

Lesson 45: "Never Has Man Believed in Me As Thou Hast"

Ether 1-6

Christ and the New Covenant by Jeffrey R. Holland

Preparatory faith is formed by experiences in the past—by the known, which provides a basis for belief. **But redemptive faith must often be exercised toward experiences in the future—the unknown,** which provides an opportunity for the miraculous. Exacting faith, mountain-moving faith, faith like that of the brother of Jared, *precedes* the miracle and the knowledge. He had to believe *before* God spoke. He had to act *before* the ability to complete that action was apparent. He had to commit to the complete experience in advance of even the first segment of its realization. **Faith is to agree unconditionally—and in advance— to whatever conditions God may require in both the near and distant future.** (18)

One may ask here, "Is it possible to have faith so great that even God cannot resist it?" At first one is inclined to say that surely God could block such an experience if he wished to. But the text suggests otherwise: **"This man . . . could not be kept from beholding within the veil. . . . He could not be kept from within the veil."** This may be an unprecedented case of a mortal man's desire, will, and purity so closely approaching the heavenly standard that **God could not but honor his devotion. What a remarkable doctrinal statement about the power of a mortal's faith!** (24)

In the glow of this revelation to the Brother of Jared comes an appeal to all who will one day receive it. **Asking the latter-day reader to pierce the limits of shallow faith, Christ cries in Ether 4:**

13 **Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.**

14 **Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.**

15 **Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel.**

The Book of Mormon is predicated on the willingness of men and women to "rend that veil of unbelief" in order to behold the revelations of God. **The brother of Jared may not have had great belief in himself, but his belief in God was unprecedented. In that there is hope for us all. His faith was without doubt or limit.**

"I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger." (Ether 3:4) From the moment of that utterance, the brother of Jared and the reader of the Book of Mormon would never again be the same. **Once and for all it was declared that ordinary people with ordinary challenges could rend the veil of unbelief and enter the realms of eternity.** And Christ, who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem his people, would stand in all his glory at the edge of that veil, ready to receive the believers and show them "how great things the Father had laid up" for them at the end of faith's journey. (28-29)

from "Nobody Said That It Would Be Easy:" Elder John B. Dickson, C.R., October 1992

"Our challenges may be physical spiritual, economic, or emotional, but if we will treat them as opportunities and stepping stones in our progress, rather than barriers and stumbling blocks, our lives and growth will be wonderful. **I have learned that between challenges it is very restful but that any real growth I have ever enjoyed has always come with a challenge.**"

Ted L. Gibbons Commentary:

Imagine setting forth into the sea in a windowless boat, with nothing to guide you but your faith in God. Imagine closing the doors of those barges and commending yourselves to the care of the Lord. I know families who are in the "barges" as I write. **They cannot see where the Lord is taking them, and having lost the moorings that bind them to familiar lands, they are utterly in his hands, waiting and hoping for him to bring them finally to a land of promise of their own.**

Joseph Smith: "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (TPJS, 255).

Ezra Taft Benson: "My beloved coworkers, you face the happiest years of your lives. I know whereof I speak. I have been there. I have **tasted the joy of missionary work**. There is no work in all the world that can bring an individual greater joy and happiness. I pray your joy will be full, and like Ammon of old, you will be able to say, "My joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God." (Alma 26:11) (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 213).

Neal A. Maxwell: "When we reach a point of consecration, [of conversion] our afflictions will be swallowed up in the joy of Christ. It does not mean we won't have afflictions, but they will be put in a perspective that permits us to deal with them. With our steady pursuit of joy and with each increasing measure of righteousness, we will experience one more drop of delight—one drop after another—until, in the words of a prophet, 'our hearts are brim with joy.' At last, the soul's cup finally runs over!" (*Brim with Joy*, 13).

In Alma, Mormon explains five important messages of eternal worth, each heralded by the phrase "**Thus we see.**"

The first one: **THUS WE SEE** that it is possible for sinners to change and remain firm in the change.

Alma 24:19: "And **thus we see** that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace (This is a typo by Mormon which he corrected), or they buried the weapons of war, for peace."

The second: **THUS WE SEE** that the Lord allows tragedies because they will work for the salvation of others.

Alma 24:27: "And there was not a wicked man slain among them; but there were more than a thousand brought to the knowledge of the truth; **thus we see** that the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people."

The third: none of those who laid down next to their dead enemies were Amalekites or Amulonites: **THUS WE CAN PLAINLY DISCERN** that when people have the gospel and leave it behind, they become more hardened than before.

Alma 24:30: "And **thus we can plainly discern**, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things

The fourth: **THUS WE SEE** how man is led astray by the power of the devil

Alma 28:13: And **thus we see** how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men.

The fifth: **THUS WE SEE** shows men working for the Lord, the sorrow of destruction countered by the joy of Christ.

Alma 28:14: And **thus we see** the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord; and **thus we see** the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life.

4. Conclusion

Dallin H. Oaks: "The Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. . . We qualify for eternal life through a process of conversion. . . . The conversion He required for those who would enter the kingdom of heaven was far more than just being converted to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel. To testify is to **KNOW** and to **DECLARE**. The gospel challenges us to be "converted," which requires us to **DO** and to **BECOME**.

Now is the time for each of us to work toward our personal conversion, toward becoming what our Heavenly Father desires us to become. The conversion we must achieve requires us to be a good husband and father or a good wife and mother. Being a successful Church leader is not enough . . . We are challenged to move through a process of conversion toward that status and condition called eternal life. This is achieved not just by doing what is right, but by doing it for the right reason—for the pure love of Christ. Charity, "the pure love of Christ," is not an act but a condition or state of being. Charity is attained through a succession of acts that result in a conversion. Charity is something one becomes." ("The Challenge to Become," General Conference, October, 2000)

Neal A. Maxwell: "*Desire* denotes a real longing or craving. Hence righteous desires are much more than passive preferences or fleeting feelings. Of course our genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability...Mostly, brothers and sisters, we become the victims of our own wrong desires...Like it or not, therefore, reality requires that we acknowledge our responsibility for our desires...Righteous desires need to be relentless, therefore, because, said President Brigham Young, 'the men and women who desire to obtain seats in the celestial kingdom will find that they must battle every day' (*Journal of Discourses* 11:14). Therefore, true Christian soldiers are more than weekend warriors...Some of our present desires, therefore, need to be diminished and then finally dissolved" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 21-22).