

NT LESSON #13

“I WILL GIVE UNTO THEE THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM”

Matthew 15:21-17:9

Introduction: Elder LeGrand Richards related the following account:

The story is told that there was a new minister who moved into the community where Thomas Carlisle lived, and he went to the office of Carlisle and asked this question: “What do the people of this community need more than anything else?” And Carlisle’s answer was: “They need a man who knows God other than by hearsay.” (Improvement Era, June 1958, p. 98)

This need is the need of the world—all mankind waits breathlessly or blindly for someone who can truthfully say “I know.” Only one other thing is needed to enable such a man to stand in the place of God and speak the words of God and do the work of God: authority. What a blessing we enjoy as we follow those who can say I know and who can then act with the power and approval of God..

In lesson #13 we will visit people who knew Christ *other than by hearsay*. We will observe the Pharisees and Sadducees as they demand a sign, and we will watch the Savior feed four thousand. Finally, we will stand on the Mount of Transfiguration and watch as Jesus bestows the power on his disciples.

I. JESUS HEALS THE DAUGHTER OF A GENTILE AND FEEDS MORE THAN 4000 PEOPLE.

In John 5:16 we learn that the Jews were trying to kill the Savior. In John 6, after the remarkable “Bread of Life” sermon, many of his disciples abandoned him (John 6:66) Not long after, perhaps looking for a more receptive audience,

Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:22-24).

This interaction has been the subject of much interesting commentary from teachers and leaders in the Church.

Our Savior, himself, declared on occasions that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His teachings were confined almost entirely to the ministry among the Jews, one notable exception being his conversation with the woman of Samaria at the well, but this seemed to be incidental. His language seems harsh towards the woman of Canaan, when he said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs," but being struck by her great faith as expressed in her answer, he had compassion on her, and granted her prayer. The reason our Savior did not carry his message to other peoples than the Jews is due to the fact that the times of the Gentiles had not arrived in which they were to participate in the gospel. After his resurrection he commissioned his disciples and said unto them: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Restoration of All Things*, p.161).

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's

bread, and to cast it to dogs.

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table (Matt 15:24-27).

The verbal exchange between this woman and the Master is without scriptural parallel.

Unto the woman of Canaan, whom, seeking mercy for her stricken daughter, the disciples would have driven away, Jesus said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she came worshipping, craving the healing of her daughter. Jesus said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." *Then came from the Canaanite, one not of the chosen seed, the one reply made to him in all his recorded ministry that successfully challenged one of his own sayings: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."* Deeply touched, Jesus answered: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour"

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life*, p.154).

On several occasions Elder McConkie commented on this woman and her meeting with the Lord.

"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt," Jesus said." And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." The woman of Canaan triumphed; hers were not only the crumbs, but she ate of the children's bread; by faith she was adopted into the house of Israel. At Jesus' invitation she now came from without and joined those within. She was no longer a Gentile; she was now a daughter of Abraham (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.3, p.13).

From the day Israel was led out of Egypt and established as a nation until the ministry of their Messiah among them, the blessings of salvation were reserved almost exclusively for them. During that entire time the aliens had no claim upon Jehovah and his goodness. He was the God of Israel alone in the true sense of the word. But even then such Gentiles as took the yoke of the law upon them became Israelites by adoption and were blessed equally with the natural seed of Abraham. "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, the Lord commanded, "and thou shalt love him as thyself." (Lev. 19:34).

Jesus made himself subject to this same law during his mortal ministry. With minor exceptions he confined his ministerial labors to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." During a brief stay near Gentile Tyre and Sidon, he withheld his healing goodness from "a woman of Canaan" until she importuned with exceedingly great faith. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs," he said. (Matt. 15:21-28.) During a short visit to the half Jew, half-Gentile area of Decapolis, he proclaimed the gospel to all who there abode. But the great burden of his labors were with the Jews only. And when he sent the Twelve forth, they were similarly restricted. "Go not into the way of the Gentiles," he said, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5-6) (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, p.235,236).

This part of his ministry has taken the Savior through Decapolis (Mark 7:31), a largely Gentile area

And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were] lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel (Matthew 15:21-31).

Here is Elder McConkie again.

Jesus, Matthew tells us, "went up into a mountain, and sat down there." Hearing of this miracle, knowing of other wondrous things attributed to him, and, no doubt, having heard him speak words of infinite wisdom in their hearing, "great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them."

Were there Gentiles as well as Jews among those restored to health and vigor? The people of the area were made up of both cultures; and, as we have seen, in the case of the Syro-Phoenician woman who pled for the crumbs that fall from Israel's table, the compassion of the Great Healer, following great faith, extends beyond the children of the kingdom and takes in the Gentiles who are without. Matthew says simply: "The multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel." [Matthew 15:30-31] It is, thus, the same thing we have seen before in Galilee where Israel dwelt. The new dimension here is not what was done, but those upon whom the blessings were showered.

"Let us try to realize the scene. They have heard of Him as the wonder-worker, these heathens in the land so near to, and yet so far from, Israel; and they have brought to Him 'the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others,' and laid them at His feet. Oh, what wonder! All disease vanishes in the presence of Heaven's Own Life Incarnate. Tongues long weighted are loosed, limbs maimed or bent by disease are restored to health, the lame are stretched straight; the film of disease and the paralysis of

nerve-impotence pass from eyes long insensible to the light. It is a new era—Israel conquers the heathen world, not by force, but by love; not by outward means, but by the manifestation of life-power from above. Truly, this is the Messianic conquest and reign: ‘and they glorified the God of Israel.’ (Edersheim 2:46) (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.3, p.15,16).

We have the blessing to live in a day when for the first time in recorded history all of the blessings of the gospel are available for everybody. This really is a time when “all that will hear, may hear.” (D&C 1:11) Ancient disciples might have had the option of focusing their attention on Israelites alone—those that fit their pre-conceived notions of what a disciple ought to be. We do not have that same privilege. We are to offer the gospel to everyone, the only limiting factors being their willingness and their faith. Wherever we find an audience, we must open our mouths. [see D&C 24:12] Whenever we find a hungry people, we must feed them. Surely this is part of the message of the feeding of the 4000.

Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. (Matthew 15:32-38)

This miraculous feeding of the four thousand is not a mere duplication or repetition of the feeding of the five thousand which took place a short time before near Bethsaida. Then our Lord was mingling with his own kindred of Israel; now he is teaching other hosts who in substantial part, being inhabitants of Decapolis, are presumed to be Gentile. Then he was laying the foundation for his incomparable sermon on the Bread of Life; now he is prefiguring the future presentation of the living bread to the Gentile nations. And significantly, this mixed multitude from the east of the Jordan were more receptive, and took a more sane and sound view of the matchless miracle of feeding thousands by use of the creative powers resident in him, than did the members of the chosen seed (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol.1, p.375).

2. THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES SEEK A SIGN

The Pharisees and Sadducees now came to the Savior, demanding that he show them a sign—some supernatural evidence to support his claims of divinity and authority. Of course he refused. They had had signs enough, with his teaching and his miracles. His rebuke must have cut like a knife.

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed (Matthew 16:2-4).

“How is it,” the Savior seems to be asking, “that you can predict the weather from the color of the sky, but cannot perceive my calling and messiahship in spite of my miracles and my message?” So he promised them a sign that they

will have to acknowledge, whether they repent or not—the sign of the empty tomb, the sign of the resurrection, the sign of Jonas (Jonah).

And then he identified at least one of the conditions that made them so hard-hearted: They were, he says, adulterers. “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” Joseph Smith taught:

I will give you one of the Keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn other, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives. The principle is as correct as the one that Jesus put forth in saying that he who seeketh a sign is an adulterous person; and that principle is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven; for whenever you see a man seeking after a sign, you may set it down that he is an adulterous man (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Four 1839–42, p.156).

In this context consider Luke 16:16-23, JST Appendix.

And they said unto him, We have the law, and the prophets; but as for this man we will not receive him to be our ruler; for he maketh himself to be a judge over us.

Then said Jesus unto them, The law and the prophets testify of me; yea, and all the prophets who have written, even until John, have foretold of these days.

Since that time, the kingdom of God is preached, and every man who seeketh truth presseth into it.

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail.

And why teach ye the law, and deny that which is written; and

condemn him whom the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that ye might all be redeemed?

O fools! for you have said in your hearts, There is no God. And you pervert the right way; and the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence of you; and you persecute the meek; and in your violence you seek to destroy the kingdom; and ye take the children of the kingdom by force. Woe unto you, ye adulterers!

And they reviled him again, being angry for the saying, that they were adulterers.

But he continued, saying, Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her who is put away from her husband, committeth adultery. . . .

Jesus warned his disciples to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees. With that same excruciating literalness of which we spoke in Lesson 5, they assumed that he was concerned that they had forgotten to bring bread (see Matthew 16:6,7).

Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? (Matthew 16:8-10).

We ought to be able to perceive his meaning a little more quickly than they did. The leaven in verse 6 is explained as “doctrine” in verse 12. “Beware of the doctrine of people who cannot or will not see,” he is saying. How does leaven work?. When it is added to a batch of home-made bread, what happens? Why did the Savior choose this imagery? What is the danger from an organism that grows slowly but ultimately changes the entire content and

appearance of the thing it inhabits? “Beware” indeed. What “doctrine” would the Lord warn us about in our day?

PETER IS PROMISED THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

“Whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:13) If you were to make a list of the most important questions in the world, this would be at the top or very near it. Peter’s response is the response of a man who knows the Savior “other than by hearsay.” Peter, with typical boldness, answers for the Twelve: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” How did Peter know? What was the source of his certainty? Revelation from the Father himself.

A very long time ago as I read Alma 5 for one of the first times, I found an interesting declaration from Alma the Younger. After he bore his testimony to the citizens of Zarahemla, he asked,

. . . Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?
Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things
whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I
know of their surety? (Alma 5:45)

As I read this question, “how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?”, I was sure that I knew what was coming next. Alma was about to share his experience with the angel. He had seen a divine messenger. He had felt the ground shake from the power of his words. The angel had told him that the church Alma was trying to destroy was God’s church. What a foundation for a testimony! What a wonderful way to drive home the message that Alma KNEW!

But Alma said nothing about Angelic ministrations. Instead he told his listeners:

Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation

which is in me. (Alma 5:46)

Alma got his testimony just like Peter did, by divine revelation.

The Savior promised “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

(Matthew 16:19–note that in Matthew 18:18, Christ makes this promise to the rest of the Twelve)

The promise was fulfilled six days later when the Savior took Peter, James, and John “up into an high mountain apart.” (Matthew 17:1) The date is probably October, and about 6 months before the atonement. The mountain upon which the transfiguration occurred is not identified in the scriptures. The most likely candidates are Mt. Hermon near Caesarea Phillippi, and Mt. Tabor, several miles West of the south end of the Sea of Galilee. President Kimball visited Mt. Tabor in 1980, and suggested that he believed it to be the correct place. But what happened is much more important than where. These are some of the events that transpired in this holy place:

1. “And [Jesus] was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.” Luke 9:29 uses the word “glistening” to describe the raiment of the Savior. The three disciples saw him in his glory. Peter says they were “eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16) John says, “We beheld his glory.” (John 1:14)

2. Moses and Elias appeared and gave keys to Peter, James, and John. This is the fulfillment of the promise made the week before that the Lord would give Peter the keys of the kingdom. Elias here is Elijah. Elias is the Greek rendering of this Hebrew name. These two were both translated at the end of their mortal ministries so that they could lay physical hands on physical heads and restore priesthood keys.

Moses and Elijah were translated -- taken into heaven with physical bodies -- so they could return, with their bodies, to confer keys upon Peter, James, and John on the Mount of

Transfiguration. Of these two ancient prophets, President Joseph Fielding Smith says: "They had a mission to perform, and it had to be performed before the crucifixion of the Son of God, and it could not be done in the spirit. They had to have tangible bodies. Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection; therefore if any former prophets had a work to perform preparatory to the mission of the Son of God, or to the dispensation of the meridian of times, it was essential that they be preserved to fulfill that mission in the flesh. For that reason Moses disappeared from among the people and was taken up into the mountain, and the people thought he was buried by the Lord. The Lord preserved him so that he could come at the proper time and restore his keys, on the heads of Peter, James, and John, who stood at the head of the dispensation of the meridian of time. (Deut. 14:5-6; Alma 45:18-19.) He reserved Elijah from death that he might also come and bestow his keys upon the heads of Peter, James, and John and prepare them for their ministry (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.3, FOOTNOTES, p.67, 4.).

3. The disciples were transfigured.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Four 1839–42, p.158

The Priesthood is everlasting. The Savior, Moses, and Elias, gave the keys to Peter, James and John, on the mount,. when **THEY WERE TRANSFIGURED** before him (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Four 1839–42, p.158, emphasis added).

This transfiguration was a necessity for them to see the Savior in his glory. Moses testified:

“But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him.” (Moses 1:11)

4. The Father verified the supremacy of Christ over the two most important

Old Testament prophets. Moses and Elijah were regarded as the most influential of Old Testament personalities among the Jews, but the Father commanded the disciples, while these two were present, “this is my beloved Son, , in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” (Matthew 17:5)

5. The disciples may have received their endowments on the Mount. Joseph Fielding Smith declared:

The disciples in that day did have the keys for this work. These keys were given to Peter, James, and John on the mount when they received this power from Elias and Moses, the latter conferring the keys of the gathering of Israel. Christ told these three men, who I believe received their endowments on the mount, that they were not to mention this vision and what had taken place until after he was resurrected. Therefore, the exercise of this authority had to wait until Christ had prepared the way (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.2, p.165)

6. The disciples saw the earth in its transfigured state:

Nevertheless, he that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome, and shall receive an inheritance upon the earth when the day of transfiguration shall come; When the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount; of which account the fulness ye have not yet received. (D&C 63:20,21)

7. The three disciples heard the voice of God. (Matthew 17:5)

8. Moses and Elijah in some way helped prepare the Savior for his atonement: “And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9: 30,31—the JST tells us that they “spake of his death, and also his resurrection , which he should accomplish at Jerusalem”)

The similarities between this experience on the Mount of Transfiguration and

the events in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (see D&C 110) are striking and not coincidental. Again in this dispensation, priesthood keys were restored and men on earth empowered with the fulness of the priesthood to do the work of God.

CONCLUSION

The most important event recorded in New Testament scripture between the calling of the Apostles and the Atonement was almost certainly what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, even though the Savior commanded the mortal participants to “tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” (Matthew 17:9; Luke 9:36)

Peter, in one of his epistles, spoke briefly of this experience. Knowing, as he must have known, that unbelievers and scoffers would reject the work for a number of senseless reasons, he declared,

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice unto him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Peter, James, and John knew. It was not just that they had heard and believed. They knew. Independent of the witness of any other man, and in spite of the intellectual arguments of any non-believer, they knew. Like the experiences of the Nephites in 3 Nephi 11:14-16, they “had witnessed for themselves.” What they knew was beyond discussion or contention. They knew, “other than by hearsay.”

And in this context it is significant to notice what the Savior said to the Nephite eyewitnesses. He was speaking of the blessing that would come to them through their belief, and then he referred to their testimony which would span the years to come, bearing witness of the reality of the divinity of

the Son of God. He said,

And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in you words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me and know I am. Yea blessed are they who shall believe in your words . . ." (3 Nephi 12:2)

We may not have the same blessings as those who walked and talked with the Savior, and who saw him in his glory, but there are great blessings for us as well, if their testimony impels us to faith, repentance, and obedience.

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