

Book of Mormon 22
Have Ye Received His Image in Your Countenance
(Alma 5-7)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background)

I. The people's hearts turned to the vain things of the world.

A. *This changed the way they treated each other.* Pride and envy developed and caused many to mock and persecute others. Therefore Alma devoted his work entirely to preaching.

II. Alma, in contrast to priestcraft, **used the true priesthood which comes from God.**

A. His consecration as priest had come from his father [who possessed the priesthood as passed down from the past, even though most of Noah's priests had become corrupt].

B. Thus he had power and authority from God Himself to preach true doctrine and to establish churches.

III. **In one of the most moving sermons of all scripture, Alma challenges the people to search their hearts with the following powerful questions.**

A. "Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that [God] has delivered your souls from hell?" (Alma 5:6).

B. Even more powerful: **"Have ye received His image in your countenance?"** (Alma 5:14).

IV. A classic example of how we obtain God's image in our countenances is found in the story "The Refiner of Silver."

A. This anonymous story can be found online under that title on several different sites. Its **main point is that like silver which is refined in the heat of the furnace, we too can be refined through our trials if we allow impurities to be purged away.**

B. But we should not miss the most cogent point at the end: that **the way the silversmith knows if the silver is sufficiently refined is when he can see his image in the silver.**

C. Alma's question applies to the ultimate Refiner, the Lord, when he asks: "Have ye received His image in your countenance?"

D. Does this mean **His image should be seen**, not just in the cooled product when everything is over, **but at the time of greatest heat --- in the mirror-like molten silver?**

1. That is, Christ's image will be found upon us in the time of the most intense heat --- that is, when our trials are at their most intense peak.

2. This is very challenging. For the scriptures make clear that what was on the Savior's face in Gethsemane, during the scouring, and on the cross, was suffering and pain (D&C 19:17-19).

3. But when in Gethsemane He said, "Not my will but thine be done;" and on the cross said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43); and to the Father, "forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), **one knows His face of love broke through His face of pain.**

4. While our hurts may not completely vanish in the heat, with the Lord's help we can forgive and in other ways show love to those causing us hurt --- even in the time of the greatest pain.

V. Many of Alma's questions clearly show **the fallacy of those who teach God's grace will save men without requiring them to repent of their sins.**

A. "Can you imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?" (5:18).

B. "How shall you feel with your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness" (5:22).

C. "Do you suppose that [you can] sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham with all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?" (5:14).

D. We should recognize that the guilty, whose evil thoughts and acts can no longer be disguised, will never feel at peace among those who have become pure through repentance and faith in Christ.

VI. Alma's warnings about pride, envy and mockery are **made particularly potent by using the strong active verb "stripped."** "Stripped" means that every single shred has been totally removed. His warning that those without such "stripping" are not prepared to meet God is profound.

A. "Are ye stripped of pride? I say if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God" (v. 28).

"Are ye stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared" (v. 29).

"Is there one among you who doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?" (v. 30).

"Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved! Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity: repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!" (Verses 31- 32). What power is in all these words!

B. President Dieter Uchtdorf's talk at April General Conference 2012 shows that the same things Alma warned the members of in his day are also of great concern to the brethren in our day. **For surely the great burden of the brethren is to prepare us to meet God, as Christ's Second Coming draws ever closer and closer.**

"This topic of judging others could actually be taught in a two-word sermon. When it comes to hating, gossiping, ignoring, ridiculing, holding grudges, or wanting to cause harm, please apply the following: **Stop it!**" An underlying theme of his talk is that harsh words kill.

C. President Gordon B. Hinckley shared the following sad events, which shows that pride and mockery are too often found among members of our day.

"I have permission to tell you the story of a young man who grew up in our community. He was not a member of the Church. He and his parents were active in another faith. He recalls that when he was growing up, some of his LDS associates belittled him, made him feel out of place, and poked fun at him.

"He came to literally hate this Church and its people. He saw no good in any of them.

"Then his father lost his employment and had to move. In the new location, at the age of 17, he was able to enroll in college. There, for the first time in his life, he felt the warmth of friends, one of whom, named Richard, asked him to join a club of which he was president. He writes: 'For the first time in my life someone wanted me around. I didn't know how to react, but thankfully I joined. ... It was a feeling that I loved, the feeling of having a friend. I had prayed for one my whole life. And now after 17 years of waiting, God answered that prayer.'"

"At the age of 19 he found himself as a tent partner with Richard during their summer employment. He noticed Richard reading a book every night. He asked what he was reading. He was told that he was reading the Book of Mormon. He adds: 'I quickly changed the subject and

went to bed. After all, that is the book that ruined my childhood. I tried forgetting about it, but a week went by and I couldn't sleep. Why was he reading it every night? I soon couldn't stand the unanswered questions in my head. So one night I asked him what was so important in that book. What was in it? He handed me the book. I quickly stated that I never wanted to touch the book. I just wanted to know what was in there. He started to read where he had stopped. He read about Jesus and about an appearance in the Americas. I was shocked. I didn't think that the Mormons believed in Jesus."

Richard asked him to sing in a stake conference choir with him. The day came and the conference started. "Elder Gary Coleman from the First Quorum of the Seventy was the guest speaker. I found out during the conference that he [was a convert]. At the end Richard proceeded to pull me by the arm up to talk to him. I finally agreed, and as I was approaching him he turned and smiled at me. I introduced myself and said that I wasn't a member and that I had just come to sing in the choir. He smiled and said he was happy that I was there and stated that the music was great. I asked him how he knew the Church was true. He told me a short version of his testimony and asked if I had read the Book of Mormon. I said no. He promised me that the first time I read it, I would feel the Spirit."

"On a subsequent occasion this young man and his friend were traveling. Richard handed him a Book of Mormon and asked that he read it aloud. He did so, and suddenly the inspiration of the Holy Spirit touched him.

"Time passed and his faith increased. He agreed to be baptized. His parents opposed him, but he went forward and was baptized a member of this Church.

"His testimony continues to strengthen. Only a few weeks ago he was married to a beautiful Latter-day Saint girl for time and eternity in the Salt Lake Temple. Elder Gary J. Coleman performed his sealing.

"That is the end of the story, but there are great statements in that story. One is the sorry manner in which his young Mormon associates treated him." (*The Ensign* May 2006).

As Alma warned, "O ye workers of iniquity, ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to know him... whose sheep are you? (v. 37-39) If a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd" (v. 41).

VI. Alma warned we are guilty of iniquity when we turn our backs on the poor and needy and withhold our substance from them (Alma 5:55). Conversely, we **are blessed when we do reach out.**

My granddaughter Angela served an internship in Romania. She was one of fifteen young woman sponsored by BYU to assist in orphanages and hospitals.

She shared precious feelings of what it was like to serve the poor and needy in this land so bereft of both material and spiritual blessings, where almost no one smiles. She wrote:

"The past few days have been really challenging. Although I knew it would be hard, working at the orphanage and hospital has been even more challenging than I thought. The first day at the orphanage I was in the isolation unit holding all of the tiny babies and kids who are really sick. I found myself crying half of the time, just shocked at the situation. There were just too many kids to adequately take care of; there was no way that we could give all of them the proper attention that they needed. We were singing them primary songs, but we discovered just how many of those songs are centered on parents and families. When singing "I am a Child of God" to try to cope with the situation and bring the kids the spirit, I started crying even harder at the line, 'has given me an earthly home with parents kind and dear.'"

“It’s so hard to think that they will never have two loving parents who care for them more than anything, and who would always be there for them and would do anything for them. They have to face the world completely alone! Yet they are so kind and sweet. It was really hard because there were so many kids that as soon as you picked up one, another would start crying!

"Today I went to the hospital after the orphanage, and we went into the intensive care unit. There were four orphan babies, one only a few days old. Once again as I held them and sang them primary songs I couldn’t stop the tears from welling up and spilling over a little. However, we changed the one line in ‘I am a Child of God’ [about parents] to ‘with angels standing near.’”

“I feel like I’ve learned to love more deeply than I ever have before.”

Finally, it is also by serving the neediest, in pure love, that we can absorb “His image into our countenance.”