the sacred grove, Joseph Smith described his struggle with darkness in these words: "Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction" (JS-H 1:15). We can all testify of the truth of Moroni's counsel: "Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).

To remember repentance is to remember God's mercy. The cry, "What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?" is a cry for mercy. The answer, "You must repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ" (Hel 5:40-41), helps us remember the power of redemption. About forty years earlier, Amulek had taught this same message: "May God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save" (Alma 34:17-18).

Notice how faith and repentance are intertwined. We typically think of faith unto repentance, but Aminadab's phrase reverses the order. He said, "Repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith." We repent to do away with sin, but we also repent to develop faith in Christ. Faith in Christ assures us that he has power to cleanse and change us. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught:

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that person is not

only eligible to be cleansed from sin. He is also strengthened, and that strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a weak person who once transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature that qualifies one to dwell in the presence of God. (150–51)

This concept is why Helaman made reference to Amulek and Zeezrom’s famous dialogue about sin. “For [Amulek] said unto [Zeezrom] that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins” (Hel 5:10; emphasis added). Redeeming us in our sins would leave us incapacitated to receive the powers of God that crush the unprepared (D&C 82:3; 88:18, 22; 130:18–21). Inherent in the blessings of God are laws, obligations, and responsibility. Bruce Hafen has written,

The purpose of our existence here is to have an opportunity to develop the skills, the capacities, that are necessary for us to live in the celestial kingdom. When my nine-year-old boy says he wants to drive the car, I must explain to him that if he goes out onto the freeway, he is going to be dangerous—he might kill himself and a lot of other people as well. He does not yet have the capacity to use the freedom offered by a freeway. Until I can help him develop that capacity—the skill, the judgment, the maturity—going out there freely will kill him. The same would be true of our premature introduction to the freedom—and the responsibility—of living in a kingdom governed by celestial laws. The assumption of responsibility can be liberating or crushing, depending upon one’s preparation to receive it. (“The Value of the Veil,” 13; emphasis added)

The “natural man” is unable to withstand the light and glory of God; thus, the scriptures speak of the absolute necessity of becoming a “new creature.” We cannot be “in sin” and “in Christ.” As Paul taught, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17) and from Alma, “Marvel not that all mankind . . . must be . . . born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become

new creatures” (Mosiah 27:25–26). Repentance then, is not just a cleansing of the slate, but the creating of a new slate, a new being, a new son or daughter of God.

The process of partaking of God’s nature is the process of giving away all our sins. God came not to rip our sins away from us, but that we might freely give our sins to him. The more we learn about God, the more we learn how anxious he is to exchange our sins for his righteousness. As we forsake or resist the sin, we gain what President McKay termed a “consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite.” He continued, “Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and to acquire more and more strength. To feel one’s faculties unfolding, and truth expanding the soul is one of life’s sublimest experiences” (1057). Thus, repentance expands and strengthens our souls and infuses us with God’s truth and goodness. Our very natures become changed.

The heavenly fire in and about the prison is allegorical to our lives. While our weak faith grows in strength, God’s grace will shield us and protect us from his burning light. But one day, long after we have passed through the veil, our faith will be sufficiently strong not only to withstand the fulness of His light but also to embrace it as well (*TPJS* 348). The process of partaking of his divine nature is conditioned on our willingness to repent unto faithfulness. The counsel, “you must repent and cry unto the voice, even until you shall have faith in Christ” (Hel 5:41), teaches that we must rely wholly on the merits of Him who is mighty to save and press forward in Christ striving to keep all the commandments and covenants of God. We then receive light and truth as fast as we are able bear it, and in “proportion to the heed and diligence” we give to that light (*TPJS* 51). Thus, our capacity to learn and live the truth requires constant change, but as we do change or repent, we will, in the words of Joseph Smith, “overcome the evils of [our lives] and [lose] every desire for sin; and like the ancients, [arrive] at that point of faith where [we] are wrapped in the power and glory

of [our] Maker and [are] caught up to dwell with Him” (TPJS 51; emphasis added).

Finally, the conditions of repentance must be God’s conditions and not our own. “Many of us have not yet surrendered,” President Kimball has observed, “or if it has been a surrender it has been a conditional surrender, with many reservations” (106). “To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore. The fasting, the prayers, the humility must be equal to or greater than the sin. . . . There must be tears and genuine change of heart. . . . *And there must be a new consecration and devotion to the living of all of the laws of God.* In short, there must be an overcoming of self, of sin, and of the world” (84; emphasis added). The repentance process, then, is ultimately dependent on our willingness to submit to the will of the God. We may not know when or how the clouds of darkness will disperse; nevertheless, we must continue to cry unto the Lord. “And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed” (Hel 5:42). In the midst of such pleadings, God will try us to see if we really believe him. Only through prisons and clouds of darkness can our faith be tested and forged. Our deliverance may be very different from that of Nephi, Lehi, and their ancient equivalents Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written concerning these Hebrew captives:

[Their] response to a persecuting king was, as they were about to be thrown into a fiery furnace heated seven times its usual capacity: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . .” And then the three words: “*But if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Daniel 3:17–18; italics added) *But if not*. . . There will be times in each of our lives when our faith must not be conditioned upon God’s rescuing or relieving us, because in fact He may not—at least, not as we would choose to be rescued. . . . Matching those three young men are three young women whose names we do not have. They are mentioned in the book of Abraham, remarkable young women about whom I am anxious to know more. They were actually sacrificed upon the altar because

“they would not bow down to worship [an idol] of wood or stone.” (Abr 1:11). (*Not My Will* 119–20)

The Savior, of course, is the supreme example of one whose faith was not conditioned on God’s rescuing or relieving him. Descending into the darkness and prison of all sins, wicked traditions, and mortal existence, he willingly took upon himself the pains and sufferings of us all. By drinking that “bitter cup” and suffering the “will of the Father in all things,” He created for us the conditions of repentance (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 19:16). If only we will remember to choose these conditions, we will “partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption” (Omni 1:26).

Remember That Jesus Christ Is Our Foundation

Helaman concludes his discourse to Nephi and Lehi with these famous words: “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation . . . which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel 5:12). Those who are founded in Christ become grounded in the gospel and riveted to the rock of revelation. Using the backdrop of the earth that had shaken fearfully, Mormon dramatically illustrates the meaning of making Christ our foundation. Instead of groping in the dark and stumbling on shaking soil, these captors find an anchor to their souls “which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4). Our narrative continues:

And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire. And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they

were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words. (Hel 5:43–45)

We can be certain that these marvelous words included words of “praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer” (3 Nephi 10:10). When our hearts are filled with gratitude and divine indebtedness, we open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. A voice came unto them, “yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying: Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world” (Hel 5:46–47). Peace is a gift of the Holy Ghost which comes because of the remission of sins (Mosiah 4:3) and a oneness with our Heavenly Father—a oneness we surely experienced in our premortal home. Through this spirit, we also come to a greater understanding of the promises we made long ago. Like the Savior who was “from the foundation of the world,” we too were “ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 13:3). As we seek to follow Helaman’s admonition that “it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation” (Hel 5:12), we will remember that our foundation is not new, but began in another time and in another place. “Before [we] were born . . . [we] received [our] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (D&C 138:56).

Elder John A. Widtsoe has written:

In our preexistent state, in the day of the great council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we become parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but measurably, saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father’s work, and the Savior’s work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with

the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation. (189)

Even though there is a veil of forgetfulness over the earth, each one of us can have a major impact on the salvation of the human family. Because of the Atonement, the Savior is able to change our hearts and awaken us “out of a deep sleep.” As our souls are “illuminated by the light of the everlasting word” (Alma 5:7), we can share that light, however small, with others.

Consider Aminadab. He had once known the gospel but for some reason had drifted away. Yet he was able to see through the cloud of darkness the “faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels” (Hel 5:36). A spiritual light was awakened within him. Notice that he just didn’t tell the people to “repent” and end there, which he could have done. He said, “Repent, and cry unto the voice, even until you shall have faith in Christ, *who was taught unto you by Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom*” (v 41; emphasis added). He reminded the people that they had been taught before. We too have been taught before. We must never stop trying to help one another for we never know when a spark within us may ignite. President J. Reuben Clark expressed: “It is my hope and my belief that the Lord never permits the light of faith wholly to be extinguished in any human heart, however faint the light may glow. The Lord has provided that there shall still be there a spark which, with teaching, with the spirit of righteousness, with love, with tenderness, with example, with living the Gospel, shall brighten and glow again, however darkened the mind may have been” (114). President Joseph F. Smith said:

All those salient truths which come home so forcibly to the head and heart seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came? Are not the means of knowledge in the first estate equal to those of this? I think that the spirit, before and after this probation, possess greater facilities, aye, manifold greater, for the acquisition of knowledge, than while manacled and shut up in the prison-house of mortality. . . . If Christ knew beforehand, so did we. But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that

we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home. (13–14)

As we remember that Christ is our foundation and are willing to take his name upon ourselves, he will enable us to follow him. Yes, that promise may seem staggering as we stumble through mortality, but his promises are sure. He has promised us a “sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel 5:12; see also 3 Nephi 18:7–13; 3 Nephi 27). “For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee” (Isa 41:13). “I will strengthen thee . . . yea I will uphold thee” (v 10).

But Christ never intended that we lean on him forever. Yes, he desires that we rely on him, but as means of becoming like him. He wants his foundation literally to become our foundation. He has invited us to join him in his ministry to be “a savior unto my people Israel” (D&C 86:11). Nothing is more sublime than when we minister to one another. To minister is to love, to forgive, to heal, and to reconcile, and in this, we follow most closely in the steps of Jesus Christ. One of the great miracles of heaven is when one ministry begets another. It is absolutely amazing what happened to these three hundred souls who were converted. After angels ministered unto them, they became as angels themselves “and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen. . . . And many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority” (Hel 5:50; 6:5).

A soul founded in Christ becomes sanctified in Christ. Remembering our Savior helps us yield our hearts unto him, and then as his will becomes our will, he “make[s] [us] mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works” and ultimately, because of the bestowal of his grace, we become strong, sanctified, and “holy, without spot” (Hel 10:5; Moroni 10:33). The Book of Mormon is a powerful witness that through Jesus

Christ we become born again into the family of God and partake of his divine nature. We are then able to love and forgive even as the Savior; his ministry becomes our ministry, and his words our words. We too may testify that the “Lord hath anointed *me* to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; . . . to comfort all that mourn; . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, [and] the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:1–3; emphasis added). Because of these converted three hundred, many “did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers” (Hel 5:51).

The “more part” of the Lamanites became firm and steady in the faith because Christ had become their sure foundation. Wicked Nephites rejected them. “Nevertheless, the people of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites, yea, because of the church of God, which had been established among them. And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy” (Hel 6:3). As we love our brothers and sisters, and work on their behalf, prisons of bitterness, anger, and frustration will melt away. Joseph Smith taught: “Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity. . . . A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race” (*TPJS* 174). Such are the blessings of a foundation built on Christ.

Conclusion

Although a merciful veil separates us from our premortal home, Heavenly Father has provided us means by which we might remember him and return to him. Through the burning testimony of the ancient saints and the living “oracles of God,” our seeds of faith are ignited and we are prompted by the light of Christ to receive the fulness of his light. We are promised

that by coming unto Christ through repentance of our sins and obedience to his commandments, we will receive the Holy Ghost which will teach us all things and bring all things to our remembrance. Remembrance is a divine awakening that leads us to faith, repentance, righteousness, and becoming born again. Light will come from heaven and glorious ministries of healing, forgiveness and love of God's estranged family will occur. If we follow these divine principles, we too will "fellowship one with another, and . . . rejoice one with another, and [will] have great joy" (Hel 6:3).

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