

# BM Lesson #42

## "THIS IS MY GOSPEL"

(3 Nephi 27-30; 4 Nephi)

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### QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

I know [a] good man who was reared in a family without the blessings of the gospel. Through a series of unfortunate events in his early youth, he was introduced to homosexuality, and gradually he became a prisoner of this addictive behavior.

One day two young missionaries knocked on his door and asked if he would be interested in learning of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. In his heart of hearts he wanted to be freed from his prison of uncleanness, but feeling unable to change the direction his life had taken, he terminated the missionary discussions. Before leaving his apartment, the two elders left a copy of the Book of Mormon with him, and testified of its truthfulness.

My friend placed the book on his bookshelf and forgot about it for several years. He continued acting out his homosexual tendencies, assuming that such relationships would bring him happiness. But alas, with each passing year, his misery increased.

One day in the depths of despair, he scanned his bookshelf for something to read which might edify and uplift him and restore his self-worth. His eye caught hold of the book with a dark-blue cover, which the missionaries had given him several years before. He began to read. On the second page of this book, he read of Father Lehi's vision in which he was given a book to read, and "as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord" (1 Ne. 1:12). And as my good friend continued reading, he too was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

He read King Benjamin's benedictory challenge to undergo a mighty change of heart—not a little change, but a mighty change. He was given hope by the comforting conversion stories of Enos, Alma, Ammon, and Aaron. He was also inspired by the account of the Savior's visit to the ancient Nephites.

By the time he reached the final page of the Book of Mormon, he was prepared to accept Moroni's loving invitation to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness" (Moro. 10:32).

My friend contacted the Church and was taught the gospel and was baptized. [Spencer J. Condie, "A Mighty Change of Heart," Ensign, Nov. 1993, 16–17].

**INTRODUCTION:** What would you write if a friendly Christian publication invited you to prepare a one page summary of the fundamentals of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from your point of view? How and what would you describe? Which parts of the restoration would you emphasize? What would you include? What would you skip? In these chapters of the Book of Mormon we get the Savior's description of his church: its name, its purposes, its characteristics.

## **1. THE SAVIOR COMMANDS HIS NEPHITE DISCIPLES TO CALL THE CHURCH AFTER HIS NAME. HE EXPOUNDS HIS GOSPEL.**

(3 Nephi 27)

Following a period of fasting and prayer, the Savior appeared to the Nephite disciples, and asked, "What will ye that I shall give unto you?" Their concern was that they did not know what to call the church. In fact, "There [were] disputations among the people concerning this matter." (3N27:3) In his response, the Lord referred to his oft-repeated instruction that we should take upon us his name, and suggests that at least in part, that directive is fulfilled by taking membership in a church called by his name. Therefore, his church must be called by his name.

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel. (3N27:8)

And there the other requirement. The Church must be built upon his gospel (see 3N27:8,9).

3 N27:11 suggests that churches can originate from three different sources.

But if it be not built upon *my gospel*, and is built upon the *works of men*, or upon the *works of the devil*, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return. (*emphasis added*)

Churches, and the works of those churches, can originate with the Savior, with men, or with the devil.

The Lord gives a definition of his Gospel in 3N27:13-20. He emphasizes the atonement and the first principles and ordinances, and then says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel . . ." (3N27:21)

Other passages that offer such a description of the gospel are found in D&C 33:11,12; D&C 39:5,6; D&C 93:1; and D&C 76:40-43.

Two points among many in this description of the gospel that are worth an additional note are these: First, from verse 14

and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil— (3N27:14)

This verse tells us that Christ is first judged by the standards of men; then men are judged by the standard of Christ. As Christ submitted himself to the will of men, so must all men submit themselves to his will, either here or hereafter. CS Lewis, in his wonderful book, *The Great Divorce*, says it this way: "In the final analysis there are only two kinds of people in the world. Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'" (Touchstone, 1996, p. 72)

Second, from verse 20:

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, *that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.* (3N27:20, *emphasis added*)

Note that we are sanctified by the **reception** of the Holy Ghost. 3 Nephi 31:17 tells us

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

This gift of sanctification—of remission—comes by the receipt of the Holy Ghost, not simply by the ordinance or by baptism. We must make our lives conform. We must qualify by partaking worthily of the sacrament, to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

The disciples are commanded to

Write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden. Write the works of this people, which shall be, even as hath been written, of that which hath been. For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men. (3N27:23-25)

But there is another record kept, for “all things are written by the Father...”

Pres. Wilford Woodruff said it this way:

There is an account kept, whether we keep one or not. There are a good many revelations which show us that this is the case. Your history goes before you. All of you will find it when you get the other side of the veil. Every man's history--his acts--are written, whether he has kept a record here or not. (J.D., Vol 21, p. 281)

It seems that it will be from a combination of these records that men will be judged. , “Therefore, out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged.” (3N27:26)

## **2. THE SAVIOR GRANTS THE DESIRES OF HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES. THREE OF THE DISCIPLES CHOOSE TO REMAIN ON THE EARTH UNTIL HIS SECOND COMING.**

(3 Nephi 28)

The Savior asked each of his disciples a question: “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?” How would you respond to such a question? This may be the best question ever asked for evaluating spiritual status. If someone with the power to grant any wish offered you anything you wanted—without any restriction or reservation—what would you ask? Solomon asked for wisdom (1K3:5-10) Nine of the disciples asked for the opportunity to be with Christ after they had completed their lives. But three, these unusual three, asked for something remarkable. They did not say, “We want to *be* with you.” They said, “We want to *work* with you.”

The scriptures are pretty clear about what matters most in the world. Both D&C 15 and 16 tell us this:

I say unto you, that the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 15:6; 16:6)

The desire of the three disciples was that they might “bring the souls of men unto [Christ], while the world shall stand.” (3N28:9) Again I ask, what would your request be? The Lord was pleased that Solomon had not asked

. . . for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment. . . (1K3:12)

How pleased he must have been for these three who, like John the Beloved, had asked to be given the most important opportunity in the world, for the duration of the world. *We want to be missionaries until the end of time.* Of course the others would be doing missionary work, too, but in the spirit world. But these three wanted to stay on the earth like John the Beloved and bring souls for another 200 years, Jesus said of John,

“I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 7:6).

Everybody knows a few *Three Nephite* stories. These should be regarded with some reservation, since it is possible in our desire to build faith and recount extraordinary examples of the power of God, to mislead class members with stories not based on truth. 3 Nephi 28 may tell us all we need to know. They are among us and the Jews and the lost tribes. They can show themselves if they think it a good thing. And “great and marvelous works shall be wrought by them . . .” (3 Nephi 28:27-31)

3<sup>rd</sup> Nephi 29 tells us that the Book of Mormon is a great sign of the times—the most profound of evidences that the work of the Father has begun for the last time (see 3N29:1). The Book of Mormon will eradicate every excuse for ignoring the words of God. The message of its existence is that God keeps his promises and we cannot do a thing about it. (see 3N29:8,9) And it will not be a good thing for those who reject it (see 3N29:5).

### **3. AFTER MANY YEARS OF PEACE, THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE DWINDLE**

## IN UNBELIEF AND REJECT THE GOSPEL. (4 Nephi)

Fourth Nephi offers what seems to be the clearest picture of a Zion society in the scriptures. Speaking of the challenges of building Zion, Joseph Smith said:

Brethren, we are gathering to this beautiful land to build up Zion. . . . But since I have been here I perceive the spirit of selfishness, covetousness exists in the hearts of the saints. . . . Here are those who begin to spread out, buying up all the land they are able to do; . . . thinking to lay foundations for themselves only, looking to their own individual families. . . . Now I want to tell you that Zion cannot be built up in any such way. . . . I see signs put out, Beer signs, speculative schemes are being introduced. This is the ways of the world--Babylon indeed, and I tell you in the name of the God of Israel, if there is not repentance . . . you will be Broken up and scattered from this choice land [sic]. (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.9, Ch.2, p.37)

Ponder this statement and what it tells you about the attitudes necessary to build Zion. Those who live in Zion cannot be selfish, covetous, greedy, or speculative. Joseph's warning that, without repentance, the Saints would be broken and scattered was literally fulfilled.

So how does one build such a society? This small book suggests four requirements to me:

1. "And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites," (4N1:2) They were all converted. This means two things. First, all the people were converted. Second, the people were all converted—that is to say, each person was converted 100%. There was no residual resistance in them to the commandments.
  
2. ". . . they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God . . ." (4N1:12) The pattern of their lives

was not determined by their greed or selfishness or covetousness, but by the commandments of the Lord.

3. " . . . there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people." The record tells us this 3 times. (4N1:13, 15, 18, ) The overriding emotion of this society was charity—the love of God and the pure love of Christ. They loved each other and therefore were not reluctant to share all that they had.
4. " . . . they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God." (4N1:17) They were united in seeking the will of God and welfare of their neighbors. There were no *ites* of any kind, and no law-breakers. They had no contention nor disputation (see 4N1:2,15,18) Rather, "every man did deal justly one with another." (4N1:2)

These attitudes will foster a purer Christianity that most of us are used to. They will change the way we drive and the way we serve ice cream and the way we buy and sell and the way we rejoice. And if it is to happen among us, it must happen in this way:

Let there be an hallowed influence go from us over all things over which we have any power; over the soil we cultivate, over the houses we build, and over everything we possess; and if we cease to hold fellowship with that which is corrupt and establish the Zion of God in our hearts, in our own houses, in our cities, and throughout our country, we shall ultimately overcome the earth . . .  
(*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.443 - p.444)

Zion must begin in our hearts individually, then spread over all things over which we have any influence, and from thence to our cities, our countries, and finally our whole planet.

One of the doctrines of the kingdom that does not appear clearly in the Book of Mormon is the doctrine of eternal marriage. But this doctrine is certainly implied by the wording of 4N1:11.



And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.

Consider these *promises* in the light of the following from Lorenzo Snow:

When two Latter-day Saints are united together in marriage, promises are made to them concerning their offspring, that reach from eternity to eternity. They are promised that they shall have the power and the right to govern and control and administer salvation and exaltation and glory to their offspring worlds without end. And what offspring they do not have here, undoubtedly there will be opportunities to have them hereafter. What else could man wish? A man and a woman in the other life, having celestial bodies, free from sickness and disease, glorified and beautified beyond description, standing in the midst of their posterity, governing and controlling them, administering life, exaltation, and glory, worlds without end. (*Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, p.138)

**CONCLUSION:** The tragic ending of 4<sup>th</sup> Nephi sends a solemn warning across the centuries to those of us who long to establish Zion in our own communities. After decades of undiluted righteousness, the decline began. And where did it begin? In the same spot where the ascension began—in the hearts of the people. We know that even the in the Millennium men will ultimately begin to deny their God. (see D&C 29:22.) Since we know that Lucifer is the Emperor of erosion, let this be our determination: *the departure from Zion will not begin with me. I will become pure in heart and I will remain pure in heart. I will give all of my heart to Christ and I will walk in the commandments of the Lord and I will be filled with the love of God and I will live in unity with those around me.*

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