

**“WHOSOEVER WILL COME, HIM I WILL
RECEIVE”**

3 Nephi 8-11

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy acquaints us with a strong testimony of the converting power of the Book of Mormon: Sister Celia Cruz Ayala of the Puerto Rico San Juan Mission decided to give the Book of Mormon to a friend. She wrapped it in attractive paper and set out to deliver her present.

On the way, she was attacked by a bandit who stole her purse and with it the wrapped copy of the Book of Mormon. A few days later she received this letter:

Mrs. Cruz:

Forgive me, forgive me. You will never know how sorry I am for attacking you. But because of it, my life has changed and will continue to change. That book [the Book of Mormon] has helped me in my life. The dream of that man of God has shaken me I am returning your five pesos for I can't spend them. I want you to know that you seemed to have a radiance about you. That light seemed to stop me [from harming you, so] I ran away instead.

I want you to know that you will see me again, but when you do, you won't recognize me, for I will be your brother Here, where I live, I have to find the Lord and go to the church you belong to.

The message you wrote in that book brought tears to my eyes. Since Wednesday night I have not been able to stop reading it. I have prayed and asked God to forgive me, [and] I ask you to forgive me I thought your wrapped gift was something I could sell. [Instead,] it has made me want to make my life over. Forgive me, forgive me, I beg

you.

Your absent friend. (“What I Want My Son to Know Before He Leaves on His Mission:” Pres. James E. Faust; C.R., p. 58, April 1996. See also F. Burton Howard, “My Life Has Changed,” Church News, Jan, 1996, p. 16)

INTRODUCTION: Some form of the word *darkness* shows up in 367 different verses in our standard works. *Light* appears in 416 verses. They appear together in 117 verses. Clearly this is a religious theme of some consequence. Nowhere in the scriptures is the catastrophic implication of the absence of light in lives better illustrated than in the three days of darkness on the American continent following the crucifixion of Christ. And the lesson becomes even more powerful when the Lord speaks in the impenetrable darkness and declares, “I am the light of the world.” After suffering for days in a darkness you could *feel*, would you not at once turn to the source of such light with all your heart? These chapters are an invitation to do that very thing.

**GREAT DESTRUCTION OCCURS IN THE AMERICAS AT THE TIME
OF JESUS’ DEATH**
(3 Nephi 8)

As you read this chapter and review the precise fulfillment of the prophecies of Samuel, consider what the verses do not tell you. The reaction of the unbelievers must have been much like the response to the light at sundown 34 years before. Perhaps there were some unbelievers still alive who had experienced both of these events. One must wonder how long this 3-hour storm (see 8:19) continued before those who were guilty of “great doubtings and disputations among the people” (8:4) began to say “Whoops.” When you read of the “mourning and howling and weeping” in 3 Nephi 8:23, remember that these are the survivors, those who were “spared because they were more righteous” than the ones not spared (see 9:13).

As we near the time of the Second Coming, how many destructions, how many wars and rumors of wars, how many great signs and wonders, how many failing hearts will be required before unbelieving people will begin to say. “Whoops.”

Can you not imagine that you or your descendants will hear people saying precisely

what people said in 34 AD?

And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible. (3 Nephi 8:24,25)

And these are the survivors! What must the wicked have felt and said as they experienced the storm, the tempest, the thunder, the lightnings, the fires, the earthquakes---*whatever they experienced* before their lives were ended by the obliteration of those three hours of utter and unexpected destruction. We are told that the “face of the whole earth became deformed,” (8:17) that entire cities disappeared in a convulsion of nature the likes of which had never before been recorded.

There are many students and scholars who have seen in the events surrounding the visit of Christ to America a pattern for the events that will surround his visit to the world in the not-too-distant future. The Lord tells us that a time will come in the future when everyone will be willing to kneel and confess:

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. (D&C 1:2)

Of course, it may not be meaningful to kneel when it is impossible to stand. Better that we should kneel now so that we can stand in that great day.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the

face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
For the great day of his wrath is come; and *who shall be able to stand?*
(Revelation 6:15-17, *emphasis added*)

Who shall be able to stand? Here is at least one answer:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or *who shall stand in his holy place?* He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This [is] the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. (Psalms 24:3-6, *emphasis added*)

2. SURVIVORS HEAR THE VOICE OF THE LORD INVITING THEM TO RETURN TO HIM

(3 Nephi 9, 10)

AND it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land . . . (3 Nephi 9:1)

After three days some of the survivors might have wondered if they would ever see light again. The only noises had been the weeping and the howling and the crying and the dreadful groanings. Then, rending the utter darkness, came a voice:

Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! (3 Nephi 9:2)

We must notice that in these cataclysmic circumstances, the Lord speaks not only to the remaining descendants of Lehi, but also to us, “the inhabitants of the whole earth” with an invitation to repent.

The snapshot of Satan contained in this verse is sobering. We have an enemy who loathes us and wants to make us miserable, and who laughs and rejoices over the destruction of his brothers and sisters who have, by this event, slipped more fully

into his power. Somehow we must learn to see Lucifer behind the glittering lights and the beautiful decorations of Babylon. His invitations seem so well phrased and carefully rehearsed. But behind the false fronts with the beautiful pictures waits a being whose pleasure is in direct correlation to our misery.

Fifteen named cities have been obliterated, along with other unnumbered thousands of God's children, and Satan and his followers are having a celebration.

The invitation from the Savior, when it comes, is simple and significant:

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:13,14)

This invitation to *come* is a major theme of 3 Nephi 9, 10, and 11.

- < (3 Nephi 9:14) Come and you will have eternal life
- < (3 Nephi 9:20) Come with a broken heart and a contrite spirit
- < (3 Nephi 9:22) Come as a little child

The matter of *a broken heart and a contrite spirit* is related to the gospel principle of sacrifice, which, with the sacrifice of the Savior, underwent a dramatic change:

And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not. (3 Nephi 9:19,20)

No more dead animals . . . One is encouraged to wonder if there were not those in

ancient Israel who really believed that the death of a bullock or a lamb or a kid would cleanse them of personal impurity. The Lord now clarifies that issue for all time. President J Reuben Clark, Jr. explained it this way:

It is an interesting reflection that up to the time of Christ, apparently, the peoples of the world . . . worshiped with the ritual which in reality . . . looked forward to the sacrifice of the Son . . .

The sacrifice was always vicarious. Animals were, with some, sacrificed, as under the Mosaic Law, for the sins of the individual and for the sins of the people, and among other and pagan religions, human sacrifice was made for the same purpose, but it was always a vicarious sacrifice, apparently with little actual sacrifice except for the value of the animal sacrificed, but the individuals themselves, to cancel the debt, so to speak, against their lives and living in the eyes of the Almighty One. The sinner, seemingly, in general, took on no obligation to abandon his sins, but took on only the obligation to offer sacrifice therefor.

But under the new covenant that came in with Christ, the sinner must offer the sacrifice out of his own life, not by offering the blood of some other creature; he must give up his sins, he must repent, he himself must make the sacrifice, and that sacrifice was calculated to reach out into the life of the sinner in the future so that he would become a better and changed man. (*Behold the Lamb of God*, by J Reuben Clark, Jr., pp. 107-108)

In April Conference of 1995, Elder Neal A. Maxwell offered this insight:

So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the "sacrifice unto the Lord . . . of a broken heart and a contrite spirit," (D&C 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving "away all [our] sins" in order to "know God" (Alma 22:18) for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him. (Ensign, May 1996, p. 68)

It is possible to find all the necessary elements of the ancient order in our own religious services. We have the opportunity nearly every week to partake of the sacrament. That is the language we always use. But in the verse following the command to offer to the Lord the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (D&C 59: 8), the Lord tell us to “offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day.” (D&C 59:9; see also D&C 62:4)

What does it mean to *offer up a sacrament*? Does it not imply the very thing the Lord commanded in 3rd Nephi 9 and Doctrine and Covenants 59--- to offer up a broken heart and a contrite spirit—to offer up the sins out of our own lives? During the quiet moments of introspection associated with the sacramental service, we are encouraged by Paul to “examine” ourselves (see 1 Cor. 11:28). Should we not search our souls in those moments to locate and offer the sacrifice of our sins at the sacramental table, or *altar*, where, as in times of old, the *priests* officiate?

We there declare our willingness to keep the commandments and to take his name and to remember him. This seems to be the perfect time to offer from our lives those things that have prevented us from keeping the sacramental covenant fully in the past.

3. JESUS CHRIST DESCENDS FROM HEAVEN AND TEACHES THE PEOPLE

(3 Nephi 11)

It happened at the temple in Bountiful. Of course it did. If you and yours had survived such an experience---a devastation that destroyed all general communication and interaction---when you were able, you would make your way to the home of the person whose voice you had heard. If the phones were not working and the roads were impassible for cars, you would go to the stake center or the ward building, or, if possible, to the temple. A “great multitude” had come there, “marveling and wondering one with another . . .” And they were “conversing about this Jesus Christ.” (3 Nephi 11:1,2)

While they were there, they heard a voice which they did not understand. This was not the same voice that had addressed them in the darkness. There is no hint of confusion in that account. But this is a “small voice” and we learn from this that we must make ourselves hear it. Even these more righteous people, gathered at the

temple, do not understand the words until they attend to them and focus on them.

Elder Boyd K. Packer taught:

As an Apostle I listen now to the same inspiration, coming from the same source, in the same way, that I listened to as a boy. The signal is much clearer now. (C.R., October 1979)

As we practice and listen and follow, the signal will be come clearer for us as well.

We have short spiritual memories. At least it seems we do sometimes. These people at Bountiful heard the voice of Christ in the darkness. They must have had records of the prophecies that he would appear to them. They heard and finally understood the voice which said, “Behold my beloved Son . . .” and yet when they saw Him descending out of heaven, “they thought it was an angel . . .” It would be comfortable to be critical of their lack of awareness, but I have a feeling that the shoes they are wearing fit us quite nicely as well. How quickly we forget the messages and prompting that come to us, and begin to evaluate our mortal experiences solely on the basis of our secular understanding.

Jesus told the survivors of the destructions that he was the light of the world (see 3 Nephi 9:18) Now he announces his name and tells them he is both “the light and the life of the world . . .” (3 Nephi 11:11)

The Savior’s declaration that he has “drunk out of that bitter cup” (3 Nephi 11:11) is a reminder that the bitter cup of which he speaks was in fact ours to drink.

Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God [that] pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, [even] the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: (Isaiah 51:22)

In the place of this cup, as we shall see in later chapters, he has given us another cup to drink—the sacramental cup.

Earlier in the lesson we spoke of the word *come* as a theme of these chapters. We suggested the following about coming to Christ.

- < (3 Nephi 9:14) Come and you will have eternal life
- < (3 Nephi 9:20) Come with a broken heart and a contrite spirit
- < (3 Nephi 9:22) Come as a little child

To these three directives we can now add one more:

- < (3 Nephi 11:15) Come one by one

This personal, intimate involvement of the Savior with 2500 people is a wonderful witness of his individual concern for us and our welfare. He had just descended from heaven. 2500 people had heard a whisper. He had told them who he was and what he was. There were no doubters in the crowd. And yet he extended this invitation.

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world. (3 Nephi 11:14)

The word *thrust* used to describe the experience of these people troubles me just a bit. I think its purpose is to communicate the deepness and dimension of the wound in the Lord's side, but it seems abrupt, almost insensitive. I cannot imagine any of these people feeling anything except the most reverent awe as they examined and handled the wounds of the crucifixion on the body of the Son of God. Can you?

And let us not try to time this experience out. We know the number who were there from 3 Nephi 17:25, but can anyone imagine the Savior trying to hurry these people along so that he can get on to more important things? Or can anyone imagine those who were not among the first being impatient at the wait?

One thing is certain: there were none among this group who would ever say, "Well, I think maybe it was the Savior who came today."

CONCLUSION:

It would not be improper to envy these people their blessings. What a joy it would

have been to have had this experience! In retrospect it might have made the preceding destruction and darkness almost worth it. But in his teachings to these people, the Savior spoke to us about our own blessings.

AND it came to pass that . . . he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying . . . blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. And again, *more blessed are they who shall believe in your words* because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 12:1,2, *emphasis added*)

Even though we were not there, we do believe in their words and in their testimony. *More blessed are we!* What a concept.

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