

Come Follow Me Class Insights – 43 – Doctrine and Covenants 121-123

I'm Taylor, and I'm Tyler, and I'm Lisa Halverson, Taylor's wife. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 121 through 123. It's a delight to have my wife Lisa with me. Now unless anybody gets the wrong idea, though we are going to be talking about the power of suffering and what happens in our lives when things don't turn out the way we want, and how God allows us to learn from that experience, well, my wife and I have been married for nearly twenty years and I do like to joke that she has learned the principle of long-suffering because of me and she has a lot of experience with enduring to the end. That's not why she's here. She is here because she loves God; she loves the scriptures and has these beautiful insights on these sections and also some perspective from her years of study in history and in religious studies and in culture that will give us some insights about how God is shaping his people and what that means for us today.

So let's go back Lisa, let's talk about what's been happening in Church history over all these years that lead to this point of section 121, 122, and 123?

So I want to give you a bit of a birds-eye view, you've been learning recently about all of these various events but I think it's important for us to see them in the context of what we're talking about today, letters written from Liberty Jail.

Which is an irony but what a terrible name for a jail, Liberty Jail. Right? It's just so sad. It's just yet one more way that Joseph and his people were oppressed. Even the name of the jail is oppressive.

So let's go all the way back to the summer of 1831. This is when Joseph receives the revelation that Jackson County, Missouri is going to be the gathering place of Zion. It will be the place where the Second Coming occurs that will be the place where the millennium begins and the saints hear this and almost in an instant this site is turned holy, but not typical. Generally, holy sites are made holy because of a series of events, because of miracles, think of Jerusalem and all of the history that goes into that holy city, but here we had in an instant the area of Jackson County, Missouri becomes a holy place.

And the saints are excited. They are so eager to begin to build the New Jerusalem. They worked to set up a communal society where they're living the law of consecration, where there's no poor among them, where the pure in heart gather together and where Jesus will come for his Second Coming.

Joseph at first had been kind of disappointed by Independence, Missouri there in Jackson County. It was a way station on the - for fur traffickers, fur traders and those headed to Santa Fe. It's not a glorious place but as soon as he receives this revelation, in his mind's eye and the mind's eye of the saints, Jackson County is the place of God.

So the members start flowing into the area very quickly but within one year, by the next summer, some of them are already fighting with one another. My great grandfather - now great, great, great, great grandfather, Edward Partridge, and Sidney Rigdon are having arguments that Joseph has to come and settle and some of the saints are complaining that Joseph is living the highlife in the luxury of Kirtland and the Missourians are also starting to get upset. Really, the biggest issue at the time, though, was the bishop's storehouse. It could not keep up with all of the new arrivals.

There were just so many needs and yet the original purpose of the bishop's storehouse was everybody give your surplus to the bishop who as an overseer - that's actually what the ancient Greek word bishop means - understands the needs of every member in the religious community. He can then give according to people's needs and some of their wants. But when the bishop's storehouse has been depleted and people are still having deep needs, what do you do? It's a very stressful thing.

Today in many parts of the world, we live with an overabundance, and you just go online and order something to your house and you're set. A hundred - two hundred years ago it wasn't this simple, and so these are very real people dealing with the daily vicissitudes of life, how do you endure when you may not always have sufficient for your needs?

So very quickly this area fills up. The Lord had even - even advised his people to take it slowly but they were so excited, so Independence, Missouri grows to be 1200 people by the summer of 1834 and more are coming every month.

There's friction though, with the Missourians. Part of it's cultural, a lot of these members are coming from New England. They are – agree with the abolitionists. They really don't like slavery. The Missourians are essentially a southern state, it's a slave state, they believe in slavery and that's a massive political issue that eventually leads to civil war in the 1860s in the United States but this is similar in tension, you have basically minor civil wars breaking out between northerners who are these members of the Church and southerners who are the Missourians and that's part of what the conflict is, among other things.

Right. Another cultural conflict with that, the members saw the Native Americans as a chosen people, as the House of Israel and they placed them to some extent in a revered spot which is not how the typical American in the 1830s views the Native American. At the end of 1833 the saints are kicked out of Independence, Missouri so they go north, they start settling other regions nearby. During this time, the saints are being sorely mistreated. They're not always choosing well themselves, sometimes they're resorting to violence, going through the countryside ransacking people's food and supplies, looking for caches of weapons and so they're not always living a peaceful law – not always turning the other cheek. It's very difficult when you have been hurt, the very natural reaction is to respond in kind and we see some of the early saints doing that; they had very natural reactions and who among us has never responded to injustice with injustice. It's a natural reaction. We're not advocating it, we're just kind of laying out that for some of the early saints, it was a bit of a challenge, the suffering that they had to endure, and some didn't endure it well at all times.

They didn't always follow the guidance the Lord had given them in D. and C. verse 16 where he says, renounce war and proclaim peace, but like Taylor was saying, that is hard when you are suffering, when your family is suffering, when your wife and your children are suffering as well. By the summer of 1836 the saints start settling Far West, Missouri. And interestingly, this is the connection to what Taylor said just a moment ago, this land was really considered sub-par, so the Missourians were willing to set aside two counties for the members of the Church to settle, but there wasn't much timber there

and it was really thought to be a land that wasn't worth having. So that's the time when they went to Far West.

Now let's get some of the rest of the context. In Kirtland things are not going well. In 1837 there's a financial crisis throughout the entire nation and it and other factors affect the bank that the members were trying to establish. That bank failed. That leads many people to question Joseph's role as a prophet, by 1838 you had Apostles being excommunicated including Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.

Joseph never said he was going to be a profit – p r o f i t, he only said he was a – prophet a p r o p h e t and people sometimes thought this prophet needs to give us a profit, when that didn't happen they thought he wasn't a prophet.

Sure, so things are really – it was a time period of chaos and upheaval for the members whether they're in Kirtland or whether they're down in Missouri and it is really in 1838 that things start heating up. So we're going to share some more details about the acceleration of the conflict and the violence that results in the expulsion of the members of the Church from Missouri and incarceration of Church leaders. But before we get to that terrible climactic moment, let's review a few more things that lead - lead up to these terrible atrocities.

By August of 1838 you have quite a bit of conflict going on between the Missourians and the members of the Church. There's an election in August and one of the candidates bashes some members and says don't let them vote, so ending in a bit of a brawl and then it even turns into more of a war breaking out between the members of the Church and the Missourians at the polls in 1838. Elections back then were quite rowdy affairs with lots of alcohol. The boys out there having a good time, but this time it ends up becoming a fight. There's guerilla warfare that's breaking out throughout the State and then you start to have some of these - events mentioned up here. On October 24th, two – two members of – or two Apostles of the Church, Thomas B. Marsh who was, in fact the senior Apostle and Orson Hyde released affidavits that basically say that Joseph Smith is planning to take over the area, take over the state and then even take over the nation, and then the world. And then the world. I mean they just are so incendiary in their

inflaming comments about Joseph Smith and his desire to basically overthrow everybody and enthrone himself as king that the Governor gets this and feels like the only thing he can do is to take immediate forceful action.

And before that, we have the battle of Crooked River and during this battle, one of the Apostles, actually the second senior Apostle after Thomas B. Marsh, David Patten is killed in that battle. So then we have on October 27th Boggs' extermination order, just this infamous order. Now it's interesting, I'm personally connected to this. I was born in Jackson County, Missouri in 1972 and it turns out that the extermination order had never been rescinded, never been erased from the books. But it's interesting that my dad happened to be bishop at this time, and a woman was baptized into our ward who was a PR specialist. She was great in the public with communication and my dad thought oh it would be great for her to be the PR specialist for the ward. And my dad and she got talking about maybe we should run some kind of celebration about the overturning of the extermination order, like when it was rescinded. And it turns out this woman was a childhood friend of a guy named Kit Bond who happened to be the Missouri governor at the time that we lived in Kansas City and so this woman reaches out to her childhood friend, the governor and said, could we check the dates when this was rescinded and maybe just run a little celebration. And weeks and months go by and she hears nothing. Finally, the governor's office gets back to her and said, embarrassingly, actually this law is still – it's still legal to kill members of the Church.

So my dad's like, oh my gosh, this is a pretty big deal, I'd better alert the brethren in Salt Lake City about this. So my dad sends this up the line and again, months go by and then the brethren respond and say, let us quietly work with the State of Missouri to rescind this order and not make a big deal of it at all because the people living in Missouri today are not the people that were alive back in the 1830s and the people in Missouri today are not responsible for things that happened in the past. And so it was rescinded. I don't remember the exact date but I think it was maybe in 1976, but we might kind of smile about that current story, but it was nothing to smile about in October because it precipitated or caused atrocious things to happen, including a mob attacking one of the outposts of the Mormons, Hauns Mill.

The Hauns Mill Massacre is really a tragic event, as are all of these events. Seventeen people were killed. And there's a lesson here. As fallen humans, right? We are of fallen nature; we've all fallen from the presence of God. It is a natural thing for us to be afraid of people who aren't like us and we're often asked to understand those who aren't like us, to walk in their shoes, to learn empathy as Jesus taught, and we see in these events that there were some people who were so afraid of those who were not like them, members of the Church, that they took action to push them away and even kill them. And that still happens today if you look around the world, that there are people who are afraid of those who aren't like them, and in some cases are willing to say you can't vote, you can't be in my community, you can't eat with me, you can't live nearby me, and in some cases I'm going to jail you or I'm going to kill you and all of this is contrary to the laws of God.

In fact, if you look at the Ten Commandments, which was God's express instructions for how to be covenantally loyal to him, one of the things that he said is you have to treat the stranger or the foreigner well because you were strangers and foreigners in a foreign land and weren't treated well. So we see what happens when people choose not to treat one another well, but they turn to violence instead of understanding, turn to anger and hatred instead of love and joy in the commonality that really, most humans desire similar things, which is to live in peace and prosperity.

So then we have Far West being put under siege, and then the Church leaders being brought out to be arrested. So at this point General Lucas wants to immediately execute the Church leaders including Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon and Alexander Doniphan who becomes a stalwart defender of the needs of the saints steps in and says you will not do that and he stops General Lucas from executing the Church leaders which is basically a form of frontier justice. And instead, they throw them in jail and this is what leads up to many, many months of imprisonment in wintertime. They spent a number – they spend some time in Richmond and later get transferred to Liberty Jail.

I want to share with you some quotes from Joseph Smith and then from Parley P. Pratt about how they felt being ripped away from their families by these mobs and these angry individuals. Joseph Smith said, I found my wife

and children in tears who feared we had been shot by those who had sworn to take our lives and that they would see me no more. When I entered my house they clung to my garments, their eyes streaming with tears while mingled emotions of joy and sorrow were manifested in their countenances. I requested to have a private interview with them a few minutes but this privilege was denied me by the guard. I was then obliged to take my departure. Who could realize the feelings which I experienced at that time to be thus torn from my companion and leave her surrounded with monsters in the shape of men and my children too, not knowing how their wants would be supplied while I was to be taken far from them in order that my enemies might destroy me when they thought proper to do so. My partner wept, my children clung to me until they were thrust from me by the swords of the guards. I felt overwhelmed while I witnessed the scene and could only recommend them to the care of that God whose kindness has followed me to the present time and who alone could protect them and deliver me from the hands of my enemies and restore me to my family.

Let's turn to Parley P. Pratt, one of the most eloquent, early leaders of the Church: This was the most trying scene of all. I went to my house, being guarded by two or three soldiers. The cold rain was pouring down without, and on entering my little cottage, there lay my wife sick of a fever. I stepped to the bed; my wife burst into tears; I spoke a few words of comfort, telling her to live, telling her to try to live for my sake and the children's; and expressing a hope that we should meet again though years might separate us. She promised to try to live. I then embraced and kissed the little babes and departed.

Til now, I had refrained from weeping; but to be forced from so helpless a family, who were destitute of provisions and fuel, and deprived almost of a shelter in a bleak – in a bleak prairie, with none to assist them, exposed to a lawless banditti who were utter strangers to humanity, and this at the approach of winter, was more than nature could well endure.

I went to General Moses Wilson in tears, and stated the circumstances of my sick, heart-broken and destitute family in terms which would have moved any heart that had a latent spark of humanity yet remaining. But I was only

answered with an exultant laugh, and a taunt of reproach by this hardened murderer.

As I returned from my house toward the troops in the square, I halted with the guard at the door of Hyrum Smith, and heard the sobs and groans of his wife, at his parting words. She was then near confinement, and needed more than ever the comfort and consolation of a husband's presence. As we returned to the wagon we saw Sidney Rigdon taking leave of his wife and daughters, who stood at a little distance, in tears of anguish indescribable. In the wagon sat Joseph Smith, while his aged father and venerable mother came up overwhelmed with tears, and took each of the prisoners by the hand with a silence of grief too great for utterance.

So let's segue into other words from Parley P. Pratt. These leaders were taken prisoners to Independence and while they were awaiting trial, they're stuck in the jail in Richmond. And there's just heaps of abuse that are being poured upon them and here's what Parley P. Pratt shared about one of those instances where they are being verbally abused: In one of those tedious nights in Richmond Jail we had lain as in sleep until the hour of midnight had passed and our ears and hearts had been pained while we had listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of our guards, Colonel Price at their head as they recounted to each other their deeds of rape, murder, robbery, etc. which they had committed among the Mormons while at Far West, Missouri and its vicinity. I had listened until I became so disgusted, shocked, horrified and so filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could scarcely refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards but I had said nothing to Joseph or anyone else although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden, he arose to his feet and spoke in a voice of thunder as a roaring lion, uttering as near as I can recollect, the following words: SILENCE ye fiends of the infernal pit! In the name of Jesus Christ, I rebuke you and command you to be still. I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk or you or I die this instant! He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained and without a weapon, calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards whose weapons were lowered or dropped to the ground, whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner, or crouching at

his feet, begged his pardon and remained quiet until a change of guards. I have seen the ministers of justice clothed in magisterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath, in the courts of England; I have witnessed a Congress in solemn session to give laws to nations; I have tried to – I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts of courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms, but dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon in an obscure village of Missouri.

I think that testimony is incredible and you get a sense of Joseph's power, his faith, his majesty, his private side, at the same time we are reminded of what the rest of the members are going through as their leaders are enjoined, they are being – beginning a forced exodus from Missouri. A county in Illinois, Quincy, Illinois has people who are welcoming to the saints but this is wintertime and they are being forced to leave their homes after so much of their material goods had been destroyed and I just think it's important for us to understand what – how devastating this moment was to the saints. It was not merely the physical devastation – devastation, the loss of lives and teams of horses or oxen and food stores and goods, but this was an emotionally and spiritually devastating time. They believed that they were setting – creating Zion and that dream is shattered and they are forced to leave and forced to seek the goodness of the people of Quincy, Illinois.

Joseph, even Joseph is distraught and confused and complains against the Lord, so as we look at these letters from Liberty Jail, all of these contexts we've been giving you to give you a sense of what the saints were going through and what Joseph as their leader was going through.

We're now going to move into D. and C. sections 121, 122, and 123 which actually, were included in the Doctrine and Covenants under the direction of Brigham Young in 1876 and it comes from a long letter, twenty-nine pages of a letter that Joseph Smith dictates while he's in Liberty Jail and it's a really incredible letter. In fact, we're going to put a link at the bottom of this video to where you can find this. Two LDS scholars are Dean C. Jesse and John W. Welch known as Jack Welch provide an edited version that you can read and as you read this letter you can just hear the anguish from Joseph who just

feels completely abandoned and it's almost as if in this letter, you can hear him like shouting out to God, I need you! Where are you? And then it's almost like God has to interrupt Joseph's painful anguished cries speak to him. Jack Welch has recorded a video where he reads the entire letter. It's a beautiful letter. We encourage you to listen to that and listen to what Joseph encountered with God in his pleadings and right in the middle of his letter, we find the initial opening statements of D. and C. 121. "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?"

I think that opening line is very interesting. First of all the anguish of the sentence, O God, where art thou? I think each of us has asked that during our life when we've been in our most - most troubled and painful moments, we too have asked that question. Even Jesus asks on the cross, he says, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? So it's interesting as we get a little farther into the section, that Jesus says, I have descended below all - that even Jesus knew what it felt like to be abandoned.

Let's keep looking at some of the other words in that verse and in the verses that follow. Where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? Now when I think of a pavilion these days I kind of think of one of those places with the bolted down picnic tables at the park in the shade and you go there with the ward to have, you know, to have an activity or I think of a gazebo in the back, in somebody's back yard. But if you look at the 1828 Webster's dictionary it says that a pavilion is a tent, a temporary, moveable habitation. Now when I read that, I thought the tabernacle of the ancient Israelites, during the time of Moses – it was a moveable tent. Yes, a moveable tent and outside in the front of that tent was the area where the priests would offer their sacrifice, the sacrifice meant to atone for the Israel - Israelites, and then as you went into the tent tabernacle, there was an area called the holy place and eventually, the holy of holies or the hiding place of God. You've got the Ark of the Covenant and there you have on the Ark of the Covenant the mercy seat. This was the place where the manifestation of the glory of God was thought to – to rest. And so, you know this holy of holies was only entered one day of the entire year by one person, the high priest would go there on the Day of Atonement, but otherwise, no one went into this hiding place of the Lord.

So Joseph kind of seems to be asking, Father, where are you? Where - where is your tabernacle, your resting place? And are you hidden in that holy of holies that we don't have any access to? Please come out, we need you, we need you now. Let's keep going with verse 2. It says, "How long shall thy hand be stayed?" Now we may have mentioned this in previous sections, but anciently there were the arms of mercy mentioned in scripture and there was the hand of justice. Joseph wants the hand of justice right now. There have been so many injustices reaped against the members of the Church and he is ready for that justice and where is it? Where is thy hand? "How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?"

Now pure eye is an interesting phrase, I don't actually find it anywhere else in the scriptures and in my searching. Most of the references to eyes in the scriptures are about our own eyes, that we need to have an eye of faith, and we need to have an eye of light, and we need to have an eye single to the glory of God. We are counseled to not let our eyes become dim to God's glory. But our eyes are often in the scriptures concerned with tears and we're even told that our eyes can be evil, this is Deuteronomy 15: 9 through 11 which says behold, "that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart . . . and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him not; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him and thine heart shall not be grieved because thou givest unto him; . . . for the poor shall never cease out of the land."

So these are the qualities of our eyes, but we are being told that God's eye is pure, that he sees all things, he sees the wrongs that are occurring to his people and to his servants so why Joseph is asking, is nothing being done? Verse 3: "Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion toward them?" Now I don't know about you, but a soft heart is a metaphor that I can get. Bowels of compassion not so much, so Taylor recently read a book about the gut and you learned that there is a nerve that connects our gut to our brain and to our lungs called the Vagus nerve. It's just one of the biggest nerves in our body and it's this information highway so

our gut often actually controls our brain, so and then our brain controls the rest of the body so is Joseph saying that this is the command center for compassion? No, I don't think so. I think it's better and deeper and more interesting than that. There is actually an article in BYU Studies put out by – by John Durham Peterson, it's called The Bowels of Mercy. There are three words that are often translated bowels and one Greek word from the New Testament that show up in the scriptures, me'im, and signify your innards generally, the reproductive organ and the seat of emotions. Qereb means your inner part and rechem which is often translated compassion is related to the Hebrew word racham, or womb.

This is where God burdens us. Yes, so it's there in that the bowels or the racham that is that means bowels of compassion. In New Testament Greek the term splangchna means not only the vital organs but kind of your entire human personality and especially your tender feelings and your feelings of mercy. In Modern Greek, I found this so interesting, one of the tenderest things you can say to another person is splachno mou, and this means figuratively, my dear one, but literally it means my gut or my spleen. I love that. The implication is that my soul is your soul, you are in my inner parts or kind of in our more modern language, you're in my heart, right? So if across all these languages the bowels have to do with the distinctive locations of human feelings, human emotions.

So what's interesting in many cultures such as North America, it's the heart where the emotions are and what we're learning is that in the ancient Greek and the ancient Middle Eastern world it was the gut, like you're in my gut, and when we say today you're in my heart, so if you really want to please somebody on Valentines you can just really reach their gut by saying, you're in my gut.

Like this is kind of funny because really, you know of all aspects of our human body, one of the least attractive is our lower gastrointestinal system, our bowels, but this makes it all the more beautiful when Christ speaks of his bowels of mercy; he has compassion on us, we are mortals, and we are tainted with disease and death just as our bowels are but he nonetheless knows us and loves us in our greatest suffering in our lowest and our most

contaminated state. This is what his mercy is. So the bowels really are a symbol of our humanity and God's succor for it, his mercy for it. So remember that Hebrew word (unclear) that's plural or (unclear) which is sometimes translated as bowels and other times as tender mercy or even maternal nature. Having bowels moved with compassion is suggestive of pregnancy, right? The inward parts being filled and moved on another's behalf. Christ's bowels are filled with mercy towards us as he gives us a second birth.

This is incredible that God is basically using maternal imagery and birthing imagery and actually the nurturing of a child in the womb to talk about what he will do for all of us. Think about the protection that is there for a child in the womb and the loving and care that is given to that child from the mother. What an incredibly powerful way for God to speak to his people and for what Joseph and his people are seeking, is for that motherly protection that only God can truly give.

Just as God has his bowels filled with mercy unto us he wants us to treat others with that same mercy. We see this later in section 121 when we get to verse 45 when he says, "Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men." Wow! Even those ones who are destroying our homes and sending our wives and our children out into the smelly cold, though we must face splash no mou for others as well, we need to hold them safe during their trials, during their struggles and this comes from the author of that article, Peters, and his article about bowels and mercy and the sway. The bowels are the site of a transaction between cells, the pains of the other become one's own. We enter Zion, they who they just lost Zion but through the bowels of mercy we enter Zion. The community (unclear phrase) our hearts might be knit together. This is the social and religious meaning of bowels of mercy. In the metaphor we discover not only something that is vaguely grotesque or suggestively poetic, but also a deep unity that is both aesthetic and theological. God's power to encompass with love all things, the heights and the depths, corruption and incorruption.

So, let's go on to verse 4. Here's what it says, here is where we see that greatness of God, "O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven, earth, and seas, and of all things that in them are, and who controllest and subjectest the devil,

and the dark and benighted dominion of Sheol – stretch forth thy hand; let thine eye pierce; let thy hiding place no longer be covered; let thine ear be inclined; let thine heart be softened," and again let thy bowels be moved with compassion toward us.

So again, stretch forth thy hand, that hand of justice. The prophet wants justice for his people. Let thine eye pierce, that pure eye that can pierce that can see what evil is happening and know the need of his people, let thy hiding place no longer be covered, again, make that mercy seat visible not just on the one day of the year on the Day of Atonement, but today because of Christ's atonement, God is visible to us whenever we repent, whenever we partake of the sacrament, his hiding place isn't covered to us even though sometimes I think during our sorrows and during our trials we start to feel like it is.

Let thine ear be inclined. Now I like this one. I was born with a hearing loss but I became deaf by age 45 and now I use cochlear implants and speech reading to hear, so I pretty much always incline my ear, right? I come close to people, I ask my kids not to shout at me from the other room even though I sometimes do it back. I want to incline my ear to those that I am trying to hear. So does God have a hearing loss? I don't think so, but we also incline our ears when we're being intimate with someone, when we're with friends who (unclear) sweet nothings into their ear or we're just sharing something that's close to our hearts, we incline our ear to another person and the prophet's pleading for God's ear to be inclined, for there to be that closeness and that intimacy between the Lord and his people. He is seeking intimacy that an inclined ear implies.

And then again, let thy heart be softened and thy bowels moved with compassion towards us. We are in God's heart, we are in his innermost parts, that's splachno mou right?

Alright, so verse 6 gets at really the crux of Joseph's plea. "Remember thy suffering saints, O our god; and thy servants will rejoice in thy name forever." Now we've all been there. We've all suffered and we've all cried out for God's mercy. I have when I was twelve and my baby sister got a particularly lethal and nasty form of childhood cancer and died at age twenty months. I have when an inflammatory immune system caused me intermittent childhood

arthritis. I have when Taylor and I learned that we would never become biological parents, I have when my mild hearing loss progressed to moderate and then to severe and to profound and finally to total deafness, I have when career opportunities that I was prepared for and ready for were – were not – were denied me. We all have had those moments when we cry out for the Lord, please remember me, I'm here. Are you listening? Are you really there?

So, you've been there too. And in these moments of terrible, terrible pain and loss, God says, *splachno mou* - you are my inner parts, my soul can be your soul, because I've graven on the palms of my hands and I have kept the scars on my side and perhaps on the inner parts within, those bowels of mercy within so that I remember you.

Verses 7 and 8 always amaze me as God's response is so powerful to my aching soul. "My son, (or my daughter,) peace be unto thy soul; (and maybe to my inner parts as well,) thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high." Often that has been enough. If we read further we're reminded that our friends haven't yet deserted us and our enemies hope shall be blasted and cut off. We are told that God shall give us knowledge by his holy spirit, yea by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost that has not been received since the world was, until now. But for me, verses 7 and 8 are often enough. God is with me, he is in my inner parts, in my heart, he has all mercy and I can trust that my losses and my pains will become joy in him.

I love this Lisa, it's absolutely just authentic, beautiful and true. I want to call our attention to covenants. God wants to be in a relationship with us. Covenants are the vehicle or the invitation to do so and the scriptures are full of little clues, of reminders about God's covenant, and actually the word remember often is a covenantal word. I actually encourage you to look at this verse, Exodus chapter 2 verses 24 and 25, and within these verses God remembers the covenant that he had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would bless their descendants to have prosperity and posterity. So God remembers his covenants. Listen to what Joseph was saying back here in verse 6, "remember thy suffering saints." So Joseph is calling upon God to recall and to instigate the covenant he'd made back to Abraham that God

fulfilled in part to the suffering saints, the Israelites, in bondage in Egypt, and now we have modern-day saints who are in bondage and Joseph as a form of a modern-day Moses is saying remember your suffering saints. And God does. He absolutely does remember and he turns all things for our good, even if at this moment we can't see it. Now I have to say in my own personal life I've had suffering and I've often had some arguments with God over it because I think I understand in my own limited mindset, of the purpose for the lessons to be learned from suffering and I feel like if I've suffered, I've mastered that lesson and I don't need any more lessons on suffering 'cause I got it. I think I got an A. And every time I suffer again I try to remind God, uh, I think I passed this lesson last time. And his gentle voice has been to me when I'm in moments of humility, no my son, there is still more learning for you to do, and for all of us, but do know that even in your suffering, you are never abandoned by God, even if you may feel alone from time to time. So we in this moment invite you to think of the times when you have felt God's love and know that he is still with you.

This is a treat to be able to have Lisa join us today and give her – her very unique perspective on this section and what's happening. As I – as we step back for just a moment, notice what's happening. They were arrested on November 1st, he's writing this letter now on March 20th, and they're not going to be released from captivity, the guards who were transporting them to a different location allow them and actually facilitate them to escape, but that's not even going to happen until April 15th so we're still nearly a month away and this is during that cold winter season in Missouri in 1838 – '39. Have you noticed how sometimes the light seems to shine the brightest when it's the darkest? This – this jail experience in Independence, in Richmond, in Liberty and in the court proceedings that are taking place during this five and-a-half months, this literally becomes a life changing – a temple-like experience for Joseph. Steve Harper refers to it as this incredible connecting point, that's what a temple is, it's a connecting point with heaven and that's what we're seeing happen with Joseph and those who are with him is God is softening their hearts through these difficult circumstances. Think about it. You're the prophet. You're the leader of these people and this is our darkest hour. There's never been a time in – in the eight year plus history of the Church when

they've needed leadership and guidance and – and strength and inspiration and where's their leader? He's incarcerated. And they're being forced out of the state with nowhere really to go – they're heading across the river back to Illinois and the wonderful people in – in Quincy take them in, but they don't have a leader – or do they?

Look at what God teaches Joseph. Pick it up in verse 26. "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now." You see, their prophet might be in jail, but the true leader is still guiding the people. Look at what he tells them in verse 32. "According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof, when every man shall enter into his eternal presence and into his eter – immortal rest." He's reminding Joseph that your experience in all of these mortal struggles, don't lose the big picture. Don't lose the eternal perspective on this incarceration and on the abuses that are being endured and the struggles and the trials and these – these heart-wrenching experiences that everybody's passing through. There's an eternal perspective here.

Now look at verse 33, one of my favorite verses of all scripture. "How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints."

Whether you're a parent, whether you're a leader, whether you have any kind of jurisdiction over anybody, let's never, ever overlook the fact that we can't get between people and heaven. He's saying no power no – nothing can prevent the heavens from pouring down this knowledge upon the heads of the saints. You see, these five and-a-half months of incarceration, Joseph's learning a great deal about Joseph and the saints are learning a great deal about the saints. And they're all learning a great deal about God and about life in general.

Look at verse 34. "Behold, there are many called but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?" And then the Lord answers his own question here.

"Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson, that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness." If you want more power of heaven flowing into your life, if you want more revelation, it's not just a matter of asking and seeking, it's a matter of pleading with God to help you find ways to become more the way he wants you to become, not the way the world wants you to become. That's true righteousness. True loyalty to him is to figure out what he would have you do, and then plead with him for the strength to then do those things.

Now notice he gives some very, very stern warnings here in verse 37. "That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man." Once again, we've talked about this before, in the world's hierarchical structure, the king or the queen or the magistrate or the judge sits at the top and rules and – and mandates down with control and compulsion and all kinds of anti-agency means at time in history. But in the kingdom of God which is an inverted kingdom, he's saying if you have power, if you have jurisdiction, you cannot do these things that are listed in verse 37. Otherwise, Amen to your authority, Amen to your priesthood power. And, by the way, the Amen in this context doesn't mean yes, I agree like it does when we finish a prayer. In this context it's a – it's an ending to, it's a farewell, so all of those negative examples, those are simply attributes of devilish characteristics.

Now let's transition into Christ-like characteristics. We're trying to come unto Christ. We're trying to become more like him so as Lisa walks us through these final verses of section 121, keep at the forefront of your mind, I'm trying to be like Jesus in all that I do and say and he's actually given me a handbook of how to do that.

So verses 41 through 46 give us a very clear, straightforward map, instructional guidelines for how we should be using power. Each of us wields power; it might be through our church callings, our professional capacities, among our peers, within our family with our children. So you know, let's go through this list of how we should wield power. We must use power through persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, pure knowledge. I think today how destructive it is when power is combined with false information, misinformation. Reproving betimes with sharpness, with the bowels - that term bowels again - the bowels of charity towards all men, and with virtue garnishing our thoughts unceasingly.

I actually think it's kind of interesting to do this exercise, complete these sentences to create your own creed of power. I will use power in what manner? And I will use power to do what? Write it on your creed for how to use power. I will use power to unify and not divide. I will use power to alleviate suffering. I will use power to demand justice. I will use power with courage. What else is on your creed? I think that if you are grounded in these scriptural verses, you can have an incredible creed, guidelines for yourself as to how you will use your influence being influenced by – by God himself.

So we get these promises if this is the way that we wield power and influence, thy confidence shall wax strong in the presence of God. The doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. Now you know a lot of our scriptures come from the ancient Near East where the dews from heaven were a major source of water, especially in the summer months. "The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion. Thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever." So there's a reference to scepter in these verses, and thy scepter shall be an unchanging scepter and it reminds me of my favorite Shakespeare play the Merchant of Venice in a speech that's kind of referred to as the quality of mercy speech, so in this play a Jewish money lender named Shylock has been wronged repeatedly by his Christian neighbors and at some point one of them needs to borrow money from him and so they enter into a contract, ha ha ha, almost lightheartedly, that if the bond, the loan isn't repaid by a certain date in three month's time, that Shylock can receive a pound of flesh, demand a pound of flesh from the one he is lending the money to.

Well, no one expects this to happen, but it does and in the intervening period, more and more injustices have been added to Shylock. His daughter has run off with the friend – eloped with the friend of the Christian that he's lended money to and as she left she took with her the ring of her dead mother and sold it for a monkey, so Shylock is hurt. Shylock at the time that the bond comes due wants justice. He wants his pound of flesh and he wants it from the heart, not the bowel, your inner parts. Talk about, you know, there are no bowels of mercy here.

A beautiful speech is given to him by a woman disguised as a learned judge, Portia, and says that in the course of justice none of us shall see salvation. Instead she urges him to think about the qualities of mercy and power. The quality of mercy is not strained, it dropeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed, it blesses him that gives and him that takes. It's the mightiest of the mightiest. It becomes the throned monarch better than the crowned. His scepter shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty wherein doth but the dragon fear of kings but mercy is above the sceptered sway. It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, it is an attribute of God himself, an earthly power doth then show liketh God when mercy evens justice.

So in this day when we've talked about the bowels of mercy, if we can exercise power in the way that God does, with the bowels of mercy and as instructed in D. and C. 121, our power will flow with that mercy and with justice.

So to finish off sections 122 and 123, these are two additional, very small, relatively speaking, excerpts taken out of that 29-page letter that Joseph Smith wrote from Liberty Jail. In section 122 the Lord gives us this – this really beautiful perspective on – on mortal suffering, on earthly suffering that we experience. If you pick it up in verse 5 and in your own scriptures if you just mark every time you see the word –if – in verse 5, 6, and 7. It's – it's this growing list of terrible things that happens to Joseph or to other people and he's saying things like "if thou art called to pass through tribulation, if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; and if thou art in perils by land or by sea;" now you start through these and everybody's thinking in the context of Joseph Smith and the early saints. What God is

doing is he's building up this grand conclusion at the bottom of verse 7. Look at the wording here, "and above all," so we have this long list of if statements and now, "above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good."

Whatever the trial, you could make your own list of – of if statements, of things that you pass through as long as we conclude them with this beautiful statement at the end of verse 7, then it puts those sufferings into context where those very trials for us can become like Liberty Jail was for Joseph. It can become temple-like experiences connecting us with heaven, putting things in perspective.

Look at verse 8. "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" And then look at verse 9, the conclusion. This is what we do with all of this knowledge. "Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known and thy years shall not be numbered less, therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever." Wow! Can you see how powerfully redeeming that whole verse mime becomes for Joseph in that setting and how powerful it is for us today? To say I can truly trust God whether my struggles back in my verse 5 through 7 are financial or relational or – or educational or fill in the blank with any struggle that anybody could go through, but to say oh, my days are known and my years shall not be numbered less and I don't need to fear what man can do, 'cause man's going to do some things that are going to hurt me. They're living in a fallen world with people using agency; I am going to be on the receiving end of some very, very frustrating trials but I don't need to fear what they can do because I know in whom I've trusted, my God has been my support. Use Nephi's words here superimposed into this story, it's a beautiful ending there.

Now section 123 is a section that tells them that they need to gather up all of the knowledge of all the facts and the sufferings and the abuses that have been put upon them by the people of this State and they they're told to present them before the world. So you have 678 accounts that are collected in fulfillment of section 123. Joseph Smith and others, they've – they're not

doing any good being presented to anybody in Missouri, he takes them to Washington, D.C. He actually knocks on the White House door in – in the capital City and asks to speak with President Martin Van Buren and they get an audience with him and they present all of these – all of these wrongs that have been put against the saints. Unfortunately, an election's coming up soon and Martin Van Buren is really interested in being reelected as the President, so he looks at Joseph and he says basically, your cause, it is just, but I can do nothing for you because if I get involved here, he uses the federalist idea of look, this is a State matter, it's not the Federal Government. I can't do anything to help you and if I tried to intercede, then I would have all of Missouri – the State of Missouri against me, and running for reelection, you can see why that would be a real struggle for him. So they don't get help there.

Joseph then tries taking it through the legislative branch but because of representation or representatives from Missouri, the – his representatives in the State of Illinois, they don't – they don't want to help him at all, and so it goes nowhere. Those 678 records were then given over to the Library of Congress where they still sit.

In closing, let's not focus on all of these wrongs. Let's – let's end on a – on a good note. Look at verse 16 of section 123. "You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves." Can I just say that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass – that great teaching from the Book of Mormon is extremely applicable here in this setting as well as in our lives, that you might find yourself in the middle of all kinds of terrible storms and you have this complex family to try to hold together and keep from sinking or your life as an individual, whatever the situation may be, I love the fact that he says a very small helm can keep that ship going in the right direction.

God has given you some connecting points with him and if we turn to him, and if we let God prevail in our life and we don't fear what man can do, but we look to God, and we trust that the Lord Jesus Christ really does carry us, not just in his heart but in his whole soul, engraven on his – the palms of his hands, our struggles are continually before him, that when we say he loves us, we mean

that, he loves us and he makes himself vulnerable to the things that we're experiencing.

Look at verse 17 to finish. "Therefore dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed." This was not a call to sit still and let God do everything. You'll notice the order; he says that we cheerfully do all things that lie in our power. We do our best, but at the end of the day, even if things don't work out, we stand still and know that God's purposes are being carried forward. What you're doing, if you're doing what you can to move forward, it's all that God needs you to do and he'll take care of the rest. Know that in spite of all of the struggles that you and I may face in this life, God is in his heavens, he is aware of you and he loves you with all of his heart. Remember, he holds worlds without number in his hand but he holds you in his heart because you're his daughter, or his son, and we leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.