

Book of Mormon Lesson #16
“YE SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF CHRIST”

[Mosiah 4-6]
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: Suppose that in this community there are ten beggars who beg from door to door for something to eat, and that nine of them are impostors who beg to escape work, and with an evil heart practice imposition upon the generous and sympathetic, and that only one of the ten who visit your doors is worthy of your bounty; which is best, to give food to the ten, to make sure of helping the truly needy one, or to repulse the ten because you do not know which is the worthy one? You will all say, Administer charitable gifts to the ten, rather than turn away the only truly worthy and truly needy person among them. If you do this, it will make no difference in your blessings, whether you administer to worthy or unworthy persons, inasmuch as you give alms with a single eye to assist the truly needy. (Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol.8, p.12, March 5, 1860)

INTRODUCTION: Consider the word “qualifications.” There seem to be qualifications or requirements for membership in every organization. In order to belong to the Kiwanis, I must meet certain standards. To be a student at any school, I meet the admission requirements and abide by the established rules. To be a doctor or a lawyer or a real estate agent, I must demonstrate a proficiency and knowledge about the profession in order to obtain a license to practice. Gaining membership to some organizations is much simpler than others, of course. Joining the student body at Harvard requires a level of expertise and preparation different from the admission requirements at Canyon View Junior High. Brain surgeons and rocket scientists must abide by more rigorous standards of preparation and performance than lumberjacks and street vendors. Even membership in a family requires admittance by birth or adoption. I cannot pick the loveliest home in Orem, walk in off the street with a suitcase, pick a bedroom as my own, and expect to be invited to dinner and to help dispose of the family fortune.

The conclusion of King Benjamin’s sermon teaches us that there are qualifications for membership in the family of Christ. That sermon, and the events and explanations which follow it, teach us how to become “the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters . . .” (Mosiah 5:7)

1. KING BENJAMIN'S PEOPLE SEEK AND RECEIVE A REMISSION OF THEIR SINS (Mosiah 4:1-12)

When Benjamin finished delivering the words he received from an angel, “he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth” (Mosiah 4:1). Think back over the most powerful moments of your church experience. You have heard sermons that have moved you deeply. You have felt the burning power of the Spirit bearing witness to you of the truthfulness of things you are hearing and feeling. But have you ever reacted to a sermon like these people reacted? Has the recognition of your “own carnal state” and the realization that you are “even less than the dust of the earth” caused you to lose the ability to stand or sit upright.

I remember a similar moment at the Missionary Home in Salt Lake City. In ancient times (1965), all missionaries spent a week in Salt Lake City at the Missionary Home, in a spot more recently occupied by Deseret Gym, and most recently by the new Conference Center. A parade of General Authorities had come to speak to us. Day after incredible day they came to us and taught us and bore witness to us. In between these moments we sang and prayed and studied and attended the temple. I experienced wonderful moments with the Holy Spirit, but I also remember still the agony I felt from time to time as I confronted my own weaknesses and my lack of preparation for missionary service. I was overwhelmed by the recognition of a mountain of tiny transgressions that had distanced me from the Spirit and added to the suffering of the Savior. Some moments, I felt weak and unworthy and even, at times, hopeless. I frequently felt inclined to fall on my face before Him and beg for His forgiveness. The heaviness of my weaknesses seemed of such a magnitude that I could hardly remain upright under the burden. And generally speaking I had been good. I was not guilty of great or malignant sins. Rather, I was rendered almost powerless by a hoard of tiny, buzzing iniquities and the scope of my procrastination.

I think the people of Zarahemla must have felt like that. They fell to the earth and cried,

O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down

among the children of men. (Mosiah 4:2)

The imagery here is probably taken from the story of the first Passover, when Israel, aware of the impending arrival of the angel of death, literally applied the blood of a lamb, that they might be saved from death. These wonderful, repentant people of Zarahemla, transformed by the Spirit and by the power of Benjamin's sermon, asked that the blood of the Lamb might be applied to the door posts and lintels of their own lives. Perhaps you will excuse the repetition here of a quote I think I used earlier in this course of study.

The Passover is a type of deliverance . . . It is a deliverance from the doom we deserve for our sins; from the spiritual death that awaits the wicked; from the outer darkness of Egypt and Sodom and Sheol—because the blood of Christ has been applied to us by faith. By sprinkling our Lord's blood upon the doorposts of our hearts and upon the lintels of our souls, we set our dwellings apart from the world: we make open and visible confession of our allegiance to Him whose blood has eternal saving power; we set ourselves apart from the Egyptians, the Sodomites, and the seekers after Sheol; and we place ourselves with the believing portion of mankind. (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.1, p.165 - p.166)

And it happened. The "atoning blood" was applied and they were cleansed and lifted.

And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them. (Mosiah 4:3)

Benjamin later adds a note to this description of the experience of those who have listened to him. He says, " if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins . . ." (Mosiah 4:11), then you ought to do something about it.

Most members are familiar with these verses. But there are some elements of this experience that we often miss. For example, Benjamin explains what it was that caused them to see themselves as they really were. “. . . the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state . . .” (Mosiah 4:5) Benjamin spent some time in Mosiah 2 (see lesson #15) explaining all that God has done for his children, and how little he requires of them in return. This message has penetrated the hearts of those who have heard the words of their King. Benjamin continues:

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body--I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world. (Mosiah 4:6,7)

This is the beginning and end of the reality of salvation. For

this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you. (Mosiah 4:8)

Those *conditions* are precisely the qualifications that will make it possible to become a member of the family of Christ. They involve believing *and* doing.

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these

things see that ye do them. (Mosiah 4:9,10)

You will have noticed that these people received a remission of their sins (see 4:3). I used to spend my summers working on a pig farm in Arizona. I spent long, sweaty days in an environment saturated by the smell of tens of thousands of pigs. How I loved to go home and shower at the end of a work-day. It felt so good to be clean! These people, cleansed and filled with joy must have had an experience a hundred times more grand. But my experience with filth had not ended with a single shower. I had to go back to the pigs day after day. And Benjamin knew that his listeners would again confront temptation and sin in an infinite variety of costumes. Having been cleansed once was not sufficient to guarantee a permanent place in the family of Christ. Benjamin wanted them to understand that certain things would be required of them if they wanted to stay clean.

I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and *always retain a remission of your sins*; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. (Mosiah 4:11,12, emphasis added)

2. KING BENJAMIN TEACHES HIS PEOPLE HOW TO LIVE CHRISTLIKE LIVES (Mosiah 4:13-30)

Benjamin continues to give the prescription for admission into the family of Christ. Here is a list of additional requirements:

- # “Ye will not have a mind to injure one another” (4:13)
- # You will “live peaceably” (4:13)
- # You will “render to every man according to that which is his due” (4:13)
- # “Ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked” (4:14)
- # “Neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight

- and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil” (4:14)
- # “Ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness” (4:15)
 - # “Ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another” (4:15)
 - # “Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor” (4:16)

This matter of helping those in need of our succor occupies most of the remainder of the chapter. What does Benjamin say a member of Christ’s family will do when confronted with someone in need? Benjamin seems to be saying that there is only one acceptable excuse for not imparting of our substance to another in need. That excuse is that we do not have anything to give (see 4:24). Any other rationalization constitutes sin.

Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just— (Mosiah 4:17)

Re-read the *Quote of the Week* at the beginning of this lesson. We have all had this experience, or we will have. Someone will stop us and ask us to give a little or a lot to assist in a temporary or continuous time of need and want.

When I was stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, I lived in the small farming community of Pomerene. Much of the labor in the fields was performed by young and middle-aged men who had crossed the border from Mexico and come north looking for work. By the time they reached the farmlands of Pomerene, they had generally been walking in the desert for at least 30 miles. They arrived hungry and thirsty. Pomerene was located astride Interstate 10, about 40-50 miles east of Tucson. Actually, only two houses were located on the south of the freeway. The others were all on the north.

One day in a Sunday School class we discussed these chapters from Mosiah and Benjamin’s counsel about dealing with the poor. After a few moments a lady raised her hand. She and her husband lived in one of the houses south of the highway. She spoke of the plight of these illegal aliens, of their poverty and of their hunger. “But,” she concluded, “I don’t feed any of them. If I do they will mark my house in some way, and then they will all

stop. If I feed one, I will have to feed them all.”

The discussion continued for a few moments, and then another woman raised her hand. She and her family lived in the other house south of I-10. She seemed almost reluctant to speak, but finally she said something like this. “I do not mean to find fault, and I am not being critical, but I want you to know how my husband and I feel about this matter. No one leaves our house hungry. And if my husband and I are not home, the children know. Anyone who comes to our door hungry will be fed.”

Like this lovely sister, I do not intend to judge or be critical. It may be that the first lady who spoke refused these visitors because she did not have enough for them and for her own family. Benjamin spoke to people like that:

And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give. And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received. (Mosiah 4:24,25)

But I also know what I felt as I listened to the bishop’s wife. I understood quite clearly what is expected of the members of the family of Christ. I have a wife who understands also. She could no more ignore someone in such desperate circumstances than she could ignore the need to breathe. It is a part of her being to serve and succor.

Benjamin explains how inconsistent it would be for someone in his audience at Zarahemla or reading the pages of the Book of Mormon to turn away a beggar.

For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind? And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged

in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy. (Mosiah 4:19,20)

This is wonderful doctrine.

And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another. (Mosiah 4:21)

If we, who are always and inescapably unprofitable servants, receive such undeserved bounty from the Father, we ought to impart to our brothers and sisters in need with that same liberality.

And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done. (Mosiah 4:22)

Remember the purpose behind these teachings of Benjamin.

And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you--that is, *for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God*--I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants. (Mosiah 4:26, *emphasis added*)

KING BENJAMIN'S PEOPLE EXPERIENCE A "MIGHTY CHANGE" OF HEART AND COVENANT TO DO GOD'S WILL IN ALL THINGS (Mosiah 5,6)

One day about three years ago I was teaching a lesson in Family Home Evening about the experience of the people of Zarahemla. I read the first two verses of Mosiah 5, emphasizing the fact that these people had no more disposition to do evil. They just wanted to do good. I expressed the conviction I felt that this was a description of spiritual rebirth—of being *born again*. My son, who will be home exactly one month from today from a wonderful mission experience in California, asked, “Is that what that means, Dad?”

“I think so,” I told him.

“That’s just how I feel,” he replied. We shared a quiet moment of wonder and joy. We knew it was true. He was a member of our family, but he belonged to another family as well. In Moses 6:59, we are taught this:

. . . inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

Birth and spiritual rebirth both involve at least four steps, three of which are outlined here. We are born into the world “by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul.” One of the first signs of the arrival of a baby is the breaking of the water. Following the birth there is a cleansing of the blood—that protective substance that surrounds and insulates the baby in the womb. And sometime between conception and birth, a spirit enters that body, which thereby becomes a living soul. Our rebirth follows that same process.

. . . even so [we] must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten.

There is one other thing that happens following the birth process. The one born is given a name—a family name. In my case it was Gibbons, a name to give some indication of belonging. *This baby is ours*, the name proclaimed.

He belongs to this family. The same thing happens to those who are born again. Benjamin explains it in this way:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.
(Mosiah 5:7)

Benjamin instructed his son Mosiah to call the conference at which he announced that Mosiah would take his place. Note that Benjamin lived three additional years after leaving government service (see Mosiah 6:5). During that time—during the final three years of his life—Benjamin, like his father before him, worked the land, “that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people” (Mosiah 6:7)

At that conference, Benjamin had promised to give unto the people a name (see Mosiah 1:11) We have seen here that he did precisely that. Mosiah 5 gives us some interesting insights into the significance of taking the name of Christ. Read the chapter and answer these questions:

1. How do you get the name? (5:7)
2. Why is the name important? (5:9,10)
3. Where is the name written? (5:12)
4. How do we lose the name? (5:11)
5. What must we know besides the name? (5:12)
6. How do we come to know about the man whose name we have taken? (5:13)
7. What is the name? (5:9,10)

Those who have taken the name of Christ are called by that name—they are called Christians. But as these questions and Benjamin’s teachings show, it is much more than a title, more than a family name, more than a badge or stamp of approval. It is a way of life. Those who belong to this family must follow the head of the family. “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up--that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24).

CONCLUSION: While I was suffocating under the weight of my sins at the Missionary Home, I prayed constantly for forgiveness. I wanted to be clean and to feel free. During a meeting late in the week, our Mission President spoke to us. An assigned speaker had encountered a conflict and our President had chosen to fill in at a moment's notice. He spoke by the Spirit. The words were not of his creation nor choosing. My heart burned and I wept and wept as I was taught from on high. Then a miracle happened. Somewhere in his talk he paused for a moment and made this comment: "I know that many of you have been pleading with the Lord for a remission of you sins, and I want you to know that the Lord has forgiven each and every one of you in the spirit of your repentance."

I do not know what happened to anyone else at that moment, but I know what happened to me. I was clean. Suddenly, undeniably, utterly clean. As Enos said, "My guilt was swept away" (Enos 1:6) I wish I could say that I have retained that remission. I wish I could feel always as I felt then. But the memory has remained with me. I have remembered how good it feels to belong to his family, and to be clean.

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