

Lesson #25

“THEY TAUGHT WITH POWER AND AUTHORITY OF GOD”

Alma 17-22

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: I have read a fair number of books in my day and hope to read a few more. I am not a scholar but once thought I was going to be. I had the beginnings of some reasonably good training at some pretty good schools. All of that has changed now, but I believe I still have an eye for a penetrating line of prose and I think I can recognize profundity in print when I see it. I say again, the Book of Mormon stands preeminent in my intellectual and spiritual life, the classic of classics, a reaffirmation of the Holy Bible, a voice from the dust, a witness for Christ, the word of the Lord unto salvation. (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Standard unto My People,” given at CES Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 9 August 1994, BYU Marriott Center)

INTRODUCTION: President Benson said:

We love all of our missionaries who are serving the Lord full-time in the mission field. But there is a difference in missionaries. Some are better prepared to serve the Lord the first month in the mission field than some who are returning home after twenty-four months. We want young men entering the mission field who can enter the mission field "on the run," who have the faith, born of personal righteousness and clean living, that they can have a great and productive mission.

We want missionaries who have the kind of faith that Wilford Woodruff and Heber C. Kimball had, each bringing hundreds and thousands of souls into the waters of baptism

Give me a young man who has kept himself morally clean and has faithfully attended his Church meetings. Give me a young man who has magnified his priesthood and has earned his Duty to God Award and is an Eagle Scout. Give me a young man who is a seminary graduate and has a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon. Give me such a young man and I will give you a young man who can perform miracles

for the Lord in the mission field and throughout his life. (CR April 1986, Ensign 16 [May 1986]: pp. 44,45.) Throughout the Church we are working hard to help all of our missionaries to increase their spiritual maturity. This worldwide effort has been referred to as "raising the bar" or "raising the standard." We thank you parents, bishops, and stake presidents for your support in this effort. We also thank the faithful youth of the Church for your willingness to live up to the Lord's standard. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless you as you prepare to serve Him in this troubled world.

But as we raise the level of expectation for the performance of our missionaries, we must also raise the level of expectation for the performance of all of the members of the Church in fulfilling our missionary duties. We need your help, brothers and sisters, to support and assist our missionaries in finding and baptizing many more of our Heavenly Father's children. We need you to watch over, protect, and inspire the missionaries, who are servants of the Lord. If the standard is to be raised, it is raised for all of us. We must be more faithful. We must be more spiritually in tune. We must prepare ourselves to assist the missionaries in finding those of our Heavenly Father's children who will embrace the message of the Restoration.

Speaking of the matter of raising the ability of our missionaries, Elder M. Russell Ballard said this:

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This lesson from the missionary experiences of the sons of Mosiah will provide wonderful insights into the things missionaries must be prepared to do in order to enter the mission field “on the run,” and to get over the higher bar.

1. THE SONS OF MOSIAH PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE LAMANITES (Alma 17:1-18)

What price are we willing to pay to be or to become effective advocates of the Lord, his gospel, and the restoration? Notice what the sons of Mosiah were willing to do.

1. “They had searched the scriptures diligently that they might know the word of God.” (Alma 17:2)
2. “They had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God. (Alma 17:3)
3. “They had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites . . .” (Alma 17:4)
4. “Neither were any of the sons of Mosiah willing to take upon them the kingdom.” (Mosiah 29:3)

They had an attitude among them that seemed to say *good enough is not good enough! I will not be done until I have done all that I can do!* The result of this passion for excellence was that they”had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth. . .” Because of the “the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him.” (Alma 17:4)

Those of us who have served in the mission fields of the church are witnesses of the truthfulness of President Benson's affirmation that "there is a difference in missionaries, and that we need to raise the quality of our missionary efforts. Some are better prepared to serve the Lord the first month in the mission field than some who are returning home after twenty-four months."

My son, who served his mission in California, read the Book of Mormon seven times in the year before his mission. He became convinced that a key to his missionary success would be his obedience. His mission call (all mission calls) reminded him that he would be expected "to maintain the highest standards of conduct and appearance by keeping the commandments, living mission rules, and following the counsel of [his] mission president." Therefore, one of his mission goals was to "obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness." (Alma 57:21) He prayed and fasted and prepared, and I believe he was a wonderful missionary.

And the Lamanites needed powerful missionaries. They were "a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands." (Alma 17:14) They were so destitute of redeeming qualities that when these young men announced their intention to preach to the Lamanites, they were met with this kind of response:

Do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth? Do ye suppose that ye can convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning?

And moreover they did say: Let us take up arms against them, that we destroy them and their iniquity out of the land, lest they overrun us and destroy us. (Alma 26:24,25)

The world still needs great missionaries—men to match the message—to go labor in

the vineyard for the last time to gather fruit unto the Master of the vineyard. Some elders and sisters become great in the mission field. That is commendable. But others arrive great, armed with a razor-sharp sword of the Spirit, enlivened by the spirit of prophecy and the spirit of revelation.

2. AMMON SERVES AND TEACHES KING LAMONI, AND MANY OF THE PEOPLE ARE CONVERTED (Alma 17-19)

There are some great lessons about missionary work here that are worth some inspection by prospective, full-time, returned, and member missionaries.

1. (Alma 17:11) **“Yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me.”** *Patience* and *long-suffering* are two of the defining characteristics of true Christians. We must wait for the Lord to act in our behalf and in behalf of our investigators. Jesus usually comes to our assistance in the fourth watch (see Mark 6:48), not the first. And in the meantime, those for whom and with whom we labor may not be friendly nor receptive. Therefore, while we wait, we must be good examples. People must know that our love is stronger than inconvenience or embarrassment or impatience. We are not expected to spend time in fruitless pursuit of impossible results, or course. The Spirit must be our guide in this. But we must not forget that some really great church members took a really long time to accept the truth.

A man in my high priests quorum talked of the experience of being reactivated after years of indifference. He said his bishop came to his house to see him twice a week for five months before they ever had a conversation. He was so grateful that his bishop did not give up on him. *Patience* and *long-suffering* indeed!

2. (Alma 17:25) **“I will be thy servant.”** Ammon had the wisdom to offer to be a servant when he had been offered a place in the royal family. (Alma 17:24) he had refused a throne to come on a mission and was not inclined to change directions now that he had arrived. He might have marched into the palace and whipped out his flip chart for a first discussion, but he did not. For the first three days of his mission all he did was heard sheep, but then the opportunities came with stunning rapidity and unexpected success.

Compare the experience of Ammon with that of Aaron and the others as they began their labors. Alma 21:4 indicates that they “first began to preach.” Before long the bitter and apostate people of Ani-anti had tossed them in the slammer. When they were freed by the intervention of Ammon and Lamoni (Alma 21:14), they went out to try again.

When they

visited the father of Lamoni, their first words were, “And now, O king, if thou wilt spare our lives, *we will be thy servants.*” (Alma 22:3) Every soul we teach must feel this: that our primary and all but exclusive motive is to serve them and thereby help them. Everything else must ride in the back seat. We do not serve missions to gain a testimony. We do not preach to fulfill some expectation or commandment. We do not testify so that we can baptize. All of these things come as we serve, but the main thing is to *serve!* That is why we talk about *serving* a mission, more than *performing* or *completing* or *doing* a mission.

3. (Alma 17:29) “I will show forth my power unto these my fellow-servants, or the power which is in me, in restoring these flocks unto the king, **that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants**, that I may lead them to believe in my words.” In a situation where fellow-shepherds “began to weep exceedingly,” Ammon’s heart was “swollen within him with joy” because he saw an opportunity to win hearts. We should constantly be looking for the same kinds of opportunities and seize them with the same enthusiasm shown by Ammon at the waters of Sebus. A missionary in our ward who was in Korea wrote home to tell his family that he had just baptized a young man who had robbed him two weeks before. When we are successful in winning hearts, people become willing to be led to the gospel, because where the heart goes, the rest of the soul and body will inevitably follow.
4. (Alma 17:30) “These were the thoughts of Ammon when he saw the afflictions of **those whom he termed to be his brethren.**” Ammon thought of the other shepherds as equals. We must not convey a “holier-than-thou” or “more-worthy-than-thou” attitude as we meet and teach others (Alma 18:17— “Behold, I am a man . . .”). Our attitude should say, “*I am no better than you. I am only different from you in that I have something precious that you do not have that I would like to give to you.*” In my mission, Elders occasionally referred to the Brazilians as *Brazies*. This is offensive and

demeaning and certainly counter-productive. My companion spoke to me one day as we rode in a taxi. “Do you think this dumb Brazi knows where he is going?” Before I could respond, the driver spoke over his shoulder in perfect English. “You Americans are all the same.” The attitude that caused a servant of the Lord to use that *title* for our driver had no doubt done great damage—perhaps irreparable damage—to the likelihood of this man listening to the gospel in the future.

5. (Alma 18:3) “We know that **he is a friend** to the king.” Last year, my son was in a car wreck, a single-car rollover, in southern Utah near Glen Canyon Dam. He was not seriously hurt, but he did spend the night in the hospital in Kanab. The next morning two friends left home 4:00 A.M. and drove to Kanab, 5 hours each way, to get him. They did not have to go. They may not have wanted to go. But they went because he was their friend. Ammon defended the king’s flocks and his fellow shepherds for the same reason. *You are my friend . How can I help you? How can I serve you?*
6. (Alma 18:5) “**Lamoni began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong** in slaying his servants . . .” People who hear the gospel from missionaries of this caliber will have a stirring of conscience and will begin to fear that they have done wrong. These feelings of conscience will create in them a desire to know their standing before the Lord, and to know that they should do. Remember the day of Pentecost?
7. (Alma 18:8-10) Lamoni “was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of Ammon, saying: Surely **there has not been any servant** among all my servants **that has been so faithful as this man . . .**” The combined effect of your concern, your patience, your example, your humility, your friendship will work on the hearts of your contacts, convincing them of your honesty and faithfulness. No one, they will be certain, will be better suited to serve them than you.
8. (Alma 18:11-14) “. . . **he knew not what he should say unto him.**” This is such an important part of this process. Investigators who have had this kind of experience with you will often want to know more but they will not know what to ask or how to ask. We must be sensitive to their difficulty and prayerful that the inspiration of the Spirit will teach us to teach.

9. (Alma 18:15,16) “Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, therefore **he perceived the thoughts of the king.**” When it is time to teach, the Spirit will help us know what to teach. Other scriptures speak plainly of this. D&C 33:8-10 commands three times, “Open your mouths” and twice those commands are followed by the promise, “and they shall be filled.” D&C 100:5,6 declares,

Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; For it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say.

D&C 84:85 says almost the same thing.

10. (Alma 18:17-20) “And the king said . . . **Thou mayest speak boldly**, and tell me concerning these things; . . . And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee” Ammon is now in a position (as any missionary would be at this point) to speak boldly. If he had given the sermon he is about to deliver on the day he arrived in Ishmael, he would probably have ended up in prison like his brethren, or worse! But now the soil has been prepared and is ready for some serious planting and Ammon can teach freely everything that needs to be taught.
11. (Alma 18:24-40) “And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness, and said unto him . . . **Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?**” We must begin our teaching where the person is in his or her spiritual understanding. Thus Ammon begins not with God but with the Great Spirit; not with the restoration but with the creation.

3. AMMON IS LED BY THE SPIRIT TO DELIVER HIS BRETHREN. LAMONI'S FATHER IS CONVERTED (Alma 20-22)

We speak of these missionaries among the Lamanites as the *Sons of Mosiah*. But there were at least two others with them, their names being Muloki and Ammah (see Alma 20:2, 21:11). And even though their names are not mentioned often among

us, it is certain that they were no less serviceable (see Alma 48:19) in their labors than were the other sons. The true sign of greatness in this work as in all divine work is not how much others notice us, but how much the Lord notices us. Our usefulness is not to be evaluated by the quantity of accolades or praise, nor even by the numbers of our converts, but by the presence of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

On their way to deliver Ammon's brother and his brethren from prison in Middoni, Lamoni and Ammon encountered Lamoni's father. In his rage, he attempted to kill Lamoni (Alma 20:16) and then Ammon (Alma 20:19,20). Ammon wounded the old king and then pacified him with his words. I wonder if the king later learned how fortunate he was that he was only *wounded* in the arm.(Alma 20:20) Others who lifted their swords against Ammon were *dis-armed* in a most literal way. But Ammon turned this encounter into an opportunity to teach, as he had done with the attack of the bandits at Sebus. This is another great key in missionary work.

12. *Look for opportunities to teach.* Ammon shows us this better than any missionary in the scriptures with the possible exception of the Apostle Paul. While others were swinging swords and clubs and seeking death, Ammon was rejoicing and preparing to teach the gospel. Missionaries must always be alert for opportunities to share the gospel. Paul commanded Timothy to

Preach the word; [to] be instant in season, out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and
doctrine. (2 Tim. 4:2)

Ammon, as he gloried in the Lord and the success he and his brethren had enjoyed, declared

And we have entered into their houses and taught them,
and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have
taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into
their temples and their synagogues and taught them; and
we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and
smote upon our cheeks; and we have been stoned, and
taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison;
and through the power and wisdom of God we have been
delivered again (Alma 26:29)

There is another great lesson in these chapters about great missionaries.

13. (Alma 17:11) “And the Lord said unto them also: *Go forth* among the Lamanites . . .” In the absence of success or spiritual direction there is always one thing a missionary can do. He or she can *go forth*. Go back to work. Knock on one more door. Teach one more discussion. Talk to one more contact on the street. Go forth. Notice what happened to those who were in prison in Middoni.

And when Ammon did meet them he was exceedingly sorrowful, for behold they were naked, and their skins were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords. And they also had suffered hunger, thirst, and all kinds of afflictions; nevertheless they were patient in all their sufferings. (Alma 20:29)

No one would have blamed them if they had taken a week or two off to recuperate. No one would have found fault with them for choosing another field of labor. But not these men: they under divine direction to *go forth*.

And those who were cast into prison suffered many things, and they were delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon, and they were fed and clothed. And *they went forth again* to declare the word . . . (Alma 21:14,15, *emphasis added*)

One final thought is worth noting from chapter 20.

And, as it happened, it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people; therefore they would not hearken unto their words . . .(Alma 20:30)

I served in Brazil, and spent so much time in the font my skin had constant wrinkles. I had people come to me on the street and ask for baptism. The Relief Society in one of the branches where I worked went tracting once a month, two by two. The Brazilians were a wonderful and willing people.

But when I left for my mission, I had a brother already serving on a mission in

Holland. He served two and one half years and had very few baptisms. But what a mistake it would be to judge our usefulness as missionaries by the number or baptisms we organized! “And, as it happened, it was [his] lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people; therefore they would not hearken unto [his] words . . .”

The Spirit led Aaron and his brethren to the home of the King who had been wounded by Ammon. I am intrigued by the involvement of the Lord in these missionary adventures, and I am confident that he is involved in every aspect of missionary work. Missionaries do essentially three things. They (1) prepare to teach, (2) they look for opportunities to teach, and (3) they open their mouths (see #9 above). God does all the rest. In this instance he got Ammon and the King together so seeds could be planted. Then the Lord led Aaron to the home of the king to teach him. He caused a great transformation to take place in the lives of the king and “and his whole household.” (Alma 22:23)

I participated in the baptism in Brazil of a man who had seen missionaries in a dream proclaiming the truth and the name of the true church. He remembered those two young men and their message, even the sound of their voices, until he met them and heard the gospel from them. But the dream he had occurred thirteen years before either of the elders was born (!), and the *only day those two elders ever worked together* was on the evening they first visited this remarkable man. We must never forget how much a part of this work the Lord is. As Jacob recorded about missionaries in these last days,

And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their might; *and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them*; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things. (Jacob 5:72, *emphasis added*)

CONCLUSION:

The king, as he prostrated himself before the Lord, cried out

O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and *I will give away all my sins* to know thee, and that I may be raised from the

dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead. (Alma 22:18, *emphasis added*)]

The king had earlier declared, “ I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom . . .” (Alma 22:15) to have the joy of redemption. When I read these verses I am constrained to ask myself, “Ted, what are you willing to put on the altar in order to have redemption and a fulness of joy?” This great king offered his sins, his kingdom, and all that he possessed.

We noted in the beginning of this lesson those four things that the sons of Mosiah were willing to sacrifice. It is fitting to end with an observation about what the Lamanite king was willing to sacrifice. But we must go one step beyond, and ask ourselves, “What must I put on the altar?” If we have any hope of exaltation, we must of course put everything there.

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