

D&C Lesson #19

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

by Ted Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Hugh Nibley gave an interesting insight in to the plan of salvation as he reported and commented on a gospel conversation between Peter and Clement, one of the early Christians:

It is like manna from heaven when this Clement has his first gospel conversation with Peter . . . Peter compares the world in which we live to a great house filled with dense smoke--blinding smoke produced by human unbelief, malice, ambition, greed, etc. Because of this smoke, the people who live in the house can see nothing clearly, but we must imagine them groping about with weak and running eyes, coughing and scolding, bumping into each other, tripping over furniture, trying to make out a bit of reality here and there--a corner, a step, a wall--and then trying to fit their desperate and faulty data together to make some kind of sense

There is only one possible way to get any sure knowledge either of the building or its builder, and that is to consult one who has come from the pure air of the outside where he has viewed the house with clear detachment and spoken with its builder. Such a clear view comes only by revelation and can only be conveyed to men, Peter insists again and again, by a true prophet. (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.3, Ch.2, p.10-11)

We live in a world in which correct knowledge of the purpose of the creation and of life is a rare commodity. Philosophers and clerics have preached and postulated for hundreds of years over the meaning of mortality. But their musings, without the light of revelation, have always come short of the fulness of truth because they were trying to describe a house in which they could see nothing clearly—trying to diagram the function of a great room from unexpected and often painful contact with scattered pieces of furniture.

One of the great blessings of the restoration was the understanding revealed to

men through a prophet of the meaning of mortality and the divine purposes of the Creator. The Doctrine and Covenants shows us the blueprint of our existence—the plan of salvation,

1. THE PLAN OF SALVATION IS “ONE OF HEAVEN’S BEST GIFTS TO MANKIND.”

The great plan of salvation is a theme which ought to occupy our strict attention, and be regarded as one of heaven's best gifts to mankind. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Two 1834–37, p.67*)

I have occasionally begun a course of study in one of my Institute or Seminary classes by presenting a couple of volunteer students with a box of assorted and unrelated materials: such as a pencil or two, a pair of scissors, a book, a brick or a rock, some pieces of paper or cardboard, etc. Without any explanation, I have called the students to the front, given them the box, and told them they have two minutes. Then, I have looked at my watch and said, “Ready? Go!” Sometimes they begin to build, employing their imaginations and the materials to make *something*. On other occasions, they stand by the box staring at me, waiting for or requesting further instructions. This is precisely the situation in which most of the world finds itself. People have attempted to create a coherent structure out of disparate data without instructions or a clear picture of the purpose of the activity. But The Lord has consistently revealed the “Plan” to his prophets. Certainly this is the meaning of Moses 1 and Abraham 3:21-28 and Moses 7:21 ff. It is probably what is happening in 1 Nephi 1:8-12 and Ephesians 1 also.

This truly is a matter that ought to occupy our “strict attention.” We need to insure that our families understand the plan. Regular family home evenings ought to be devoted to explaining the “great plan of happiness” to toddlers and teenagers at a level they can comprehend.

2. PREMORTAL LIFE

As Elder Packer explained, life is like a three-act play. The acts are (1) the premortal life; (2) mortal life; and (3) life after death. The doctrine of or premortality is one of the truly unique characteristics of the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints. An absence of understanding of this part of our existence makes comprehension of what is happening now and what will happen later impossible. Yet even in the Church we may not always give sufficient emphasis to the influence of our premortal lives on what is happening here. Elder McConkie taught:

Is it inappropriate to ask: Why are there different races of men? Why is there a white, a yellow, and a black race? In the days of Israel's first bondage, why did the Lord send some spirits in the lineage of enslaved Jacob and others to their Egyptian overlords? Why were some spirits sent to earth among the Amalekites, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, while others at the same moments found birth in the house of Israel? Why was Antipas sent as the son of a debauched and evil Herod, while John the Baptist came into the home of a priestly Zacharias and a saintly Elisabeth?

All of these things operate by law; they are the outgrowth of long years of personal preparation in preexistence on the part of each individual; they come to pass according to the laws that the Lord has ordained. This second estate is a continuation of our first estate; we are born here with the talents and capacities acquired there. Abraham was one of the noble and great spirits in the premortal life. He was chosen for his mortal ministry and position before he was born, and as with the father of the faithful so with all of the spirits destined to be born as his seed. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p. 512)

D&C 38:1 makes it clear that we were with the Savior before the world was made, for he looked upon "all the seraphic hosts of heaven." He also looked upon the "wide expanse of eternity" there. This is powerful evidence of the infallibility of the plan.

We know from the revelations that:

- T We have always existed in some form (D&C 93:29)
- T We were begotten there as children of god (D&C 76:24)
- T Gender is a premortal characteristic (Proclamation on the Family, paragraph 2)

- T The earth was created as a place to prove us (Ab. 3:24,25)
- T We met in council and listened to the Father's plan and then to an opposing plan presented by Lucifer (D&C 76:25; Moses 4:1,3)
- T One third part of the Father's children destined for this earth followed Lucifer in his rebellion and were cast out with him (D&C 2:36-38; Rev.12:4; Ab. 3:128)
- T The faithful responded with joy and gladness to the opportunities and challenges offered us by this mortal existence (Job 38:4-7)

If you will find a safety pin or a straight pin and poke your hand, you will feel something (don't do it! I'm just making a point!). The fact that you have a body and can feel pain makes it pretty clear which course you selected in that premortal counsel. What a tragedy it would be if you made a choice in a place where you could see clearly and with your eyes wide open, and then changed your mind here, where you can only see "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12)

3. MORTAL LIFE

Have you given careful thought and study to the question of why we are here on this tiny, fertile rock orbiting around a small star in a insignificant corner of the universe? What is there about this experience that is so valuable that we had to leave the presence of the Father? All of us know students who have gone away to school. But they have mailboxes and telephones and a chance to visit on vacations. We have something like the telephone, of course, and our scriptures are very much like letters of love and counsel from home, but we are cut off from the presence of God in a very real way. Why was that necessary? Why did we have to be in a place where we could act from faith rather than sight and knowledge? A parable from Elder Oaks suggests a reason:

All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I have I can easily give you, but that which I am you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours. (*Ensign*, Nov. 2000, p. 32)

Many of you will remember classroom experiences from elementary and secondary schools in which you or others around you acted differently when the teacher was out of the room. As we prove our worthiness for the blessings of Godhood and exaltation, we do so with the teacher out of the room—indeed, with our memory of the teacher veiled and shadowed by our mortality. Thus we act out of agency rather than coercion.

In this mortal probation it is the design and purpose of the Lord to test us: to see if we will believe in him and obey his laws now that we no longer dwell in his presence, hear his voice, and see his face. He already knows how we respond—what we believe and how we act—when we walk by sight. Now he is testing our devotion to him when we walk by faith: when his presence is veiled, his voice is afar off, and his face is seen by few men only. (Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *the Promised Messiah*, p. 84)

Elder James E. Talmage reported in this way:

This life is oftentimes, and very properly, referred to as a probation. "And we will prove them" the Lord says, putting us upon test, to see whether we will exercise our agency in choosing to do whatsoever the Lord our God requires of us. The Lord wants to know about that. Perhaps His foreknowledge shows the result to Him, but it is necessary that we demonstrate it. There is much work ahead of us, and the Lord desires to know whom He can trust with authority and power beyond the grave, so this probationary period has been provided that we may prove and demonstrate beyond all question as to whether we can be trusted, as to whether we shall be entitled to the welcome: Well done; you have been faithful over what may have seemed to be a few things, and perhaps relatively small things, but you have been proved and you have shown that you can be trusted with many and greater things. (C.R., October 1929, p. 66)

4. LIFE AFTER DEATH

A spirit world awaits us when we depart from this sphere. Where is it? Right here.

When you lay down this tabernacle, where are you going? Into the spiritual world. Are you going into Abraham's bosom? No, not anywhere nigh there but into the spirit world. Where is the spirit world? It is right here. Do the good and evil spirits go together? Yes, they do. Do they both inhabit one kingdom? Yes, they do. Do they go to the sun? No. Do they go beyond the boundaries of the organized earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this earth, for the express purpose of inhabiting it to all eternity. Where else are you going? Nowhere else, only as you may be permitted. (JD, Vol. 3: p. 369)

We know from the revelations and the prophets much about what happens in the world of spirits. We know that those who have kept their second estate rest there from their troubles and "labors." We know that the righteous elders are engaged in preaching the gospel (D&C 138:57)

Considerations relating to that work suggest some interesting conclusions. For example, how many people are there in the spirit world, compared to the numbers who are living as mortals on the earth? Where is the greater work being done? What is involved in moving a laborer from mortality to the spirit world?

In a talk given on February 2nd to employees of the Church Educational System, Elder Maxwell made some interesting comments about these matters. Two interesting quotes follow:

What we do here is so vital, but it is actually a preparation for our labors in paradise in the spirit world. The scope in that spirit world is ten times as large as the demographics of this world. It is, though, a place of peace, a place of intense devotion. One sees in section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants words that tell us about the character of God. Not only will the gospel go to those who have never heard of it, but also included are those who have been in transgression, in rebellion, and who have rejected the prophets. [Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Satellite Broadcast, 2 Feb. 2001—"Evening With a General Authority"]

We cannot control what I call "the great transfer board in the sky."

It's out of our control. And the inconveniences that are sometimes associated with release from labors here are necessary in order to accelerate the work there. Heavenly Father can't do His work with ten times more people than we have on this planet except He will on occasion take some of the very best sisters and brothers. And the conditions of termination here, painful though they are, are a part of the conditions of acceleration there. And we're back to faith and the timing of God. And to be able to say, "Thy will be done" (and I would paraphrase it, "Thy timing be done") is part of letting Him know we will be submissive in that situation too, even when we do not fully understand it. [Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Satellite Broadcast, 2 Feb. 2001—"Evening With a General Authority"]

All the children of God who have experienced mortality will be resurrected, their spirits and bodies forged into an eternal, unbreakable union capable of experiencing a fulness of joy in the presence of the Father. Some of course will not enjoy his presence. The lesson that follows this one will discuss the three degrees of glory.

CONCLUSION: The plan provided by our Father and implemented by his Son must be a primary consideration in every significant decision. If the primary purpose of this life is to make it possible for us to journey from where we were to where we longed to be, then an awareness of that journey must be a fundamental factor in every thing we do.

It is clear that the Lord had a plan laid out for the accomplishment of His purposes. In the scriptures we read of the many names of the plan: "the great plan of happiness," "the plan of redemption," "the merciful plan of the great Creator," "the plan of salvation," "the plan of justice," and "the great plan of the Eternal God."

Each name emphasizes one aspect or another of the plan. But in reality there is only one plan called by many names through which God means to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

Think of an airplane leaving the airport with the complete journey mapped out. The pilots and crew know where they are going, and they

won't get off course and fail to reach their destination once in 50,000 times, unless weather or mechanical troubles interfere. Now, imagine another airplane with a captain and crew but no flight plan. The engines are started, and the plane moves down the runway. Yet as it begins to climb, the crew doesn't know whether to turn east or to turn west. If you are on that airplane, you will have almost no chance of arriving at your destination. It is clear to each of us that an airplane crew needs a flight plan.

So it is with our lives. One cannot make wise long-range decisions unless one understands that there is purpose here and recognizes that he must understand at least some aspects of the merciful plan of the great Creator. (Our Destiny: Elder L. Aldin Porter, C.R., October 1999, p. 65)

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