

From Denver Snuffer blog

Saturday, June 5, 2010

Weep for Zion for Zion has fled

It may as well be a dream. It involves our collective slumber. We get pictures in our head when we are taught some truth and presume that the picture is accurate. Then after we have repeated the "truth" often enough, we go on to believe the picture must be all-inclusive.

Once we've arrived at that point, the truth no longer matters. Our minds are made up. We've decided the answers, and no further evidence will be considered.

This certainty is reinforced when more people reach the same conclusion because they share the same picture in their head. You get together with others and testify that you are all in possession of the truth; not only the truth, but ALL of the truth. Before long every one of the group can pass a lie-detector test about the truth as they explain it.

As a result, this herd is incapable of ever seeing the picture differently. They cannot open their minds to the idea that their picture is skewed or off. It is most certainly incomplete. It is, in fact, so far short of the whole story that when any part of the remaining, missing information is shown to them they are certain it is a lie.

It is painful to part with our suppositions and the traditions we hold dear. It is painful to admit there may be much more of the picture we have not yet considered, much less seen. It causes anxiety and fear. So much fear in fact, that when it comes to "eternal truth," people literally put their lives in jeopardy if they denounce the falsehoods of the herd and proclaim the truth to those whose peace of mind and self-identity is tied to the incomplete and misleading picture they believe holds all truth.

Latter-day Saints are not immune from this process. We have wanted a complete, well defined statement of our faith since the time of Joseph Smith. We crave an "orthodox" faith so we, like the Historic Christians, can proclaim what is true and right and what is error and heresy. It gives us security. It is false security, purchased at the price of closed minds. It gives us hope. It is false hope, based on the foolishness of the deluded.

As we water down even further the true principles of what our faith contains by requiring Relief Society and High Priests to labor over a Gospel Essentials Manual as the sole fodder for our spiritual fare, we strain every particle of solid food out of the diet. The remaining gruel is so thin, lacking in substance, that we become universally malnourished. Yet in that emaciated state, as our bellies distend from the bloating of starvation, we all proclaim how well fed we are. Our bellies are swollen! We have enough of the word of God! We need no more of the word of God! All is well! Better than well, we prosper in the land of promise!

When you surrender your superstitions and arrogance and read the scriptures for the first time with an open mind, they will astonish you. They will condemn you. They will demand you repent, open your heart, and receive more. They will offer you the bread of life, a living fountain of revelation from which, if you draw, you will find not only sustenance, but also the capacity to recognize that there are those who are starving.

We still weep for Zion; for Zion has fled.

Try reading Alma Chapter 13 and take LITERALLY every word there. Don't bring any pictures in your head and read them into the text. Forget every popular and correlated notion ever spoken about the priesthood for a moment and just look at the words. You will be shocked. If you can bring yourself to do that, then read the Book of Mormon again. It was written for our day, testifying against us. A former group of inhabitants who failed and were destroyed wrote their best advice and sent it to us. We are the ones being warned. We are in a great deal of peril. Our church, if the Book of Mormon is true, is filled with corruption and priestcraft.

Or, on the other hand, just chant that "you know (insert the subject of choice here) is true" and throw about the "name of Jesus Christ" as you do. It is a tried and true mantra, which when repeated often enough, can dull the senses and reinstate the slumber we are so often wrapped. So relax. Hum to yourself a hymn and you will soon be back asleep.

Monday, June 7, 2010

Cite your minds forward

A few days ago I directed you to Alma 13. I suggested that it be read without preconceptions and you let the words just acquire whatever meaning they appear to have in the chapter itself. Some of you have begun that process and have raised questions. I thought I might revisit the chapter to open up a few ideas for those who haven't begun the exercise.

Here's the first verse:

"And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people."

Why "cite your minds forward?" Especially since it was talking in the past tense? Why is this idiom in the verse? How would Joseph Smith know about this kind of word usage? (Perhaps this is an indication the text is translated from another language rather than being composed in English.)

Why "the Lord God ordained priests?" Were they ordained by God indeed? Was there another man involved in conferring that authority? Did it necessarily come from God alone? What priesthood is it that is referred to?

What is "after his holy order?" Is this Aaronic? Is this Melchizedek? Or is this something different? There are three orders of priesthood, the third being "Patriarchal" as explained in Beloved Enos. Which one is this verse referring to of the three?

What form of priesthood is "after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son?" Are all three? Or is there one that is distinguished by being uniquely after the order of His Son?

What "things" are these people to "teach.. unto the people?" Is there something associated with what is contained in the chapter that alone is the province of those possessing the "holy order" to teach? If so, why is that?

What is going on here? Is this deeper doctrine than we normally encounter? If so, why has it eluded our attention? If our preconceptions have blinded us to this material, then why would we want to ever read scripture through the blinding lens of the notions we have inherited? Is this part of the wicked "traditions of our fathers" that the Book of Mormon warn us against?

Oh ye Gentiles.....

Now I'm missing the weekly Book of Mormon class I taught for so many years. There I could go ahead and discuss all the answers. My home was too small for the crowds and I wasn't going to export it to a less sacred place where the Spirit would not permit me to teach. Well, the questions are better than merely giving answers, as I have said before. If you can learn to ask good questions, then you can go to the Lord and get the answers. Who knows where that dialogue will lead you.

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Alma 13:2

Continuing with Alma 13: 2:

"And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption."

Now this is important stuff here. We are really being told something quite amazing. Look at these words!

To be "ordained after the order of his Son" it must be done "in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption." Did you get that?

Think about these words carefully.

The "manner" must be in a way which will let people know or understand how to "look forward to His Son for redemption."

So, let's clear away the institutional garbage that surrounds our thinking.

Christ WAS NOT ordained by being sustained by a congregation.

Christ WAS NOT ordained by having hands laid upon Him by another man.

Christ DID NOT carry a credential with Him or a certificate of priestly authority.

Christ WAS NOT part of the established priestly hierarchy.

We have no record of His ordination at all. We only have established, priestly class officials asking Christ about where He got His authority from. And we have Christ simply refusing to answer their question.

Christ showed that He in fact held priestly authority by His demonstration of power. More importantly, He taught profound truths with such passing simplicity and convincing prose that His message necessarily came from a higher source. In word and deed He put on display His power and authority.

But what is the verse in Alma speaking about? How does one become "ordained" in such a manner that people learning of it will then know how to look forward (or back) to the Savior and understand His redeeming power?

Do they put on display, by the words and precepts they speak, the profound simplicity and convincing prose of the angels themselves? Are they able to show their ordination by speaking words of eternal life, as He did?

How does this "ordination" acquire or show redeeming power?

How can obtaining authority by ordination to this priesthood be something which will let people know their Lord better?

What is really going on for those who hold actual priestly authority, being ordained in the required manner? Do they acquire more than administrative authority from an institution? Do they receive power from on high? Can you get it anywhere other than from on high? Is this why the power of the priesthood is inseparably connected with the powers of heaven? What have we Saints been doing? Practicing? Holding ourselves forth to possess?

Where can we get this ordination after the order of the Son of God?

Forget what you've been taught. Read the Book of Mormon and remove the condemnation under which this people labor. Really study its words. They are alien to your prejudices and presumptions. But they ARE in fact the words of life. You really can get closer to God by abiding its precepts than through any other book! Amazingly, this is one of the very precepts which necessarily forces you to draw closer to God!

What a marvelous work and a wonder! Will the wonder never cease? (Only if you reject it.) It is a font of living water which constantly renews and floods forth more and new information endlessly, until at last we are also caught up in the visions of eternity and know our Lord. Then we needn't ask another to know the Lord, for all shall know Him.

I labor to help you know Him; to bring you to Him. The primary means to accomplish that remains the Book of Mormon. But only if you actually let it speak to you and reveal its many hidden secrets.

I'm only asking questions here. You'll have to figure out the answers.

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Alma 13: 3:

"And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such."

It is too much! Too great of words for men to possess! Consider what they refer us to.

Called and prepared FIRST! From the foundation of the world!

So here priesthood has its beginning before this world even was organized. There is a necessary link between those hallowed days and power here. No person has authority here unless it was first obtained there.

How was it obtained first - before the foundation of the world?

It was because of the foreknowledge of God. And what was God's foreknowledge based upon? Their "exceeding faith and good works!"

How can a person have "faith" when they stand in the presence of God? Do they now have knowledge? This was before the mortal estate, right? If so, then how can there be faith? What good works were involved?

Then, too, the "faith" and the "good works" were done as a result of the person having been "left to choose between good and evil." Now this is surprising! You mean that before Adam partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (i.e., before the foundation of the world) that some people had already obtained a knowledge of good and evil, been tempted, exhibited good works and acquired faith? How so? When and where did they do that? What does that tell us about them? Is this why Joseph said there were "sons of God who exalted themselves to be gods before the world was made?" (TPJS p. 375.) When and where and how did they do this? And was this required for any person to be able to claim they now have priestly authority here? Or is it only those who have the "holy order after the Son of God?" Is there something about these men's "holy calling" that distinguishes them from others here? If so, what is it? Who are these men? Are they always going to be from unlikely sources and places, so that people can know how to recognize the Lord?

Then, too, we have them in a class of people who had been through a "preparatory redemption" already. What does that mean? What does it imply? How did they qualify? How long have these souls been working on the process of redemption and thereby qualify through their faith and good works to hold authority in this estate? Who are they?

Oh, now my head is spinning. Can this doctrine really be true? Why do we know so little about it? Why did Joseph talk about it, but we have simply nothing to add? Indeed, we deny it exists..... why is that?

This is certainly an interesting chapter. Fearsome and interesting. What a threatening, terrible, majestic, holy and challenging book this Book of Mormon turns out to be after all.

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Alma 13:4

"And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren."

The result of what went on before is the reason for the ordination or calling. That is, "thus they have been called." Meaning that all of what went into the earlier experiences i.e., being left to choose between good and evil, and having chosen good, having "faith" and good works, is the reason for their ordination. These souls are not novices. They are not getting authority here for the first time. They come with power from beyond this earth, bringing it with them to this earth. They qualified before and elsewhere.

All of this is "on account of their faith." All things are obtained through faith. That is explained in the Sixth Lecture, quoted here. Faith is a principle of power. It is capable of making things happen. There must be a connection between faith and power; between faith and priesthood.

Others reject the Spirit of God and, therefore, do not have this power. These others may claim to have authority, but they do not really receive power from the Spirit of God. They are animated by a different source.

What, then, causes someone who has a little authority "as they suppose" (they don't really have it, you see), to attempt to use that pretense to control and dominate others? The answer is contained in revelations already in print. It is their pride, their insecurities, the need to control, to be praised and celebrated, the need to gratify their vain ambition. These are character flaws. They cover up these flaws by claiming to have priestly authority from God. (D&C 121: 34-44.)

They are the world's Pharaohs, not the world's Abraham's. Their hearts are hard, their minds blind.

They do not hear the Spirit of God, and therefore none of the powers of heaven are with them.

This was/is their choice. They could have had the same privilege. But, alas, they prefer instead their own aggrandizement. They prefer monuments built with their names engraven on them. There is no message of truth and hope coming from them. Their words (the only things which really endure), will fall to the ground unfulfilled. They will not be remembered. They will return without a saved soul.

What stunning doctrines we have stumbled upon here! I'm getting worried about things as I look about. This Book of Mormon is alarming...

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Alma 13: 5-6

"Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared— And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—"

So there wasn't some great advantage for these people who hold actual priestly authority. We learn that "in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren." Where was that "first place?" Is it also "from the foundation of the world" referred to earlier?

What does it mean that they were "on the same standing with their brethren" while in that first place?

What was it about these who receive authority that qualified them to receive the "holy calling" from the foundation of the world? What does it mean that they "would not harden their hearts" in the first place? If they didn't do it then, will they do it now?

Is foreknowledge about these individual's qualifications based on prior performance? Can you determine that since they did not harden their hearts in the first place, they will not begin to harden their hearts now?

What about the "atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared" made them qualified? Did they accept Him there? Did they soften their hearts there toward Him? Are they capable of having redeeming faith in Him here because they first acquired it there?

Is all this necessary to have preceded ordination here? If it was not acquired there, can an ordination here have any effect?

What, then, do those who qualify do? What does it mean "to teach his commandments unto the children of men?"

Is there something different between teaching commandments on the one hand, and "that they [who are taught] also might enter into his rest" on the other hand? Are the two linked together? Is it necessary to both "teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest" to show such priestly authority? That is, can anyone, regardless of their true ordination to authority teach commandments? But does it take something more, some higher ordination in order to bring those taught "to enter into His rest?" If so, what is the difference? How can you recognize such teachings if they are ever put on display?

Did Joseph Smith exhibit such powerful teachings?

Did Enoch?

Did Melchizedek? Abraham? Elijah? Elisha? Nephi? The Brother of Jared? Enos? Others?

Do we see that today? If so, where? Does anyone have the audacity to presume they can bring another soul back to the Lord's rest? Maybe Joseph Smith's comment on this point is appropriate:

"The things of God are of deep import and time and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind O man if thou wilt lead a soul into salvation must search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity, thou must commune with God." (DHC Vol. 3, p. 295.) I'd like to meet such a man. They seem to be rather infrequent residents of this fallen world....

I'm only asking those questions which arise in my own mind as I read these words. You'll have to figure out your own answers.

Thursday, June 10, 2010

Alma 13:7

The record continues in Alma 13: 7:

"This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—"

Now we encounter comments that everyone seems to use about this priesthood. It is "without beginning of days or end of years." It is "from the foundation of the world."

It is "prepared from eternity to eternity."

When did eternity end and mortality begin?

When does mortality end and eternity begin again?

What does the phrase "from eternity to eternity" really refer to?

Do we pass "from eternity" then back "to eternity" as part of this mortal experience?

What went on before, back in the first "eternity?" We read elsewhere of this peaceful existence during "millennial" conditions, which end with rebellion, disputes and a war. Was Satan loosed in an earlier eternity after some season of peace to stir the hearts of men to anger one with another? (See Rev. 20: 7-9.) Was he cast out to hell, or the Telestial Kingdom, where we presently reside? What went on? How often would the Lord have gathered us as a hen gathers her chicks, but we would not be gathered? (I suppose His asking and the lack of an answer implies a great number.)

What is it about what went on before, in the earlier "eternity," that allows God to possess His perfect "foreknowledge of all things" now?

What is this strange doctrine and the implications which flow from them? Was Joseph Smith trying to tell us this in the later Nauvoo talks? (Maybe we should read them again...)

How is one to take it all in? How is the priesthood tied to this prior eternity? Why do we get side-tracked into the subject of "from eternity to eternity" when we learn about this endless priesthood which is without beginning of days or end of years?

What is really going on? How can we learn of the truth? Is there no prophet who can declare it to us?

The suspense is killing me. I'm hoping to get answers. I'm hoping you want them too. I'm confident if you ask the Lord, He will answer you. He intends to pour out knowledge upon the heads of the Saints. If we will stop making others accountable for what we learn, and go to Him to receive what He offers, by the power of the Holy Ghost you may know the truth of all things. I read that somewhere... But the words are mine, now.

Thursday, June 10, 2010

Alma 13:8

"Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—"

The manner of such person's ordination is described but-

What does it mean to be "called with a holy calling?" Is there something about the nature of this "calling" that is different from an interview and being "found worthy of advancement in the priesthood" as we commonly see? What is a "holy calling" anyway? Why does this kind of priestly calling get described exclusively as "holy" by its nature? Is there some contact with God required (who is the source of all holiness) as part of this "holy calling?"

Then we have the description of their ordination. What does it mean to be "ordained with a holy ordinance?" Does our practice of laying on hands, conferring the Aaronic Priesthood and ordaining to the office of Priest answer to this description? What is the "holy ordinance" that is done to confer this priesthood?

Can we automatically rule out the entirety of Aaronic and most of the Melchizedek priesthood offices when we see the words: "taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order?" Is there some office we are aware of which is appropriately described as "taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order?" Think about that for a moment.

If this is a "holy calling" and it results in the person receiving it "taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order" isn't this something perhaps quite different from what we do to disseminate the priesthood? And if all the Aaronic Priesthood and most of the Melchizedek Priesthood offices are not what we would appropriately call "the high priesthood of the holy order" then are we talking about either of these two commonly held priesthoods anyway?

Then we have the interesting addition that the "calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end" for those involved. That is, without reference to mortality. It was held before coming here, it will endure after leaving here. It is "endless" in the sense it comes "from eternity to eternity" as set out in the preceding verse.

This is potentially quite different from the manner in which we practice priestly ordinations in the church today. I suppose that some will want to confine all this description to our practices. They are free to see it in that way if they choose. I'm just asking if it is more likely that the words have a different meaning than we have associated with them before. If that is possible, then perhaps we ought to be asking the Lord to inform us more about the matter, rather than presuming we already possess what is being described here.

It may just be that our hopes for some great, eternal reward hinge upon getting to the bottom of this matter. It may just be that God's control over and involvement with the "holy calling" and "holy ordinance" of having the "high priesthood after the Son of God" is immediate and direct. It may be that this "holy ordinance" will only come from that God who employs no servant at the gate, but is Himself the gatekeeper. (2 Ne. 9: 41.) Wouldn't that be wonderful. Think about it - no flawed process. No fooled bishop or stake president letting someone obtain an office for which they are completely unsuited. It sort of makes sense.

Friday, June 11, 2010

Alma 13:9

"Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen."

Several things about this formulation are interesting. Most interesting is the closing declaration, "**And thus it is. Amen.**" It is iconic. It is as if the statement were an authorized, serious message, intended to be accompanied by the requisite formalities to let the reader know that this is serious stuff. This is "most holy." This is not just a passing description. It holds terrible, eternal significance. So the material that preceded it holds important keys to understanding. Important warnings and knowledge. Perhaps, as a result of the concluding punctuation, we should be very, very careful about the words that preceded it. [This is why I'm conducting this exercise.]

Now look at the beginning-

"Thus they become..." These individuals have become something. The "high priests" about whom this material has been written have been in the process of becoming something holy from before the foundation of the world. This is pre-earth or pre-mortal existence stuff. The history, or background leading up to finding a holy high priest in mortality is eons in the making. It goes back to before this world had been reorganized.

"..high priests forever..." This priestly authority and holy order is not mortal. It is without beginning in this mortal phase of existence.

Now comes the formula of the authority: "after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth." Look at it in pieces.

-After the order of the Son

-After the order of the Only Begotten of the Father

-After the order of Him who is without beginning of days or end of years

-After the order of Him who is full of grace

-After the order of Him who is full of equity

-After the order of Him who is full of truth.

What does it mean to be "begotten" of the Father? (Psalms 2: 7.)

What does it mean to be a "son" of the Father? (1 John 3: 1-3.)

What does it mean to be full of "grace?" (D&C 93: 11-20.)

What does it mean to be full of "equity?" (Proverbs 2: 9.)

What does it mean to be full of "truth?" (D&C 93: 24.)

This is interesting. What are we to make of such "holy" men who are "high priests after the order of the Son of God?"

Do you think we make a man such a thing by sustaining him in Ward, Stake and General Conferences? Can we make one of them at all?

If we never realize who they are, does that mean they don't exist? Does it mean they weren't ordained before the foundation of the world?

If they come, minister in obscurity, never hold high office and never have a single building at BYU, BYU Hawaii or BYU Idaho named after them, are they any less?

Does our recognition of them make them any more?

Are they here to be recognized? Are they here just to teach so that others may be brought back to God by learning His commandments and enter into His rest?

This is quite different than what I've been told in Gospel Doctrine class. It is beginning to look and feel a lot like what Joseph Smith was saying right at the end in the Nauvoo period. I wonder why we neglect this today?

Friday, June 11, 2010

Alma 13:10

"Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;"

Immediately following the formula, the explanation continues that "many" were able to become ordained as such "high priests of God." But the way they did this was through several specific actions. They had "exceeding faith." What do you suppose "exceeding faith" means? Why not "faith?" What is the difference between "faith" and "exceeding faith?"

They went through "repentance." So we know they made the same kinds of mortal mistakes as we do. They experience the bitter and then are able to prefer the sweet. They knew what it was like to feel the bitterness of hell, because they felt the sting of sin. So they repented. These great souls are NOT perfect, after all! They "repented" because they didn't do it right the first time. What a refreshing idea. They weren't fake. They didn't feign virtue. They had failing. They were filled with life, made errors, and needed to repent. They were not immune to the circumstances of this fallen world.

More importantly, do the terms "exceeding faith" and "repentance" go together? That is, do you necessarily have to possess "exceeding faith" in order to become one who fully "repents?" If so, why? How is it done? This may be an important clue to the process of "keeping the second estate" and "proving" that you are ready to move on. Perhaps it is in this manner that some will then have "glory added upon their heads forever," (Abr. 3: 26) and in another cycle of existence and eternal progression then also join in the ranks of those belonging to the "holy order after the Son of God."

These called persons are, despite everything, "righteous before God." God measures differently than do we. Being "righteous before God" may not mean the same thing we think "righteous" means. We want outward signs, symbols, dress, grooming and conformity. God looks at the intent of the heart.

Interestingly, they "choose to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish." What do you suppose that means? First, they "repent," then they "work righteousness." Because of this, they do not "perish." So do these things all go together? Can a person "repent" but then not "work righteousness?" Does a person have to "repent" and "work righteousness" in order to not "perish?"

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Alma 13:11

"Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb."

If you understand these phrases, this verse clarifies the matter.

Being called into this holy order requires a person to be more than a church member, or a follower, or a believer. They need to be "sanctified."

"Their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb." No small feat!

To have white garments is to have the blood and sins of your generation removed from you. To be purified. To be sanctified by the Lamb - removing from you, and taking upon Himself the responsibility to answer for whatever failings you have.

This is not ritual purity. This is purity in fact.

The person described by this phrase is qualified to stand in the presence of God without sin. Clean of all blood and sin - righteous forever. He is Christ's, and Christ is the Father's, and all that each of them will be is the same; for we shall see Him as He is, because we will be like Him. To be like Him is to be sanctified.

I can use the words, but I am powerless beyond that. This is more than you think it is. Words are inadequate to explain it. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered **into the heart of man** what great things the Lord has in mind by inheriting these promises. Indeed, to receive an understanding is to **cease to be a man and become something else altogether**. A stranger and sojourner here, but a resident with God in another condition altogether. It is written by the Lord concerning them: *"These are they who are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all. These are they who have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn. These are they whose names are written in heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all. These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood."* (D&C 76: 66-69.)

Such persons are still in this world, but they are also associated with innumerable others who are not present here. Although mortals associate with each other, these individuals obtain a higher order. They connect with a higher plane, because a more sure word has been spoken to them. As a result they belong to an order of holy priesthood. That priesthood is an order without beginning of days or end of years, from eternity to eternity. This new, higher order, when it occurs can be the spark through which heaven itself can return to the earth.

To others looking in from outside, these are words without meaning, or definition. To those who hold this priestly position, these words are a perfect fit. The gulf between the two positions is so great that even a common vocabulary won't make meanings connect.

We proclaim we "have the truth" but we do not preach it. We claim to have authority, but we have no power to redeem and exalt. We pretend it is unlawful to preach mysteries, yet Alma is preaching the deepest doctrines to the non-converted. If we preach the truth, it will attract those whose lives are empty. Why would they join us if what we offer is as trite and superficial as the false religions they already believe?

Is there no need to cry repentance to this generation with power and authority? With the tongue of an angel? To cry out as the Book of Mormon declares the message to the non-believing and skeptical?

It does raise some troubling concerns as we claim to be the "true church" but do not act the part as shown in these scriptures. How are we justified in masking the fullness, hiding the mysteries, putting away deep doctrine that will save, and still proclaim that we are the "only true and living church upon the earth?" Does "living" require us to create sons and daughters of God who are "come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn?" If so, why do we hear so little about it in our day?

I suppose our audacity springs from our history? If we have lost something vital that conflicts with our current understanding of the history that GUARANTEES us that we are perfect, and that we cannot be misled, then we wouldn't want to acknowledge that. Thank goodness for these guarantees. It does let us relax a bit, doesn't it? Broad and wide are the guarantees we have inherited. We don't need to worry about that narrow and strait fringe who rummage about in the mysteries.

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Alma 13:12

"Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God."

If the earlier verse were not clear enough, the point is reiterated again here. These people are "sanctified by the Holy Ghost" as a result of "having their garments made white." They are "pure and spotless before God!"

This is the reason they can enter His presence. He has accepted them because just like Him, they are without sin. They were not perfected by their own acts. The earlier reference to their repentance makes that clear. They become pure and spotless before God because they have done what was asked of them to become clean. They have repented.

Now, measure the effects of their repentance. It has been so complete, so heartfelt, and deeply prized that they "could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence." It is this notion that underlies the mistaken idea that once someone's calling and election has been made sure they are required to suffer for their own sins, because they have knowledge they are redeemed. This is a twisted view, designed by the adversary to discourage those who might otherwise seek and find.

It is not that the atonement ceases to operate for the redeemed. The atonement continues to cover the on-going sins of these redeemed souls which arise from their foolishness, mistakes, errors of comprehension, and the things they don't understand yet. Christ does not require them to do what they don't know is a requirement yet. As the gentle and kind Lord, He will forgive all they do that is wrong, while He reveals through greater light and knowledge a higher path. As He unfolds to their understanding more light, they can measure their conduct according to that greater light.

As they gain greater truth and light they see things how they really are. Right and wrong are seen differently. What once was "right" is now wrong as greater light and truth is received. What was once "wrong" is now seen clearly, without all the errors of understanding held before.

The spotlessness is because their heart is right. They WANT to please their Lord. They WANT to be like Him. Sin is not tempting because it is contrary to Him whom they love.

The abhorrence they feel at sin is not within them. It is not the temptations they struggle against. That is not the meaning at all. It is what they see all about them. The lost souls are the object of their compassion and care. They WANT to have others redeemed and saved from this lost and fallen world. The fruit they tasted is something they desire to share. They WANT many, an exceeding many, to share with them in the hope that can be won by repentance.

They would shout "**flee from Babylon**" if they thought it would do any good. But shouting does no good among a darkened and benighted people. They may speak the words of an angel to others, but it is up to others to decide whether they will listen. It will be a still, small, quiet pleading they make to others. Within their entreaties will be found the Master's words.

Many may claim to speak in His name, but only these few have the ability to speak with His approval. These are holy men, possessing words of eternal life. In them will be found truths that come from eternity and that will save to all eternity.

Only a few will listen. That won't detract from the power of the message delivered by those who are after the holy order of the Son of God, for their words can save any who will listen.

What an interesting chapter we have found here. And we are only a dozen verses into it! We should press on.

Sunday, June 13, 2010

Alma 13:13

"And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest."

Think about what you're reading here. Alma is essentially declaring himself as one of those possessing this priesthood because he is inviting others to enter into the rest which these people enjoy. That is, "come, join in the rest of the Lord."

Alma has just revealed something profound about himself. It is subtle, but nonetheless true. In meekness he has proffered an invitation. He has not set himself up to be admired. He does not consider himself better. He has delivered the invitation to those to whom he is ministering, just as you would expect someone possessing this great, holy calling to do.

All the more remarkable is that he extends this invitation to an unredeemed, critical, reproachful audience of unconverted. He does not shield them from these great mysteries.

He does not flinch or hold back because it would be to "cast pearls before swine." He knows where the line is drawn, for in the preceding chapter they have explained to an audience that there are mysteries withheld from the public. (Alma 12: 9-11.) There are things kept from public knowledge and obtained only by heed and diligence. The line involves sacred ordinances, NOT higher knowledge. You give that and you make converts. You withhold it and you blend into the morass of churches who teach merely a form of godliness without any power to save. (JS-H 1: 19.)

It was the same during Christ's ministry. The line is drawn as sacred events turn to ordinances. They are withheld. NOT the teaching of deep doctrine.

So when we refuse to discuss "mysteries" and limit our correlated curriculum to an approved list of 52 subjects, recycling them endlessly, we are not in conformity with the pattern shown in the Book of Mormon. The "most correct book" condemns us. But, then again, so does the word of the Lord precisely because we are not following the Book of Mormon. (D&C 84: 55-57.)

The highest form of acceptance and redemption is to have your calling and election made sure; to be washed and cleansed from sin every whit. Alma is preaching this to unconverted, investigating, potential converts. Today we won't even permit the subject to be raised in adult Sunday School, Priesthood, or Relief Society meetings because it is considered to be "too sensitive" for the members to consider. Have we, the Gentiles, rejected "the fullness of the Gospel?" (3 Ne. 16: 10.) Not as long as any of us (like salt or leaven) keep these doctrines alive.

If you want to know about this fullness and how to obtain it, then read the books I have written. That is what they are about. Alma was right! His message was true!

Let all come and partake. Everyone is invited. No institutional control should be used to prevent your search into this matter. It is right in the Book of Mormon. Though the institution may be condemned for neglecting it, you don't need to be.

So, let's turn to the next verse and see what wonders continue to unfold before our eyes....

Monday, June 14, 2010

Alma 13:14

"Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever."

We have named a portion of the priesthood after Melchizedek. (It is not, however, the form which Melchizedek held. That is another topic I am not going to address here now. This area is complete mush in the minds of Latter-day Saint writers and commentaries. I can't straighten that out on this blog. I might take it up in a book and go through it methodically there.)

What is important is that the great events of Melchizedek's time began when people humbled themselves and accepted the teachings of this "high priesthood" holder and were, thereby, saved. Not only saved but also led into a fellowship which eventually turned into a City of Peace, or City of Salem, or Jerusalem, which was taken into heaven.

This prototype was so influential in the thinking of all who followed, that the high priesthood was named after Melchizedek. Even though he held Patriarchal Priesthood with its associated sealing power, he was the one after whom Melchizedek Priesthood was named in the form it was later transmitted which lacked sealing authority. (Again, another topic.)

What is important in this verse is the connection between the existence of the one holding this authority (Melchizedek), and a humble people who would accept and follow those teachings. The result of the combination of the two was that God came and dwelt among them.

This is a pattern that followed the previous pattern with Enoch. This was the pattern Joseph wanted to return through his teaching and ministry. Joseph wasn't able to accomplish it. We now hope to see it someday occur in the unfolding history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The most recent book on this subject, now on sale at Deseret Book (unfortunately a red-flag for me) urges the idea that the only Zion we should expect to see will come when the church president allows or directs it to happen.

This verse suggests what is needed is: 1) humble people willing to accept teaching from a high priest after the ancient order and 2) a person having that authority who will teach.

What does this do to our current accepted model?

If Zion is to return, how will it return? Will it mirror what the Book of Mormon is teaching here?

Is the church president the one who will bring this gathering to pass?

Is the church president teaching doctrine about the fullness which will bring others into the rest of the Lord?

Has the church president brought a company into the Lord's presence? Attempted to do so? Taught or written about how that will happen? (If so, can someone point that out to me so I can read the talk, get the book or watch the video.)

How can I know I would actually have followed Melchizedek and become a part of his city by what I do today? (I'd like to be among them, you see.)

Monday, June 14, 2010

Alma 13:15

"And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed."

Abraham, father of the righteous, paid tithe to this Melchizedek. Not the reverse.

I've already commented that I believe Melchizedek (whose name means "king and priest") was in fact Shem. I believe those who disagree (McConkie and Joseph Fielding Smith) base their conclusion on the words of D&C 84: "Which Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah;" (D&C 84: 14). I believe the lineage referred to there is from the fathers who preceded Noah. But Noah was Shem/Melchizedek's father.

Abraham received the priesthood which had been promised to him by God, from Melchizedek. He (Abraham) already had the records of the fathers. (Abr. 1: 31.) He already had the promise of priestly authority. (Abr. 2: 6-9.) So the question should be asked as to why Abraham would need to be ordained by Melchizedek when the Lord was speaking directly to him and could have taken care of that directly. It is an important question. It is necessary to understand why the question should be asked and also what the answer is.

First, why would Abraham, who was directly in contact with God, be sent to another to receive the priesthood? What sense does it make the Lord would make him wait and send him to another? Particularly when Abraham had understanding that stretched into heavens and also possessed the records of the fathers, back to Adam. Why do that?

You should struggle with this question yourself. I feel like I'm robbing you by answering. Nevertheless, Abraham needed to be endowed and Melchizedek was set up to provide to Abraham the endowment. Therefore to receive the ordinance (Abraham was raised by apostates who had not provided that for him), he was sent to Melchizedek from whom he received necessary ordinances. As long as the ordinances needed to be performed and there was an officiator there to accomplish it, the Lord sent Abraham to Melchizedek.

Abraham also received the accouterments of kingship that descended from Adam. Melchizedek was the reigning high priest on the earth, Abraham was to replace him at his passing, and Melchizedek had awaited the promised successor's arrival for years. When at last Abraham arrived, Melchizedek was able to provide ordinances, answer questions, minister as was needed, then turn over the accouterments of kingship and withdraw from this earth. No sooner had Abraham been prepared than Melchizedek and his city also withdraw to join Enoch's people.

Second, why were tithes paid to a great high priest who would shortly be translated? What need was there for tithing?

The form the tithing took was not a check or bank draft. It was animals, food and usable material. What was provided would be used in sacrifices, feasts, celebrations and decoration of the temple maintained by Melchizedek. In short, Abraham provided material through his tithing that could be incorporated into the celebrations to which he was invited and from which he derived his own blessing and endowment. He gave, in turn he received.

Now, if you do not understand the concept of meekness and its importance for one who should hold this holy priesthood, then you do not understand either Melchizedek or Abraham. Each was a minister who served others. Each was a faithful guide because neither sought to be greater than another. They were great servants, who could be trusted with great authority because they did not seek their own will. They were interested in following the Lord's will. Even at the price of great inconvenience and sacrifice to them. They were willing to sacrifice all things, and were therefore called to the work.

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Alma 13: 16

"Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord."

Notice the shifting back to "ordinances" from the discussion of priesthood. What ordinances? What manner?

Why would what happened with Melchizedek and Abraham be something pointing to the Son of God?

Why would such an ordination and ordinance always be something that would prepare people to understand and accept the Son of God?

How was it a "type" of the Son of God's order?

What is this referring to in plain language? Is it that the ordinances will reveal a pattern that will unmistakably point back to the ministry of Christ? How?

What is there in conferring priesthood and endowing with understanding that points to Christ? Was Christ endowed with knowledge? Power? Authority? From on-high? When? What account do we have of it? Was it at His baptism when the voice of God declared, "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (which wording was deliberately changed during the Fourth Century Christological debates to read instead: "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased")? How does this identify both the holder of this holy order of priesthood and confirm Christ's ministry as the Son of God?

More importantly, why are these things not being taught to us today? This is such basic and important doctrine that Alma is teaching it as introductory material to a potential group of converts. But as faithful members of the Church we aren't even familiar with them. What have we been doing with the Gospel we received?

Why was the "manner" something which would let those who learned about it know and identify the Lord?

Do we expect to follow Christ? If so, why aren't we anxious to learn about this holy order? Can we follow Him unless we do what is necessary to take upon us that same holy order? If so, then how are we to find it today? Who teaches about it?

It is interesting to read this chapter of Alma. It reinforces that the Book of Mormon is still being neglected. We cycle through it every four years. Perhaps we are still neglecting it's true message? I think this chapter gets lumped in with three others and covered in a 50 minute class every four years. Maybe that is what is meant by "neglect." Oooops....

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Alma 13: 17-18

"Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness; But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father."

He was a king over people who had "waxed strong" in both "iniquity" and also "abomination." Keep in mind that "waxing strong" means to be increasingly determined or committed. "Iniquity" is generally evil practice, but "abomination" involves the religious justification of wrongdoing. That is, something becomes "abominable" when it is motivated out of a false form of religious observance or is justified because of religious error.

The people to whom Melchizedek would minister were not simply in error, they were motivated by a false set of religious beliefs and errors. The result was that "they had all gone astray." They were "full of all manner of wickedness." This was a challenging audience for this man to minister to and try to convert to the truth.

Melchizedek began by "exercising mighty faith" in order to understand the truth and discern the difference between truth and error. Remember how difficult it is to be taught truth. It is more difficult to learn truth than it is to perform miracles. (3 Ne. 17: 2-7.) Despite this, Melchizedek was able to set aside all he beheld and through faith acquire an understanding of the truth for himself. Conferred upon him as part of this education was the priestly authority with which to minister to others.

He "did preach repentance unto his people." This required him to expose the errors, show them they were involved in iniquity and to expose how their religious errors had made them abominable. This preaching is always most difficult because it confronts the audience with a challenge to their mistaken beliefs, and false religion. There is a risk of violence when this happens. People who entertain abominable religious practices are more often moved to violence than to repentance. The Lord was greeted with violence. So was Lehi, Isaiah, Nephi, Samuel the Lamanite, Abinadi, Peter, Paul, Stephen, James, Zacharias and too many others to mention. To their credit, and to Melchizedek's, the preaching resulted in repentance.

The serious errors, iniquity, and abominations of these people did not prevent Melchizedek from establishing a Zion. These people were able to acquire "peace in the land" because of their repentance. As used here, however, peace means more than the absence of violence, it means the presence of the Lord.

The statement that he established peace as the King of Salem (Shalom means peace) and "he did reign under his father" is a play on words. Which "father" is being identified in the statement. Was it Noah, or Gabriel? (A man who would also be translated and have a ministry as the Lord's herald before the birth of John the Baptist and Christ.) Or was the "father" Him would would declare that Melchizedek was "begotten" as a "son of God?" It likely meant both. But it is also likely written this way to let those who do not understand what is being said to read it in a way that conceals the dual meanings. The scriptures are filled with such dual meanings.

What is hopeful for us today, is that no matter how much "iniquity" and religious error we engage in that results in our "abominations" in our pride and foolishness, we still may be candidates to receive something similar to what befell the City of Salem. The first step is to acquire the presence of this priesthood through individual repentance.

We envy these ancients. But we do nothing to try and follow the pattern revealed to us in their course. The Book of Mormon is a course in ancient failure and ancient success. We just do not respect what we have in that volume.

Well, let us press on...

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Alma 13:19-20

"Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention. Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice. Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction."

The "many before him, and also ... many afterwards" in this sermon is not just a reference to believers, but to those who held this "holy order after the Son of God." It is a reference to those who were made clean and pure by their repentance. It is those who, having been called by the Lord, chosen to this holy order, having their calling and election secure, hold power as a result of this relationship with God.

But none of these, before or since, (at the time of the writing by Alma) who held authority were greater than Melchizedek. As a result, he merited particular mention to identify those who held the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God. It was merited because his example and his ministry illustrated perfectly what the "holy order" was intended to accomplish. It is designed to save others.

It was not to exalt the man.

It was not to bring attention to the man. It was not to amass praise or a following.

It was not to make the man a ruler over others. It was not to gain control or domination.

It was not to subjugate or force compulsive obedience upon the souls of men.

It was to serve and exalt those to whom he ministered. His greatness was derived by the fruit of saved, exalted souls whom he saved. There is no record of a single sermon preached by Melchizedek. We have evidence of the following things he did with his authority and power:

-He received tithes from Abraham. (Alma 13: 15.)

-He ordained Abraham. (D&C 84: 14.)

-He saved an entire population from iniquity and abominations, and converted them to the truth. (Alma 13: 18.)

-He made those he converted qualified to behold the Lord's presence. (Alma 13: 11.)

-He performed a form of ceremony with Abraham involving breaking bread and wine. (Gen. 14: 18-19.)

He served. He blessed. He produced exalted souls. He was not great by what he received, but by what he did with what he received to bless and exalt others.

We would see this if we understood the scriptures. We would not be following a false tradition wherein men are famous, celebrity-like, fawned over, held up to acclaim and given the authority to exercise control over men. This is a false model that the Gentiles follow, and not the way in which true priesthood holders operate. (Matt. 20: 25-28.) No-one possessing power from heaven will do this. (D&C 121: 36-37.)

Now, if you make this mistake and follow in this false tradition, it will be to your own destruction. Alma has warned you.

What a marvelously relevant book this Book of Mormon is for our own day! It is almost as if they saw our time, knew what we would struggle with, and had teachings designed to let us see the error and repent. I truly believe that we can get closer to God by abiding the precepts of the Book of Mormon than we can from any other book! Joseph Smith was right.

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Alma 13: 21-22

Now we see this startling continuation in Alma 13: 21-22:

"And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh; Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us."

Now we get to some things which the record does not fully disclose, but does allow those with eyes to see behold it. Be careful how you respond to this, because some correct answers are not going up if they cross a line. But think of the answers to these questions:

Why does he "stretch forth his hand?" What does that signify?

In what way would that become significant, even a sign that he is a true messenger?

Why does he now "cry with a mighty voice" to make the call?

What is a "mighty voice?" Is it distinguished by volume or is there something more and quite different about it? Importantly, it is not "loud" but instead "mighty." Is that significant? How? Why?

What does it mean that "the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it?" Who is really speaking? Who is He speaking through? What person is delivering the message? How is Alma identifying himself in this "mighty cry" he makes?

Who are these angels sent to all nations?

What is the difference in this statement by Alma and the others who can speak with the tongue of angels? (2 Ne. 31: 13-14 and 2 Ne. 32: 2.)

If one should possess such a right or commission, then whose words are they actually speaking?

Why do His sheep hear HIS voice? Even when spoken by another man or empowered priestly minister?

What does Alma actually say about his own authority as he delivers this warning? What can Alma lead you to inherit if you will heed his counsel and warning? How can we know he is a true messenger sent by the Lord?

If the Lord sends these messages and messengers to all His people, have they been sent to us? If so, where would we be able to find them and hear their message? How are we to know they are true ministers? Should I just trust that some institutional office and office holder is a guaranteed place in which to locate such a true minister? If it is always that convenient, why hasn't the Lord implemented that system before, instead of letting people have their free agency and permitting them to make mistakes? Why did the Lord allow Eli, Caiaphus and Annas become High Priests? Why didn't He come up with this neat system before? [Clearly our system makes it so much easier. It throws God's fairness into question, since He made it so much harder for earlier Israelites to figure out where the truth was being proclaimed. I think the Lord must owe them an apology.]

Well, more can be said, but I leave it to you to reach your own conclusions about this startling comment coming from a true messenger. It makes one wonder why we've been missing it, as it has been before us for so many years.

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Alma 13:23

"And they are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard."

This doctrine contained in the scriptures was understood by this audience. The same audience who was full of iniquity and abominations because of their false religious traditions. It was in "plain terms" in the scriptures, if one doesn't "wrest" them to their destruction.

To "wrest" means to apply such twisted reasoning that the philosophies of men are mingled with scriptures so that the result is error.

The object of the scriptures is to make matters "plain" and prevent people from "erring" in their effort to follow God.

What is the difference between someone who with their scriptures before them, finds their message sufficiently "plain" and "understood" that they "cannot err," and someone who has the same set of scriptures and engages in "iniquity" and "abominations" because of their false religious ideas? How can someone who is religious be certain they are not among those who err, but is instead among those who find holiness and develop faith to repent?

How do we know which side of this line we are on?

Both sides are religious. Both sides have their traditions and teachings. Both sides are sincere and following what they believe to be true. However, one is engaged in "abominations" because of their false beliefs, and the other has entertained angels and received such cleansing that their garments are white before God. One side does not understand their awful state. But the other is certain of their promise of exaltation and purity before God.

So, how certain are you? Do you know you are pure before God? Holy? Having entered into His holy order after the order of the Son of God? Or do you entertain some doubt about whether the traditions which you value are actually based on the truth? Is it possible that you "err" or "wrest" the scriptures as part of your religious tradition?

According to Alma, all of this care by the Lord is because they are "wanderers in a strange land." Meaning that they are in this spot at this time because they have been taken from Jerusalem, the land of their forefathers, and placed in a new, promised land. They have been persecuted and evicted from land by their aggressive cousins. All of this to stir them up to repentance. It is God's care for them, God's careful tutelage of them, that leads them to receive this profound understanding. They are on God's errand, and therefore entitled to God's guidance. God is providing the "glad tidings" which will permit repentance to occur.

So, applying Alma's teaching to us, we should ask ourselves if we have repented? If we have received a message from angels declaring glad tidings? If we have received what we would recognize as a message from the Lord by someone declaring repentance? Or do we have a weak tradition which assures us that we are right, while letting us entertain abominable (false, religious-based) errors in our beliefs?

These are troubling questions. Worth careful, solemn and ponderous thought. Perhaps even prayerful thought where we ask the Lord if these things are not true. And if we ask with real intent, He may make the truth known to us. At least that is what He has said through past messengers. I see no reason why it would not work for us. It's at least worth a try, isn't it?

Powerful teachings from Alma. But then again, one should expect nothing less from a true messenger bearing a holy order of power and authority after the order of the Son of God. A weak and vacillating voice telling us all is well and we're going to be fine just seems wrong by comparison. At least I would think so.

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Alma 13: 24

"For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory."

If "angels are declaring it unto many" at the time of Alma's remarks, why are they not declaring it unto many now? Are we any less important than they were? If we are as important, then why are we not hearing of this now?

What is the definition of "angels" who are doing this "declaring" to "many?" Was Alma included? If so, what is it that turns a man from a mortal to ministering angel? Can a mortal become a ministering angel? How would that occur? What would it require? Can we thereby entertain angels unawares? (Heb. 13: 2.)

If an angel comes to visit with a man, gives him a message, and the man then declares it, are they both made "angels" by this message? Are "angels" always either deceased or unborn? If they are, then why did Joseph teach that "there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it?" (D&C 130: 5.) If angels "do belong" to the earth are they still mortal?

How would you recognize such a person? Would it be the same way the Lord was known before He showed Himself to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus? (Luke 24: 32.)

If it is the "hearts" which are to be prepared, then does this relate to the disciples "hearts burning within them" as the Lord spoke to them while in the way? Why do His sheep hear His voice? How do they hear his voice?

Why is preparing "the hearts" enough to prepare a people to "receive His word?" Is it more important to "receive His word" than to receive His person? Why would that be so?

Why are we unable to receive Him in His glory until after our hearts have first "received His word?"

It is more difficult to be taught than to have faith for miracles. (3 Ne. 17: 2-8.) Even should you behold the Lord "in His glory" just as the Nephites, it would still be more difficult for you to have the faith to be taught by Him and accept what He has to teach than for Him to perform a miracle.

How alike all the generations of men are. How very relevant, therefore, these words remain for us!

Friday, June 18, 2010

Alma 13: 25

"And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice."

This comment is made in expectation that the Nephites will be told by heaven as soon as Christ is born. ". . . we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels . . ."

Angels declared it to the shepherds near Bethlehem. (Luke 2: 8-15.) Alma expected a similar announcement.

"We only wait to hear the joyful news." He EXPECTED the news to be shared. He knew they would have the announcement. He EXPECTED the angels to declare the arrival. He knew heaven would not leave these people without a herald of the news.

Imagine that. A prophet confident that the Lord will do nothing without first making known to the people His secrets! (Amos 3: 7.) It is one thing to teach this concept. It is another to live it. Alma is living it. Therefore angels did come and did make things known to him.

What does it take to have faith like this?

If you do not possess this kind of faith, can you be saved? Moroni taught that the absence of such faith condemns the people who no longer have such things happening among them. (Moroni 7: 36-37.)

Do we expect the Lord to tell US about things by the mouth of angels before they happen? Or do we expect the Lord will tell someone inside the bowels of an organization, and we will get some announcement through the prescribed channels, thereby relieving us from obtaining the ministry of angels? Then why is the visitation of angels an Aaronic (lowest) priesthood key? (D&C 84: 26.) This is the right of young people beginning at age 12, mind you. Should we expect the angelic heralds to come to everyone, 12 year of age or older? Why or why not?

Alma knows it will happen. But he does not know when it will happen. He would like it to have been in his day. It was not. But whether it was to happen in his life or afterwards, he nonetheless had faith, knew angels, awaited the message, and rejoiced at the idea of His coming.

How meek! How faithful! No wonder such a man possessed and knew the details of this holy order from God. No wonder he could teach with authority about it. How great the lesson he has left for any who will take seriously the message he taught.

Faith of this sort should be the common heritage of the Lord's people. It was never intended that an elite, distant hierarchy would be put between God and His people. If you are His, then you should KNOW Him. If you do not know Him, then you are not His. Heed His voice when you hear it. No matter how surprising a place or person from which it may come. If it is His voice, then you have heard Him.

Friday, June 18, 2010

Alma 13:26

"And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them."

Here is a simple, but compound thought. Alma is saying this:

There were "fathers" who recorded words of prophecy.

The "fathers" had the "spirit of prophecy which was in them."

These words of the prophetic fathers promised that "the mouths of angels" will declare Christ's birth into the world.

The declaration of Christ's birth will come to "just and holy men" by these angels.

So, Alma is assured that the promises will be fulfilled. He knows this because the fathers who revealed the promises were trustworthy and had the spirit of prophecy.

Now comes the real question: What does it mean that "just and holy men" will be the ones to whom the angels will come and make the declaration?

Is this a description of those who hold the same priesthood as Melchizedek discussed by Alma? If so, then does access to that priestly order after the order of the Son of God put the possessors into contact with heavenly messengers? Can a person hold that authority and not receive messages from angels from time to time? Who is it among us who begins an address by referring to the angel who visited them the preceding night? (See, e.g., 2 Ne. 10: 3; also 3 Ne. 7: 15.)

I have to assume that this is the kind of information that would be generally known among faithful followers of Christ's Gospel. After all, Alma is speaking to apostates, non-believers and critics who hold a false and abominable religion. One would expect that such things are not really so sacred that they can't be preached. Why would it be "off limits" to us and be something freely declared as part of a missionary effort in the Book of Mormon? So assuming it ought to be known, if it is occurring, is this among us? Where? Who has received these angelic messengers? Where are these "just and holy" men who entertain angelic ministers?

Or is it that we don't expect angels, so we don't entertain them? Perhaps they come and we don't notice them? Perhaps we are blind that we cannot see, deaf because we will not hear, and our minds are darkened because we will not abide the teachings of the Book of Mormon? What is going on with us, when we compare and measure ourselves against this message from Alma?

Should I be concerned?

Is all well?

Will we endure sound doctrine? (Cf. 2 Tim. 4: 3.)

Saturday, June 19, 2010

Alma 13:27

"And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance;"

This is the reality of those who hold this holy order. They feel absolute charity toward others. It causes them "great anxiety even unto pain" to consider how others might be lost. This was exactly the same charity that motivated the born-again sons of Mosiah to perform their missionary labors at great personal peril. (Mosiah 28: 3.)

When you hear such a man after this order speaking in plain, even blunt words, it is not because they are unkind. It is not because they are uncharitable or brash. It is because they are filled with care, concern, and longing to share eternal life with those who would otherwise be lost.

Look at his words. What does it mean that Alma's motivation now comes from "the inmost part of my heart?" How is it possible that Alma can have such concern that it causes him "great anxiety even unto pain?" Why does he long so for others to "hearken unto his words?"

Is this motivation for Alma the same as he described Melchizedek having?

Is the plea to "cast off your sins" the same plea which Melchizedek made to his people?

If this is the plea of both Melchizedek and Alma, and it is a burden which causes pain for fear that the mission would fail, where do we find such souls today crying repentance? Are they among us? Do we have ministers using the words of angels, declaring a message from heaven, who suffer anxiety and pain at the thought we will not repent?

Are you one of them?

If you are not, then why procrastinate? Why not also join in the process? All that is required is repentance to make yourself clean, followed by keeping the word of God until you entertain angels, receive your assignment, and having been commissioned to then proclaim repentance to others.

Alma is inviting people to join the order after the Son of God, becoming thereby sons of God themselves. This is the great message of the Book of Mormon. I've discussed in six books the mysteries of godliness, using primarily the Book of Mormon as the scriptural source to explain these doctrines. It is the most correct book we have to set out these doctrines and inform us of the process. It is interesting how little of that message we've uncovered as yet.

So let us proceed.....

Saturday, June 19, 2010

Alma 13: 28

"But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;"

Alma's formula is quite direct and clear:

"Humble yourselves:" Without humility you are not teachable. Humility and the capacity to accept new truth are directly related. This is the character flaw that prevents the Lord from teaching the Nephites when He appeared to them. They THOUGHT they already knew things. Therefore nothing that contradicted their false notions would be accepted. Christ advised the Nephites who saw Him descend from heaven to go prepare themselves for His teaching. *"Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again."* (3 Ne. 17: 3.) This was the Lord telling these witnesses that they were not humble enough to be taught--even by Him! So the first requirement is no small matter. Are you really humble? Can you accept truth if it is taught to you? Even if it contradicts your traditions? Even if it alienates you from family, friends, comfortable social associations, your neighbors? (Matt. 19: 29.) See, humbling yourself is not just some droop-faced, hang-dog expression to wear on your countenance. Rather it is opening your heart up to higher things.

"Call upon God:" Not just prayer. Call upon Him. To call is to invite Him to come. How do you call Him? By devoting yourself, in humility, to living every principle He has taught to you through His messengers and in His scriptures. It's not a laundry list of "to-do's." It is meekness and prayerful watching; humbling yourself and accepting what His spirit will advise you to do. When He testifies to you that you are hearing a true principle, accept it. No matter the effect it may have upon your life. Change your life, but never abandon His truths. Call, listen, and obey what you are told. Never close that line of communication. Don't trust a message which does not come from Him.

"Watch and pray:" Answers may come in many ways. Be watchful so you don't miss them when they are given to you. Pray that you might be seeking, preparing your mind to behold what He sends. Stay tuned, and stay attuned. Without such diligence you will miss His messages, that come sometimes frequently, but from unexpected sources.

"That ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear:" Implicit in this is that you may be tempted beyond what you can bear. So how do you avoid falling? Does humility and calling upon God and watching and praying insure that you can avoid an excess of temptation? How would they all go together? In particular, how would being "humble" be a protection against this kind of temptation?

Alma connects all this together with the word: "thus." Meaning as a consequence of the foregoing. As a result of what he's just told you. As a product of this approach, you will then "be led by the Holy Spirit." You can't do what comes next without being so led. It isn't in you. Not without help from within through the Holy Spirit.

So, if you do all the above, and then acquire the Holy Spirit to be your guide, then it follows that you will "become humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering." You won't be imitating humility, but you will be humble with the Holy Spirit's assistance. You won't feign meekness, but you will acquire the power to be meek (in the sense it is explained in *Beloved Enos*). You won't pretend to submission, patience, love and long suffering, but you will be these things as a result of the Spirit within you. This will be your character. Not as the world understands such things, but through the power of the Spirit to lay hold upon such things.

Formulas like this one are inspired statements, providing a road map to the Lord's methods of changing lives. Alma is making such a declaration and invitation in this sermon. It is amazing, really. How succinctly he cuts to the core of the matter.

Sunday, June 20, 2010

Alma 13: 29

"Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest."

Here you have faith, hope and charity (or love). You only have a fraction of the understanding of what faith in the Lord means until you have done as Alma is explaining here. True "faith" which is a principle of power, is acquired by the method Alma is preaching.

Hope that one can receive eternal life is not the vague optimism that it might happen - it is a certitude. You have the promise. You know you will have eternal life. You haven't died and entered into the resurrected state yet. Between the time of the promise and the time you leave this sphere, you have hope. (The way it is used here is defined in *Eighteen Verses*.)

When God has promised you eternal life then you have "the love of God always in your heart." It is there through the indelible promise He has made. He has changed your status. He has declared through His own voice what great thing you have become. Therefore it is by knowledge alone that such love resides in the heart of man.

This life will end. But you will be raised up. You know when you are lifted up in the last day it will be the power of God that raises you. Such power as God employs to lift a man up confers upon such a person eternal life. The promise alone is a power, conferring the right to lay hold on eternal life when the moment comes. No power in earth or hell can rescind God's word. (D&C 1: 38.) It cannot be done. Therefore, you have knowledge that you will not only be raised from the dead, but "lifted up" as well. Powers, principalities, dominions, exaltations are all promised as yours.

This is how you attain to "rest." It is the "rest of the Lord" as soon as the promise is made by Him. It is His rest when you inherit it in the last day. The words of the promise are enough to guarantee the inheritance. Therefore once the promise is made it is true enough that you have entered into the rest of the Lord. However, until you depart this life, you remain subject to the difficulties of mortality. Graduation is assured, but you must tarry for a little while here.

As one possessing this hope, being filled with faith, hope and charity, it becomes your responsibility to raise up others. Hence the ministry of Alma, and Alma's exposition on the ministry of Melchizedek. God does send true messengers. They can lead you in the way of life and salvation.

Monday, June 21, 2010

Alma 13:30

"And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death."

Alma's closing remark here is a prayer. He is asking that the Lord "grant unto you repentance." This is an interesting cause-and-effect way to state the proposition. We cause it by our desire and willingness to become humble and repent. The Lord causes it because without His atoning sacrifice it could not be done.

We receive the effect because we are cleansed by our acts, humility and willingness to accept what is offered. The Lord receives the effect because He has allowed us to join Him in being pure and holy. He acquires a brother (or, more correctly a son). But He has no jealousy, allowing His brothers/sons to sit upon His own throne. (Rev. 3: 21.) He wants to have "all things in common" with us.

Alma's petition goes further to ask that the wrath of God not be poured out upon these people to whom he is preaching. There are, of course, two levels of wrath. One is temporal--here and now. The wicked are often punished here by letting them pursue their own evil course until it destroys them. Repentance in that sense relieves them of the physical, emotional, social, military, economic, and interpersonal disasters they bring upon themselves by their ruinous pursuit of destructive behavior.

The other is eternal--meaning coming after this life. That second "wrath" is a result of leaving this life with accountability for what happened here, and the lack of preparation for the moment when "judgment" is rendered. That "judgment" consists of you finally facing reality. When you are in His presence you can accurately measure the difference between what you are and what He wanted you to become--i.e., like Him. The gulf is so great that you would rather be in hell than in the presence of a just and holy being when you are stained with the blood and sins of your generation. (Mormon 9: 4.)

I have been in the presence of President Ronald Reagan. I met with President Spencer W. Kimball at the law school at BYU when he would come to visit with his son, who was a criminal law professor there. I shook hands and spoke with Chief Justice Warren Burger for about a half hour in the law library at BYU. I have appeared at the US Supreme Court, the Utah Supreme Court, argued before Federal and State courts in Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Texas, California, Virginia, Washington DC, New York, Oregon, Nevada, Montana and New Mexico. I have seen Congress in session. Although a boy at the time, I was there when President Kennedy came to Berlin and spoke at Checkpoint Charlie, giving his "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech. I have seen many other men who have shaped history. But there simply is no comparison between these mere children, these insubstantial and powerless creatures, and the holiness, power, majesty and glory of the one True Man, clothed in light. You may see what the world reckons as a "great man" and think he was impressive. But you come from the presence of glory with only one conclusion: Surely man is nothing, which I had never before supposed. (Moses 1: 10.)

It is awful, fearful and dreadful to be in the presence of God. You realize the horror of your own darkness. (Gen. 15: 7-18.) You cry out with the realization that you are unclean, living your life among the unclean, and you are not ready for His presence. (Isa. 6: 5.) You are not prepared, and all your careful pretensions dissolve until you stand naked, revealed, hollow and unworthy to stand in His presence.

How, then, does a man stand in His presence? Through the merits and mercy and grace of this, our Lord. (2 Ne. 2: 8.) If your mouth is unclean, He will use an ordinance to cleanse your lips. (Isa. 6: 6-7.) If you are covered by the blood and sins of your generation, He will cleanse them. (John 13: 5-13.) If you cannot stand, He will raise you up with His own hand. (Daniel 10: 5-10.) He is the God of mercy. Your discomfort is relieved by what He does, and this not of yourself, least you should boast. There is nothing in you from which to boast other than the merit and mercy and love and sacrifice given to you by Him.

How can He love so? It defies explanation. Words fail. You can search your lifetime through every word you have ever seen or heard - nothing comes close to being able to describe it. It cannot be spoken.... Too sacred for language to capture. Beyond our power. So, you are left saying only: "Come, see."

How, then, can a man come to the judgment and not feel the wrath which they might have overcome by His grace and mercy? Through the merits of Him bestowing upon a man the power to stand in His presence.

Alma's pain at the thought of these people perishing was real. He was powerless to bring them to Christ. That power consists only in the authorized and truthful declaration of an invitation to come to Him. But the choice remained in those who, having heard, must decide for themselves whether they will repent. They were free to choose iniquity and abominations. Alma was only able to invite.

The invitation, if rejected, will cause those who die to die yet again. The way is broad which leads to such eternal deaths. (D&C 132: 25.)

Monday, June 21, 2010

Alma 13: 31

"And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book."

This is often the case. John's Gospel ended with this observation:

(John 21: 25.) Records are incomplete. We do not have the full account of Christ's acts and words. We don't have Alma's either.

Mormon was the editor of this portion of the Book of Mormon. He was the one who determined to omit portions what Alma said to these people on this occasion. From what Mormon left for us to read, his intent is clear. He wanted us to understand the bigger picture of God's dealings with man, man's possession of priestly power, and the importance of repentance and defeating religious error. Mormon had seen us, and included specific warnings addressed to us, the Gentiles. He cautioned us about the Book of Mormon as follows:

"And then, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways? Know ye not that ye are in the hands of God? Know ye not that he hath all power, and at his great command the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll? Therefore, repent ye, and humble yourselves before him, lest he shall come out in justice against you—lest a remnant of the seed of Jacob shall go forth among you as a lion, and tear you in pieces, and there is none to deliver." (Mormon 5: 22-24.)

Mormon knew the book would initially be in the hands of the Gentiles. So you can know we are identified as "Gentiles" in the Book of Mormon. Also, Joseph Smith declared in the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple that we are identified with the Gentiles. (D&C 109: 59-60.) Although Brigham Young and President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Joseph was a "pure blooded Ephramite." (Doc. Sal. Vol 3: 253-54.)

The selected materials that Mormon gave to us were targeted to the purpose of the Book of Mormon. The title page (written by Moroni) tells us the purpose: **"Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile."**

Gentiles would receive, translate and disseminate the Book of Mormon. But the Gentiles are prophesied to fail in their faith. They are to become full of their own abominations. When they reject the fullness of the Gospel, then it will be taken from them and given back to the remnant. (3 Ne. 16: 10-11.)

Mormon is using the message from Alma to provide to the Gentiles (who will reject the invitation), an opportunity to understand the fullness which was offered to them. It was intended to remove from them the excuse that they were not given an opportunity and did not understand. Therefore, the Book of Mormon's primary purpose, to make the Gentiles aware and accountable for their failure, is accomplished by Mormon including this portion of Alma's teachings. The fact that other portions were left out mean that they would not have contributed to the task before Mormon.

A few of the Gentiles happily may be numbered with the remnant. (3 Ne. 16: 13.) That is conditioned upon their repentance. The degree and completion of that repentance is shown by this portion of the sermon by Alma which Mormon preserved for us.

We are on notice. We are accountable for how we react to that notice. For the most part, the expectation is that we tell one another in reassuring words that "all is well." and that "Zion prospers," and to generally allow our souls to be cheated while we are led carefully down to hell. (2 Ne. 28: 21-25.) Still, some few will follow Christ, despite the leaders' teachings that will cause them to err. (2 Ne. 28: 14.)

The Book of Mormon is a record that will be used as evidence we have been warned. In plain language and with sufficient truth to hold us all accountable, this is the standard by which we are to find our way back to the Lord in this last dispensation before His return. We remain, of course, under condemnation because we are unwilling to do that. (D&C 84: 57.)

What a great and terrible book. What an alarming message. It is no wonder we neglect it so.