

“THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST”

Reading: Isaiah 61:1-3; JST, Luke 3:4-11; JST, John 1:1-18; John 20:31
by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION:

This year the course of study for the Gospel Doctrine Sunday School class is the New Testament. How could we possibly determine the value of a record of the mortal ministry, messages, and sacrifices of the Messiah? The worth of this record to the welfare of mankind is beyond computation. We will have the sacred privilege of watching the majesty of the Redeemer through the eyes of men who followed him and loved him. We ought to begin the study and to begin every lesson with a prayer that we will both understand and believe their words . . . with a prayer that our lives will be changed by this experience.

And then, later in the year as we begin to study the ministry of those witnesses who went forth into all the known world to bear testimony of him, we will find the distillation of his teachings as they are applied to the common problems of all mankind.

I believe there are three purposes for these lessons: 1) to provide an additional resource for Gospel Doctrine Teachers throughout the Church; 2) to offer insights into the messages and meaning of the scriptures for those who attend Gospel Doctrine classes in their wards and branches but who desire to learn more; and 3) to provide a lesson for those who on rare occasions for one reason or another are unable to attend the Gospel Doctrine class in their ward or branch. This forum *should not* take the place of a regularly scheduled class in your ecclesiastical unit, held under the direction of your local priesthood leaders. I would be devastated to learn that someone had chosen these lessons over a Sunday School experience. LDSLiving, although a valuable resource in so many ways, is not one of the Lord's programs for the salvation of his children. Sunday School is.

Your study of the New Testament at this site will be greatly enhanced if you will have all of the standard works, along with a marking pencil, available as you peruse

these lessons. I would also encourage you to provide yourself with a *scripture journal*. If the scriptures are true, and they are, your study of them will be accompanied by the gentle whisperings of the Spirit. When such messages come, they ought to be recorded in a sacred place, and studied and treasured.

Powerful spiritual direction in your life can be overcome or forced into the background unless you provide a way to retain it . . . Knowledge carefully recorded is knowledge available in time of need. Spiritually sensitive information should be kept in a sacred place that communicates to the Lord how you treasure it. That practice enhances the likelihood of your receiving further light (Richard G. Scott, “Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 88).

There are dangers in not making a record at the time of the prompting. Elder Maxwell taught:

The prompting that goes unresponded to may not be repeated. Writing down what we have been prompted with is vital. A special thought can also be lost later in the day in the rough and tumble of life. God should not, and may not, choose to repeat the prompting if we assign what was given such a low priority as to put it aside. (*Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward*, p. 122.)

I do not have to wait till “later in the day” to lose those precious insights and that gentle direction that come. I have lost a priceless particle of revelation in the time it takes me to find the book I want to write it in.

President Hinckley gave this counsel about the messages of General Conference, but his words can be applied to our study of the scriptures:

Perhaps out of all we have heard, there may be a phrase or a paragraph that will stand out and possess our attention. If this occurs, I hope we will write it down and reflect on it until we savor the depth of its meaning and have made it a part of our own lives (*Ensign*, Nov. 2001, p. 88)

One final thought about this:

Some people say, “I don’t have anything to record. Nothing spiritual happens to me.” I say, “Start recording, and spiritual things will happen. They are there all the time, but we become more sensitive to them as we write” (John H. Groberg, “Writing Your Personal and Family History,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 48).

So, “If you have not already commenced this important duty in your lives, get a good notebook, a good book that will last through time and into eternity for the angels to look upon” (Spencer W. Kimball, “President Kimball Speaks Out on Personal Journals,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1980, 61). Start today and make it a part of your scripture experience. You will be richly blessed for doing so.

I would be delighted to hear from you with ideas or suggestions. Criticism will also be welcome. Please let me know what you like and don’t like and what kinds of things would increase the usefulness of this presentation.

You can e-mail me at tedgibbons@yahoo.com.

I would also be delighted receive a casual note from you. I cannot tell from my study and computer keyboard who is out there and what use is being made of these lessons. A quick note will always be welcome. If you are so inclined, let me know where you live and how you use this material.

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And so we begin. In any attempt to study the scriptures, particularly a study that is limited in both space and time as this one is, one of the great challenges of teaching is to decide *what to teach*. It is always useful to extract from the text the fundamental principles of a volume before beginning to teach its contents, so that appropriate focus can be given to the things that matter most. An editor in Chicago made an attempt to distill the central message and bragged that he had reduced the entire New Testament into one paragraph. He knew that in the New Testament, the major focus belongs on the Savior. Here is the paragraph:

HE WAS BORN. HE LIVED. HE DIED. HE’S COMING BACK, AND HE’S
NOT VERY HAPPY!

I. THE SAVIOR DETAILS THE SPECIFIC THINGS HE HAS BEEN CALLED AND ANOINTED TO ACCOMPLISH.

The ministry of the Savior did not begin when he was born. The ancient scriptures are filled with the words and actions of Jehovah, the pre-mortal Messiah, and with prophecies of the events that would transpire when he came to earth as the mortal Son of God, and when he came again as the Eternal Judge. Turn in your scriptures to Isaiah 61:1-3. No Old Testament prophet said more about the mortal ministry of Christ than Isaiah. These verses are a wonderful example of the powerful vision Isaiah had of the ministry of Christ. Mark in your scriptures the phrases that describe the things the Savior was called to do for his people. These are the items I marked.

- “Preach good tidings unto the meek”
- “Bind up the brokenhearted”
- “Proclaim liberty to the captives”
- “The opening of the prison to them that are bound”
- “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance”
- “To comfort all that mourn”
- “To give . . . beauty for ashes”
- “To give . . . the oil of joy for mourning”
- “To give . . . the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”

Can you recall examples from the Savior’s ministry of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s words? Try to find examples in your own life or in the lives of those close to you of the fulfillment of these prophetic promises.

At the beginning of his ministry, the Savior quoted this passage from Isaiah in his own home town of Nazareth in order to declare unmistakably that he was indeed the Messiah.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to

heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him (Luke 4:16-20)

This passage was a familiar one to the Jews. They accepted it as a Messianic prophecy and looked forward to its fulfillment.

When Jesus took His seat the people knew that He was about to expound the text, and "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him." The scripture He had quoted was one recognized by all classes as specifically referring to the Messiah, for whose coming the nation waited. The first sentence of our Lord's commentary was startling; it involved no labored analysis, no scholastic interpretation, but a direct and unambiguous application: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" ([Luke 4:21]: Daniel H. Ludlow: *A Companion to Your Study of the New Testament*, preface).

Jesus announced, *I am your Messiah*. The people were astonished. They knew him and his family and his siblings. "Is not this Joseph's son?" they said. Christ rebuked them for their unbelief, and they tried to kill him (see Luke 4:24-30).

What aspect of his calling, not mentioned by Isaiah, did the Savior announce in Luke 4:18,19? (Recovering of sight to the blind) The most common miracle of the Savior's ministry was restoring sight to those who were physically blind. But restoration of "sight" has other applications. What blindness does Jacob 4:14 refer to? Review Moses 4:4 and 3 Nephi 2:2. Satan's efforts can only succeed in an absence of light—that is, in an environment of "blindness." What does Jesus offer as an antidote for Lucifer's blindness? (John 8:12)

If we allow the Savior to fulfill his calling in our lives, what does Isaiah 61:3 suggest we will become?

. . . that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

What do you think Isaiah means by “trees of righteousness” and “the planting of the Lord”?

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST DESCRIBED THE CALLING AND MISSION OF THE SAVIOR.

Isaiah was only prophet who spoke of the various responsibilities associated with the calling of the Redeemer. Turn in your scriptures to Luke 3:4-11 in the Joseph Smith Translation Appendix on pages 805-806 at the back of the LDS edition of the King James Bible. Review those things mentioned by John that the Savior was called to do. Once again, mark the significant phrases. You might wish to cross-reference Luke 4:18-19 to JST Luke 3:4-11,

- To take away the sins of the world
- To bring salvation unto the heathen nations
- To gather together those who are lost
- To prepare the way and make possible the preaching of the Gospel unto the Gentiles
- To be a light unto all who sit in darkness
- To bring to pass the resurrection
- To ascend up on high
- To dwell on the right hand of the Father
- To administer justice to all
- To come down in judgement upon all
- To convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds
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Once again, contemplate events from the Savior’s life which indicate that he fulfilled his callings.

III. JOHN TESTIFIES OF THE SAVIOR’S PRE-MORTAL STATUS AND FOREORDINATION.

Look at the beginning verses of each of the Gospels.

- At what point does Mark begin his discussion of the Savior’s ministry? (baptism)
- At what point do Matthew and Luke begin their accounts? (birth)

- Now turn to John 1:1-18 in the JST. At what point does John begin his account.

We may not be certain why the writers of the Gospels commenced their records in the places they chose, but it seems to be important that at least one of the them tells us that the Savior was called and ordained before his baptism and even before his birth. What disadvantages would we have in our understanding of the Savior's ministry and calling without John's explanation? What additional understanding does John give us about the blessings the Messiah would bring to the children of his Father?

- The gospel and the plan of salvation were preached in the pre-mortal world. (JST John 1:1)
- All things were made by him (JST John 1:3)
- He is the light and life of the world (JST John 1:3,4)
- The world was made by him (JST John 1:10)
- To those who received him he gives power to become the sons and daughters of God (JST John 1:12)
- He was the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (JST John 1: 14)
- He gives us the fullness of immortality and eternal life (JST John 1: 16)
- Life and truth come through Jesus Christ (JST John 1: 17)

According to John 20:31, what are the two purposes of the Gospel records?

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

It seems important that we reflect on these two purposes each time we open the scriptures to study the life of the Savior. We should grow in our belief in him and that growth should impel us receive the blessings that his life has made possible for us. As we do this, we can begin to "see" the Savior in the walk and talk of his mortal life, an understanding that can occur more powerfully in the New Testament than in any other scripture.

CONCLUSION: During the final Passover of the Savior's mortal life, and near the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, certain Greeks who had come to the feast

made a special request of the Apostle Philip. “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:20,21) What would have caused them to make a request like this? Perhaps a part of this answer is found in Isaiah 25:1. Why was Isaiah willing to exalt the Lord and praise the Lord’s name? Because he had done “wonderful things.” In Isaiah 9:6, what is the first of the many names Isaiah ascribes to the Savior? It must have been the report of these “wonderful things” that caused the Greeks in John 12 to seek the opportunity to “see Jesus.”

Of course the Greeks were not the only ones who felt this longing to see Christ. After the Savior had called Philip, Philip found Nathaniel and testified to him that he had found the long-awaited Messiah. When Nathaniel expressed reservations, Philip said, “come and see” (John 1:46). When the Samaritan woman returned to the city after her meeting with Christ at the well, what did she invite the people of the city to do? (John 4:29) Turn to Luke 19:1-3. What did Zacchaeus the publican seek?

This invitation is the invitation is the invitation of this course of study. “Come and see” the Savior as he lives and loves and heals and rebukes and challenges and forgives and saves. Come and see his disciples as they carry on this work of immortality and eternal life. As we immerse ourselves in the stories of his life, we will discover a great desire in our own hearts to “see” him.

Brigham Young said:

The greatest and most important of all requirements of our Father in Heaven and of his son Jesus Christ is . . . to believe in Jesus Christ, confess him, seek him, cling to him, make friends with him.

Take a course to open and keep open a communication with . . . our Savior (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:339)

Many years ago a young lady wrote these words as she began a study of the New Testament. The question to which she was responding is the one found in Matthew 22:42: “What think ye of Christ?”

I know quite a bit about Christ and I really believe that he is my Savior, but more than anything else in life right now I want to get to know

Jesus as a brother and I want to be his friend. I have thought about Christ a lot lately and I know that somehow I have got to gain a testimony so that I know for myself that he lives. (CB, September 9, 1978)

At the end of a year studying, she responded again to the same question. She wrote this:

I hardly know where to begin. Jesus Christ is the most important [person] in my life. I know, without a doubt, that he lives, that he is the Son of God and that he loves me with a most complete and perfect love.

This past . . . year I have grown so much! I have learned about the Savior's life, his mission, and all the things he taught. But most important, I have come to know that Christ lives. He is a real person with feelings, and personality. I love him very, very much and I hope I always will. I know that if I will just live the teachings that he taught, I will never have to wonder and doubt again. (CB, May 19, 1979)

I hope that your experience can be like that. I pray that as you contemplate and review the calling of the Savior and the wonderful things that he has done, that you will have a great desire to "come and see" him, and that the fruit of that desire will be an abiding and burning testimony that will sustain you through every challenge and difficulty of life.

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