

NT LESSON #19

**“THY FAITH HATH SAVED THEE”**

Luke 18:1-8, 35-43; 19:1-10; John 11

by Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:**

“Faith in Jesus Christ” is a term that often seems to be misunderstood in the kingdom. Only when we begin to talk of the *attributes* of Christ—his power, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his patience, his long-suffering—can we begin to understand the nature of our faith. Only then can our faith in him as the source of these needed blessings begin to transform us in Christlike beings worthy of exaltation. Thus the first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—faith in his willingness to love us and forgive us and help us and save us. In today’s discussion we will study events that, when understood and believed, will increase our faith in him

Consider the following statement by Elder McConkie, and as you review and ponder the scriptures and the topic of faith this week, ask yourself the important questions: how can I increase my faith? In which areas of obedience will increased righteousness and obedience enable me to increase my faith?

Faith is a gift of God bestowed as a reward for personal righteousness. It is always given when righteousness is present, and the greater the measure of obedience to God's laws the greater will be the endowment of faith. [Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.264]

**I. JESUS PRESENTS THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE AND THE WIDOW (LUKE 18:1-8)**

**[We can increase our faith by praying always]**

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying,  
Avenge me of mine adversary.

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though  
I fear not God, nor regard man;

5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her  
continual coming she weary me.

6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him,  
though he bear long with them?

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of  
man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

The purpose of this parable is clear: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." The directive to pray always is given often in the scriptures. The message here is not that our lives should be one continuous prayer, although the devotion of our thoughts, words, and deeds ought always to ascend to heaven like prayers. But what the Lord probably means here is that we should never stop praying. We should never "faint."

Speaking of this parable, Elder Talmage explained:

The judge was of wicked character; he denied justice to the widow, who could obtain redress from none other. He was moved to action by the desire to escape the woman's importunity. Let us beware of the error of comparing his selfish action with the ways of God. Jesus did not indicate that as the wicked judge finally yielded to supplication so would God do; but He pointed out that if even such a being as this judge, who "feared not God, neither regarded man," would at last hear and grant the widow's plea, no one should doubt that God, the Just and Merciful, will hear and answer. The judge's obduracy, though wholly wicked on his part, may have been ultimately advantageous to the widow. Had she easily obtained redress she might have become again unwary, and perchance a worse adversary than the first might have oppressed her. The Lord's purpose in giving the parable is specifically stated; it was "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

(James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p.436)

How long does it take to pray? Those who approach God with sincerity and real needs are not bound by constraints of time. They pray until they have accomplished the purposes of their prayers. Praying takes as long as it takes. For example . . .

During the early days of Church history, in the times of trial and turmoil, Heber C. Kimball sought lodging and food from a widowed member of the Church. She offered what she could: a meal and a room. When he went off to bed, an idea came to her, and she thought, "Here is my opportunity . . . I would like to find out what an apostle says when he prays to the Lord." She made her way quietly to her room and stood outside the closed door. She listened as Brother Kimball sat down on the bed. She heard the thump as each of his shoes hit the floor. The springs creaked as he leaned back on the bed. Then he spoke these words, "Oh Lord, bless Heber; he is so tired." (See Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "Are General Authorities Human?" *The New Era*, January 1973, p. 33)

Was this prayer long enough? Certainly it was, because it was the expression of an exhausted man who had spent his whole day in service, obedience, and, no doubt, prayer. Elder Kimball was not looking for an excuse not to pray, but making a commitment to meaningful prayer. Most of us have dozed off while praying, as Elder Kimball might have done had he gone on long enough, because we tried to immerse ourselves in the formalities of prayer when our bodies and minds were concerned only with being immersed in bed. Is it not better to pray briefly and meaningfully when we are exhausted, and then spend more time in the morning when we are rested and refreshed, than to stumble groggily through a litany of trite phrases and unexpected mental intrusions when we are so exhausted that our minds wander in every realm but the heavenly one?

Another example:

Enos wrote:

Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart. And my soul hungered . . .

Impelled by that hunger, Enos knelt and cried to his Maker.

I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens. (Enos 1:3,4)

Harold B. Lee, referring to this passage said,

I once read that scripture to a woman who laughed and said, “Imagine anybody praying all night and all day.” I replied, “My dear sister, I hope you never have to come to a time when you have a problem so great that you have to so humble yourself. I have; I have prayed all day and all night and all day the next day and all night the next night, not always on my knees, but praying constantly for a blessing that I needed most. (*The Improvement Era*, October 1966, p. 898)

Was this prayer too long? No. Prayer is not a matter of minutes but of meaning. Enos describes his prayer as “a wrestle” (Enos 1:2) and as “many long strugglings.” (Enos 1:11) Much of the time Enos spent must have been a pure wordless reaching, not upward as much as inward. It was not that Enos was trying to get God to answer his prayers, but that he was trying to get himself ready for whatever answer God might be willing to give.

Another example of this kind of praying comes from Joseph F. Merrill of the Twelve. He shared this story in April Conference of 1944.

When I was about ten years of age, I began to pray for a special blessing. But I did not get an answer . . . no answer came . . . and so I continued to pray, feeling that when I could make myself worthy of an answer, I would get it . . . In the latter part of August, 1887, in my nineteenth year, *after I had been praying nightly for nine long years with all the earnestness of my soul for this special blessing (emphasis added)*, I was alone in the bedroom, and I said, half aloud, “O Father, wilt thou not hear me?” I was beginning to get discouraged.

Then . . . something happened. The most glorious experience that I have received, came. In answer to my question I heard as distinctly as anything I ever heard in my life, the short, simple word, “Yes.” Simultaneously my whole being, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, was filled with the most joyous feeling of elation, of peace and certainty that I could imagine a human being could

experience. I sprang from my knees and jumped as high as I could, and shouted, “O Father, I thank thee.” At last an answer had come. I knew it. (*The Improvement Era*, May 1944, pp. 281, 282)

If we want to communicate with our Father in the way that the prophets and scriptures have promised, we must pray with faith—with enough faith to persevere until the answers come. We must recognize that what Joseph Smith said is true: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another,” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.345) As we persevere in praying with real intent, we demonstrate our faith. But more than that, our faith grows. As we converse with him and discover the reality and power of his continuous answers, our confidence in him will wax stronger. That is to say, we pray FROM faith, and we pray FOR faith.

## **II. A BLIND MAN DEMONSTRATES HIS FAITH AND IS HEALED BY JESUS**

35 ¶ And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:

36 And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

37 And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

39 And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

40 And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

41 Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

42 And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and

all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

This blind man on the Jericho road had never followed the Savior. He had never *seen* the Savior. But someone somewhere had told him that Jesus of Nazareth restored sight to the blind. Perhaps he had heard of the man born blind in John 9, or perhaps he had been visited by one of the blind ones who had been healed through the touch of the Lord (See Matt. 9:27-29; Matt. 12:22; Mark 8:22-24; etc) Somehow he had come to believe in the power of this miracle-worker from Galilee. He had heard enough to have faith that he could be healed. And he was healed, whereupon, he followed the Savior, “glorifying God.”

Our faith comes, and grows, in the same way, does it not? We hear, we hope, we believe, we experiment, we are healed spiritually, and we follow, also “glorifying God.” Ho often have you cried out, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me”? And how often had he left you by the roadside without response or recognition? This is his promise: “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:8)

And as we come to believe in his willingness to respond to our needs, our faith in him will grow.

### **III. ZACCHAEUS SHOWS HIS FAITH IN CHRIST AND CHRIST VISITS HIM IN HIS HOME (Luke 19:1-10)**

1 AND Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.

6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Zacchaeus' motives in trying to see the Savior are not clear. But the goodness hiding in his heart shines forth brilliantly in this story. Zacchaeus was the chief publican—an Israelite employed by the Romans to collect taxes, of which he was entitled to a share, perhaps to any amount he could collect above and beyond the assessment made by the Romans. He had thus become rich, and the Jewish residents of Jericho did not like him. In fact, and Jew who undertook this work was excommunicated (see Bible Dictionary: **Publicans**). Collaboration with their enemies had made Zacchaeus rich with their money. They considered him “a man that is a sinner.” (L:uke 19:7)

But he wanted to see Jesus and could not, for two reasons. There was a “press” around him (or a crowd, a multitude), and he was short. What things keep us from *seeing* the Savior? What are the pressing needs and problems that cloud our vision and steal our incentives? What inappropriate desires and worldly inclinations keep us from growing to our full spiritual potent, so that we are too “little of stature” to see him? Also, we must be sensitive to the spiritually immature around us, who may not be able to clearly see the Savior—to have faith in him—and who need our assistance to be able to climb higher for a better look.

Zacchaeus, in his anxiety, raced ahead of the crowd and “climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him . . .” (Luke 19:4) I like his determination. I would like more of it in myself. I wish I were more inclined in times of blindness or obscurity to find a way, any way, to see clearly what I need to see. And I recognize that most of the time, such an effort will require me to *climb higher* so that I can see more clearly.

From this simple act arises one of the great lessons of the scriptures. Jesus stopped

beneath the tree and looked up. “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.” (Luke 19:5)

Jesus knew him! He knew his name, he knew his heart. I am amazed that Zacchaeus did not fall from the tree. Certainly he must have been startled enough. That Jesus would single him out from a multitude and call him by name and invite himself to Zacchaeus’ home should have been enough to send him tumbling earthward. But he did hurry down, “and received him joyfully.” (Luke 19:6) And so do we. When we sense the presence of the Lord in our homes and our lives, our desires to be righteous intensify. Our joy expands in wonderful ways.

That joy, and Zacchaeus’ response to the presence of the Lord in his home and in his life (Luke 19:8) are sufficient evidence of the *rightness* of the heart of this little man. He arose from his seat: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He was clearly a man of faith. And he was righteous. The compelling evidence of that righteousness is his repentance.

The righteous are whoever are repenting, and the wicked whoever are not repenting. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee" who gave thanks to God that he was not a crook or a lecher, that he fasted twice a week, paid a full tithe, and was very strict in his religious observances. All this was perfectly true. The other man was a tax collector and rather ashamed of some of the things he had done, and instead of thanking God by way of boasting, he only asked God to be merciful to him, a sinner (see Luke 18:10-13). The surprise is that the sinner was the righteous one--because he was repenting; the other one who "exalteth himself shall be abased"--because he was not repenting (Luke 18:14). None but the truly penitent are saved, and that is who the righteous are (see Alma 42:22-24) (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, Vol 8, p. 474).

We must recognize that as the Lord knew Zacchaeus, he also knows us. The Lord, speaking to a group of elders in November of 1831, said, “Behold and hearken, O ye elders of my church, who have assembled yourselves together, whose prayers I have heard, and whose hearts I know, and whose desires have come up before me. Behold and lo, mine eyes are upon you . . .” (D&C 67:1,2) The Savior declared that (1) he had heard their prayers, (2) he knew their hearts, (3) their desires had “come up before him,” and (4) that he was watching them. Ammon testified that the



Lord “knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Alma 18:32) These verses (and many others) show that he knows all of us—our thoughts, our hearts, our desires, our faith.

And the fact of his knowing us increases our ability to have faith in him. We know that he can bless us according to our real needs, our real desires, and the true longings of our hearts.

#### **IV. JESUS RAISES LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD (John 11)**

A number of events in the life and ministry of Christ forced the Jewish leaders into circumstances in which they had to make choices and declarations about this man who claimed to be the Son of God. But none of them was more significant than the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Consider the overwhelming evidence presented by this miracle:

- C Jesus, even when he knew that this man whom he loved was sick, waited until he was certain that he was dead (John 11:5,14) before he went to him.
- C When he arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. (John 11:17 (JST) Family members were reluctant to open the grave because of the smell. (John 11:39)
- C Bethany was so close to Jerusalem that many Jews came from that city to comfort Lazarus’ sisters.
- C Jesus prayed vocally to the Father before the miracle, so that there could be no question in the minds of the disciples about who had sent him and by whose authority he was acting.
- C The nature of this miracle was so unexpected that even faithful, devoted disciples, we unprepared for its reality. Both Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sisters, had no hope of the raising of this dead brother. It was clearly too late for that. (See John 11:21,32)
- C A multitude of Jews were converted by this miracle (John 11:45)
- C Leaders of the Jews were convinced that unless they did something, “all men [would] believe on him.” (John 11:48)

The shock waves of the emergence of Lazarus from the tomb rolled from Bethany across the Mount of Olives, spanned the Kidron Valley, and beat against Caiaphas’ Palace.

*Alive? But it is not possible!*

*Nevertheless, it is true . . .*

Confronted with irrefutable proof of Christ's divinity and his power over death, and reeling under the impact of their cultural collision with this incredible miracle (which caused many of the Jews and even their leaders to believe. See John 11:45 and 12:42) the Sanhedrin were forced to act decisively. Either they must admit that they had been wrong about him or they must stop him once and for all.

The decision they made with regard to Jesus is described in John 11:53, 57.

In addition, the witness of the living, testifying Lazarus to the power and divinity of Christ was a terrible embarrassment and hinderment to the Jewish leaders. They "consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that by reason of him many of the Jews . . . believed on Jesus." (John 12:10, 11)

## **CONCLUSION**

Among the lessons to be learned from this event, one seems to stand forth clearly: Christ wants us and all men to have faith in him. Every circumstance of the raising of Lazarus, and of many other portions of the ministry of Christ, were designed to invite people to have faith in him as the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. We can almost hear the echoing words of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:37: "For with God, nothing shall be impossible.

In recent weeks almost all of you have received a DVD with your copy of the April *Ensign*. The title, *Finding Faith in Christ*, and the content, make this a wonderful tool to be used with this lesson if you are teaching. You might also consider viewing it (again) with your family as you discuss the principles of the scriptures referred to in these pages of the New Testament.

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