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Lesson IX. The Righteousness of Faith

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Abstract: The American Indian a creature of faith—Some customs of the Indians—Faith fundamental—Faith counted for righteousness—Why Nephi was blessed —The testimony of Moroni—Mormon's exhortation—The Holy Ghost obtained by faith—The priesthood secured by faith—Many wondrous things wrought by faith—Power comes by faith—Miracles wrought by faith—Works essential—The faith of the Indian a natural inheritance —From a sermon by Mormon.

GUIDE DEPARTMENT.

Teachings of the Book of Mormon

LESSON IX.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH.

The aboriginal American is a creature of faith. Says the learned Professor Brinton, "Nature, to the heathen, is no harmonious whole swayed by eternal principles, but a chaos of causeless effects, the meaningless prey of capricious ghosts. He investigates not, because he doubts not. All events are to him miracles. Therefore, his faith knows no bounds, and those who teach that doubt is sinful must contemplate him with admiration."^a Such testimony from a scholar of modern times is interesting. But the Indian has himself left even stronger testimony than this of his simple, abiding, fundamental faith. In Nicaragua maidens were selected as sacrifices to be thrown into the seething craters of volcanoes to appease certain gods. The maidens destined to such a horrible death marched to their fate, it is said, as "happy as if they were going to be saved." In a certain part of Central America, the Indians looked "upon it as the crown of favors to be permitted to die with their cacique, and thus to acquire immortality."^b And in both instances, the victims had complete faith in the efficacy of their sacrifice. In the same spirit of implicit confidence in a Divine Protector, "the Indian deposits tobacco on the rocks of a

rapid, that the spirit of the swift waters may not swallow his canoe; in a storm he throws overboard a dog to appease the siren of the angry waves. He used to tear the hearts from his captives to gain the favor of the god of war. He provides himself with talismans to bind hostile deities. He fees the conjurer to exorcise the demon of disease." These are the lesser deities whom he loves not and respects not. "But in his highest divinity, he recognized a Father and a Preserver, a benign Intelligence, who provided for him the comforts of life—man, like himself, yet a God—God of all."^c

Faith is thus required in every form of religious worship. Faith is fundamental to every doctrine. Faith is the first principle of natural religion. Faith is the first principle of revealed religion. It has been recognized so in all the ages of man. Always, faith has been counted to man for righteousness. Adam received the word of the Lord and questioned not, and it was counted to him for righteousness.^d Abraham "believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."^e In his natural religion, his faith though it was founded on false worship may be counted to the Indian for righteousness. And since

^aBrinton, *The Myths of the New World*, p. 330.

^bCited by Brinton, p. 330.

^cBrinton, pp. 335, 336.

^dMoses 5:4-6.

^eGen. 15:6.

the Indian has so strongly marked in his worship this principle of the righteousness of faith, it will be interesting to learn what his forefathers taught of it, and what faith accomplished amongst them.

As with Adam and as with Abraham, so in the Nephite theology faith was counted to man for righteousness. It is recorded in the Book of Mormon that Nephi believed in the visions and the predictions of his father. Nephi's brothers, on the other hand, ridiculed their father and called him a visionary man. For his faith, Nephi was chosen. Said the Lord to him, "Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [that is, continue in faith], ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise."^f Again, when Nephi professed his faith a short time later in the Christ, the conducting Spirit cried, "Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for He is God over all the earth, yea, even above all; and blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired."^g Nephi was a man of simple, whole-souled faith. Because of his faith he was blessed. It was counted to him for righteousness. He was the first. When the zealous Moroni was complaining many years later of his weakness in writing—he was the last—the Lord comforted him thus: "Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity, bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness."^h Hence did

^fI Nephi 2:19, 20.

^gI Nephi 11:6.

^hEther 12:28.

Mormon exhort the people to the righteousness of faith.

"And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing? * * * Behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. * * * Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. And after that He came, men also were saved by faith in His name; and by faith they become the sons of God. And as sure as Christ liveth, He spake these words unto our fathers, saying, Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you."ⁱ

Here the righteousness of faith is clearly set forth. But the Nephite theology did more than merely to exhort to faith. It stated clearly, too, what might be accomplished by faith. Nephi asserts that his father, Lehi, received the power of the Holy Ghost through faith in the Son of God.^j Mosiah testifies that the Spirit of the Lord came upon the people of King Benjamin, "because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come."^k And Jarom bore this general testimony, "As many as are not stiffnecked and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith."^l So it appears that it was taught in the Nephite theology that

ⁱMoro. 7:20-26.

^jI Nephi 10:17.

^kMos. 4:3.

^lJarom 1:4.

the Holy Ghost was to be obtained through faith.

So also it was taught that "it was by the faith that they of old were called after the holy order of God."^m It was by faith that the law was given to Moses.ⁿ It was by faith that Christ showed Himself to His people.^o It was by faith that the law was fulfilled and "a more excellent way" prepared.^p And Ether exhorted the people "to believe in God unto repentance;" for, "by faith all things are fulfilled; wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God."^q Such wonderful, far-reaching power has faith.

Even those who were called by faith after the holy order of God, could exercise the authority and power of that calling only in faith. Nephi assures us that the power to do all things—which is the power of the holy priesthood—comes by faith.^r Because of the great faith of the brother of Jared, "the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight."^s Indeed, it will profit a man nothing to hold unlimited authority, if he do not add faith to his gift. It is by faith that the power of the priesthood is made manifest to man. Even the initiatory ordinance, which opens the door of the kingdom, comes we are told by faith. "The first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith, unto the fulfilling

the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness and lowliness of heart and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God." So endless in its righteous results is the power of faith.

As further illustrating the power of faith, we are told that miracles are wrought by faith. Ammon assured the Lamanite king that God so ordered that mighty miracles should be wrought through faith.^t Nephi, the grandson of Helaman, performed countless miracles through his great faith in Jesus Christ.^v The disciples of Jesus wrought wonders in His name.^w And Mormon declared stoutly, that, "it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore if these things have ceased, woe be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain; for no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in His name."^x Without faith there is no power at all. Faith is first. Faith is last. Faith is always.

So clearly does the Nephite theology, recorded in the Book of Mormon, set forth the doctrine of the righteousness of faith. There is another very important point, also, on which the teaching of the Book of Mormon is very clear. It is this: Faith alone is of no worth at all—

^mEther 12:10.

ⁿEther 12:11.

^oEther 12:7.

^pEther 12:11.

^qEther 12:2-4.

^rII Nephi 1:10.

^sEther 12:20, 21.

^tMoro. 8:25, 26.

^vMos. 8:18.

^wIII Nephi 7:17-20.

^xIV Nephi 1:5.

^yMoro. 7:37-39.

faith without works is dead. It is recorded that men will be judged according to their works. "For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them: for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to (his) works, according to that which is written."^y This doctrine is explained more clearly by Alma.^z So it appears that, while a man's faith may be counted to him for righteousness, it can be so counted only if his works are righteous too. Indeed, the righteousness of faith is accomplished through the righteousness of good works.

Such is the teaching of the peoples from whom have descended the American Indians. Is it any wonder, then, that the American Indian is steeped in the principle of faith—that he has implicit confidence in the Great Spirit? Is it any wonder that the Indian should be enjoined by his divinity to "go and do good?"^a Is it any wonder that the Indians who endeavored to cultivate the righteousness of faith could be described as "a good people, attached to virtue, urbane and simple in social intercourse, shunning lies, skilful in arts, pious toward their gods."^b

The lesson of the righteousness of faith is one which all men should seriously consider. There are perhaps no better words with which to close the present discussion than these from a sermon delivered by the great prophet Mormon:

"Wherefore I would speak unto you

^yII Nephi 29:11. Read also I Nephi 15:33; Mos. 5:15. Alma 37:32-34; 7:27; 9:28; Mor. 3:20.

^zAlma 41:3-5.

^aBrinton, p. 336.

^bSahagun, quoted in Brinton, p. 337.

that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope, by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth, until ye shall rest with Him in heaven. And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men; for I remember the word of God, which saith, By their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also. For behold, God hath said, A man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent, it profiteth him nothing. For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness."^c

"And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning Hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you, that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of His resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal; and this because of your faith in Him according to the promise; wherefore, if a man have faith, he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. And again, behold, I say unto you, that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart; if so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart, and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing: * * * But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them."^d

To such an ideal condition of the spiritual life leads the righteousness of faith.

OUTLINE.

The American Indian a creature of faith—Some customs of the Indians—Faith fundamental—Faith counted for righteousness—Why Nephi was blessed

^cMoro. 7:3-7.

^dMoro. 7:40-47.

—The testimony of Moroni—Mormon's exhortation—The Holy Ghost obtained by faith—The priesthood secured by faith—Many wondrous things wrought by faith—Power comes by faith—Miracles wrought by faith—Works essential—The faith of the Indian a natural inheritance—From a sermon by Mormon.

QUESTIONS.

1. What is meant by the statement that the Indian is a creature of faith?
2. Show from the customs of the Indian that he possessed a simple faith.
3. Show that faith is the first principle of both natural and revealed religion.
4. What is meant by counting faith to man for righteousness?

5. Why was Nephi blessed?
6. What did the Lord say to Moroni concerning faith?
7. What is the substance of Moroni's exhortation to exercise faith?
8. How is the gift of the Holy Ghost to be obtained?
9. What other blessings may be obtained by faith?
10. What is necessary to the exercise of the authority and power of the priesthood?
11. How is baptism dependent upon faith?
12. How may miracles be wrought?
13. Why is faith alone of no avail?
14. Why should we expect the American Indian to be a creature of faith?
15. Give the substance of the extract from Mormon's sermon.

LESSON X.

SIN AND THE LAW.

There is perhaps no truth more often or more clearly displayed in the history of the world than this, that man is prone to do evil. From the time that Adam partook of the forbidden fruit in the primitive garden, sin has lain at the door of man, and Satan has desired to gain possession of him. The great warrior-king of Israel, praying for the remission of his sins, exclaimed: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity."^a If one is to judge from the tendency to evil in man, then one must certainly conclude that David expressed the truth. Nay, more; one must conclude, that, not only was man shapen in iniquity, but also has he followed iniquity rather than righteousness all the days of his life. The story of the nations is only too often the story of their rise to opulence and power through a form of rigorous right living and of their decline and fall because of luxury, corruption, and unbridled wicked-

ness. And what is true of nations is true in a measure of families, and of individuals. Success, prosperity, health, happiness, reward the eschewing of evil and the cleaving to righteousness. Yet there is perhaps no normal man but can testify that sin lies always at his door, tapping, tapping, tapping, whispering, inviting, enticing. The individual life, as well as the national life, is evidence of the fact that man is prone to do evil.

Since sin is thus lying ever at the door of man to tempt him, one may well ask, Why is not man, then, worse even than he is recognized to be? What is it that keeps him in the way of righteousness at all? Fortunately, it is not only Satan who desires to gain possession of man. God, too, whose offspring man is, desires him. And God's desire springs from love. He has a Fatherly watchcare over His children. While he has wisely granted to them the unrestricted exercise of their free-agency, He has also wise-

^aPs. 51:5.