

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #39
“BEHOLD, MY JOY IS FULL”

3 NEPHI 17-19

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

"Few men on earth," said Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "either in or out of the Church, have caught the vision of what the Book of Mormon is all about. Few are they among men who know the part it has played and will yet play in preparing the way for the coming of Him of whom it is a new witness . . . The Book of Mormon shall so affect men that the whole earth and all its peoples will have been influenced and governed by it . . . There is no greater issue ever to confront mankind in modern times than this: Is the Book of Mormon the mind and will and voice of God to all men?" We testify that it is. (The Millennial Messiah [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982], pp. 159, 170, 179.) Now, my good Saints, we have a great work to perform in a very short time. We must flood the earth with the Book of Mormon-and get out from under God's condemnation for having treated it lightly (see D&C 84:54-58). (President Ezra Taft Benson, C.R., October 1988)

INTRODUCTION: If the Savior came to spend a few days with your ward or stake, what would he do? What would you want him to do? Would he heal your sick? Would he invite you to participate in a sacrament service or two? Would he teach? What doctrines do you think he would emphasize to your family? Your ward? Your stake?

**1. JESUS COMMANDS THE NEPHITES TO PONDER AND PRAY ABOUT
WHAT HE HAS TAUGHT. HE HEALS THE SICK, BLESSES THE
CHILDREN, AND PRAYS FOR THE PEOPLE**

(3 Nephi 17)

At the beginning of 3 Nephi 17, Christ announced that it was time for him to go.

I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them. (3 Nephi 17:4)

But he gave great counsel to the Nephites as he prepared to depart. Knowing that he had doctrines to teach that would be difficult to understand, he counseled them to do four things: (see 3 Nephi 17:3)

- Go home and ponder the things I have already given you
- Ask the Father to help you understand
- Prepare your minds
- Come back again

This is superb counsel for any difficult concept or doctrine. It may be an excellent way to bring the messages of the temple to life in our own hearts.

The people were, of course, in tears. He saw them, felt their longing, and changed his plans.

And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. (3 Nephi 7:6,7)

Who would you bring? He offered to heal the physically damaged. I have two sons with diabetes. I would put my arms around them and we would walk together to the Savior. And he would heal them. But he also promised to heal all those who are *afflicted in any manner*. Therefore, others would have come to him then as they come to him now whose afflictions are invisible: people with sorrows and burdens and weaknesses and infirmities. And he would heal them too. I believe that he will still heal anyone who will come to him with sufficient faith.

I remember the parades in Logan when I was a child. The best parts were the floats that had candy-throwers on board. People would reach into huge boxes

at their feet and fling handfuls of treats in the crowds along the street. I know some got more than others, but I got some and that seemed to be enough. Do you think the Savior could give blessings in that way? Certainly he could open the windows of heaven and dump out huge boxes of blessings for all those who happened to be in a position to receive them. But that is not the way he works. In all of his most significant interactions with us, he deals with us *one by one*. When he invited the survivors to feel the wounds in his hands and feet, they came forth one by one.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, *going forth one by one* until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come. (3 Nephi 11:15, *emphasis added*)

When the little children came to him,

he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. (3 Nephi 17:21, *emphasis added*)

He dealt with the Nephite nation, but he also dealt with Alma and Helaman and Enos and Mosiah and Benjamin and many others. And he dealt with them one by one.

3. JESUS INSTITUTES THE SACRAMENT AMONG THE NEPHITES

(3 Nephi 18)

The institution of the Sacrament at this point in his American ministry may be a response to the desire of the Nephites to have him stay longer with them (3 Nephi 17:5) Perhaps he means to communicate to them that through the ordinance of the sacrament it is possible to have his Spirit with us *always*. Whatever the reason, his extended stay with them, *after* his announcement that he was leaving (3 Nephi 17:1,4), continues in 3 Nephi 18 with the introduction of this sacred ordinance.

In conjunction with your study of this chapter and chapter 19, you might consider reading the conference address, “This Do in Remembrance of Me” by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. You can find it in the Ensign, November 1995, beginning on page 67, or at lds.org.

The sacrament is a testimony and a witness. In 3 Nephi 18:7,11, the Savior uses both these words to define what we do when we partake of the emblems of the sacrament. As we eat or drink, we are in effect saying to the Father, *“This act is my witness or testimony that I do always remember your Son.”* Such a proclamation ought not to be made carelessly or thoughtlessly. The act of eating and drinking is filled with gravity. And the promises associated therewith are (or ought to be) most sobering. “And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.” (3 Nephi 18:7,11)

We are thus presented with a fairly simple way to evaluate our sacramental experience. We can simply ask ourselves if the Holy Ghost is active in our lives. If we are experiencing the manifestations of the Spirit, it would seem that this is evidence that we are partaking worthily of the sacrament.

In his commentary on this ordinance, the Lord gives strong counsel about prayer to his disciples and to the multitude. He teaches us that

- T We must watch and pray always lest we enter into temptation (18:18)
- T We must always pray unto the Father in his name (18:19)
- T Whatever we ask for that is right, believing, we shall receive (18:20)
- T We must pray unto the Father in and for our families (18:21)
- T We must pray for those that meet with us and turn none away (18:22-24)

Even though all are invited to meet with us, not all are invited to partake of the sacrament: to his twelve disciples, the Lord said

And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it; For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood ye shall forbid him. (3 Nephi 18:28,29)

The leaders of the church are not to allow those they know to be unworthy to partake of these emblems. In addition, each member of the church bears a responsibility to review his or her own preparation to make and to renew covenants. Thus Paul instructs us

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. (1 Cor 11;27,28)

What are the elements of sacramental worthiness? Consider the following:

I rejoice when I find our brethren and sisters coming to the sanctuary and partaking of these emblems as indicated—worthily; but I desire to call your attention to the fact that there is danger if we do it unworthily. Before partaking of this sacrament, our hearts should be pure; our hands should be clean; we should be divested of all enmity toward our associates; we should be at peace with our fellow men; and we should have in our hearts a desire to do the will of our Father and to keep all of His commandments. If we do this, partaking of the sacrament will be a blessing to us and will renew our spiritual strength. (Elder George Albert Smith, C.R., April 1908)

It is our duty to meet together often to partake of the Lord's supper. But we should partake of this emblem worthily, as by partaking of this ordinance unworthily we may bring upon ourselves sickness and even death. If I have aught against my brother it is my duty to go to him alone and talk it over in prayer and settle that difficulty before partaking of the sacrament. (Elder Joseph F. Smith, *Collected Discourses*, Vol. 2, Feb. 21, 1892)

The Lord has said that we should not permit anyone to partake of the sacrament unworthily. This means, as I understand it, anyone in the Church who has been in transgression of some kind and who has not repented. It would also apply to the apostate. (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.2, p.350)

Those who partake worthily of the sacramental emblems, by so doing, covenant on their part to remember the body of the Son of God who was crucified for them; to take upon them his name, as they did in the waters of baptism; and to "always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them." (D&C 20:77.) Thus those who partake worthily of the sacrament -- and the same repentance and contrition and desires for righteousness should precede the partaking of the sacrament as precede baptism -- all such receive the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle, they thus receive a remission of their sins through the sacramental ordinance. Through this ordinance the Lord puts a seal of approval upon them; they are renewed in spirit and become new creatures of the Holy Ghost, even as they did at baptism; they put off the old man of sin and put on Christ whose children they then are. (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.239 - p.240)

3. THE DISCIPLES TEACH AND MINISTER TO THE PEOPLE. THE SAVIOR RETURNS TO TEACH THE PEOPLE AND PRAY FOR THEM (3 Nephi 19)

Those who had had this life changing experience with the Savior did a wonderful thing: they "labored exceedingly" to let others know what they had experienced, and to invite others to have the same kind of experience. We must do the same. We who have been taught the truth about the atonement and the ministry of Christ must *labor exceedingly* to let others know and to invite them to have a similar understanding.

The next day the Twelve taught the multitude in twelve groups, "nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken." (3 Nephi 19:8) Then the Twelve were baptized. After this ordinance, "they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (3 Nephi 19:13)

And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them. (3 Nephi 19:14)

The multitude knew thereby that these men were in fact called of God to the ministry. The significance of what the multitude sees here must not be lost on us. President Harold B. Lee quote Elder John A. Widtsoe as follows:

How vital it is that each of us come to have a personal witness that we are led by living prophets. President Lee observed that someone once said, "That person is not truly converted until he sees the power of God resting upon the leaders of this church, and until it goes down into his heart like fire." President Lee said this observation was "absolutely true," adding that "until the members of this church have that conviction that they are being led in the right way, and they have a conviction that these men of God are men who are inspired and have been properly appointed by the hand of God, they are not truly converted." (Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are*, p.70 - p.71)

This remarkable chapter is filled with instruction and insights about prayer. Some form of the word *pray* appears 19 times in this chapter.

The praying commences when the Twelve cause the multitude to kneel and pray. They pray this time "unto the Father in name of Jesus." (3 Nephi 19:6) Notice what they pray for.

And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them. (3 Nephi 19:9)

The assumption that this gift comes automatically following the ordinances of baptism and confirmation may require some scrutiny on the basis of this outpouring of prayer. The Savior will soon say of these people "So great faith have I never seen." (3 Nephi 19:35) And yet the receipt of this gift is not a foregone conclusion. The multitude prayed for this gift, because it was the thing they most desired. Do we pray with that kind of longing for the manifestations of the Holy Ghost in our lives?

After the reappearance of the Savior, they prayed unto him, because he was with them. (3 Nephi 19:22)

. . . and behold, they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire. (3 Nephi 19:24)

They did not pray for distance. No one was evaluating the quality of these prayers by their length. The two things that make these prayers meaningful are (1) the inspiration that told them what to pray for, and (2) the act of praying for that which they truly desired (see 1 Nephi 2:16; Enos 1:12; Ether 3:2).

Can you see the lessons here? The habit of praying sometimes leads to the habit of *saying prayers*. Occasionally we pray as though we were flinging a handful of words at the clouds. I have often asked my children, “Did you say your prayers?” That is not a good question. Prayers aren’t something you say, they are something you do.

CONCLUSION: You will have noticed that Christ prayed for these wonderful people. But not for them alone; he prayed for me and for you. Did you notice these words?

And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one. (3 Nephi 19:23)

And these words?

Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and I pray for them, and also for them who shall believe on their words, that they may be purified in me, through faith on their words, even as they are purified in me. (3 Nephi 19:28)

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