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The Power of Faith That Comes through Sacrifice

TRAVIS LARSEN

Faith is an indispensable and marvelous principle that has shaped worlds and that has guided and steadied faithful Saints as they have passed through this life. Indeed, faith is the first principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fourth article of faith states, “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.” This declaration clearly suggests the importance of faith as the first principle we need to qualify ourselves to receive the saving ordinances of the gospel and thus to return to live with our Heavenly Father. As we come to more fully understand the great principle of faith, we will better be able to overcome the adversary and reach our divine potential. In this paper, I will first discuss what faith is and how it is a principle of power. I then will discuss how we can unlock the power of faith through sacrifice.

DEFINITION OF FAITH

In order to unlock the full power of faith, we must first have a sound understanding of what faith is and how it operates. Alma 32:21

states: “And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” Thus, the thing in which we exercise faith must be true. “All belief is founded on evidence,’ Elder Orson Pratt explained: ‘A true faith is founded on true evidence; a false faith on false evidence. And in no case can a man have faith, either true or false, unless it is the result of true or false evidence. The greater the evidence, the greater will be the faith resulting from that evidence.’”¹ Thus, no matter how devoted we are to a cause, if it is not based on a true and everlasting principle, it is not sufficient. Saving faith can only be exercised in that which is true. Our faith must also be centered in Jesus Christ. In 2 Nephi 9:23, we read: “And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.” Christ is the mediator between us and the Father, and because He lived a perfect life we can exercise perfect faith in Him. Only because of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice can we return to live with our Heavenly Father again. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). With a basic understanding of what faith is, we are now ready to look at the finer details of faith and come to grasp what true faith can do for us in our lives.

FAITH: A PRINCIPLE OF POWER

One of the simplest definitions of faith is that faith is power. In the *Lectures on Faith*, we read the following:

Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed, neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute—for it is an attribute—from the Deity, and he would cease to exist. . . .

Faith, then, is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation or existence!²

Thus, by the power of faith, we were created and the world upon which we live was created. We read in Moses 1:39 that God's work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." God wants His children to have the same blessings, attributes, and power that He has. Through our faith we can unlock the power that God has promised us and receive all that He has. President J. Reuben Clark once stated:

As I think about faith, this principle of power, I am obliged to believe that it is an force intelligent. Of what kind, I do not know. But it is superior to and overrules all other forces of which we know. . . .

We brethren, have had this great power given unto us, this power of faith. What are we doing about it? Can you, can we, do the mighty things that the Savior did? Yes. They have been done by the members of the Church who had the faith and the righteousness so to do. Think of what is within your power if you but live the Gospel, if you but live so that you may invoke the power which is within you.³

With true faith and the power that goes along with it, we can literally make good things happen in our lives. This is the effect of a true and abiding faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Elder John K. Carmack of the Seventy gives us this interesting insight about the relationship between faith and power: "Faith taps into divine sources and is a manifestation of unity and partnership with the Lord. Even the ideas and words formulated by faith come by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the power to accomplish the words formed by faith comes from God."⁴ We have the power to make changes in our lives and become all that we are destined to become through our faith and our obedience to God's commandments.

POWER AND FAITH ARE SYNONYMOUS

Joseph Smith actually taught that power and faith are essentially the same thing. We read in the *Lectures on Faith* the following about God and the attributes that He possesses: “We have, in the revelations which he has given to the human family, the following account of his attributes: . . . First—Knowledge. . . . Secondly—Faith or power. . . . Thirdly—Justice. . . . Fourthly—Judgment. . . . Fifthly—Mercy. . . . And sixthly—Truth.”⁵ In the second attribute of God that Joseph Smith brings to light, he says that God has “faith or power,” which suggests the interchangeability of these two principles. Thus, when we increase our faith we are really increasing our power. If our faith is strong and vibrant, then our power will likewise be strong; but if our faith is lacking, then our power will be also.

Why, then, do we need this increase of faith and power in our lives? The *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* gives a brief definition of what power is. It states that power is “the possession and execution of authority, control, or influence over people, things, and circumstances.”⁶ As we have more faith, we will be empowered to do those things that God would have us do. In the scriptures, there are numerous accounts of the faithful who received power to do the things that God would have them do through their faith in Christ. For example, Alma and Amulek could not be confined in dungeons; neither could they be slain by any man (see Alma 8:31). Lehi, through his faith, was able to confound the words and murmurings of his sons Laman and Lemuel with power and authority (see 1 Nephi 2:14). Jacob taught that he was able to control the elements through faith (see Jacob 4:6). What incredible examples of the power that comes through faith!

Joseph Smith taught that the faithful would also be better prepared and able to overcome Satan and his temptations through their faith: “The Saints were enabled, through faith, to combat the powers of darkness, contend against the wiles of the adversary, overcome the world, and obtain the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.”⁷ Thus,

God's power is a gift that He gives to the faithful. "To be 'armed . . . with the power of God' (1 Ne. 14:14), one must exercise faith . . . and 'diligently seek [God],' striving to do his work in righteousness."⁸ As our faith increases, we will be endowed with the heavenly gift of power and will be better able to fulfill our purposes here upon the earth.

SACRIFICE AND FAITH

As we come to understand the principle of faith better and know of the power that can be received because of our faith, it is likely that we will ask ourselves what we can do to increase our faith, and thus our power. As the prophet of this, the last dispensation, Joseph Smith revealed numerous principles essential for our salvation. And within these revelations, we find a precious gem, revealing the secret to quickly and effectively develop our faith. In the *Lectures on Faith*, we read:

Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the *sacrifice* of all things never has *power* sufficient to produce the *faith* necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.⁹

According to Joseph Smith, the one essential thing to obtain the faith necessary to inherit eternal life is the principle of sacrifice. Sacrifice

is a principle that can be seen as far back as the time of Adam and Eve when they were commanded to offer “the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” as a “similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:5, 7). Under the Mosaic law, the followers of the law would offer blood sacrifices and burnt offerings in order to obey the law of sacrifice. In contrast, when Christ came to the Americas after His Resurrection, He taught the Nephites that the law of Moses had been fulfilled and told them to “offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). This was the introduction of the new and higher law and the principle that will ultimately exalt those faithful Saints in the kingdom of God. As the higher law, this type of sacrifice goes well beyond the offering of fruits and animals as a sacrifice but requires the offering of oneself to God. In the book of Omni, Amaleki urges the readers of the Book of Mormon to “offer your whole souls as an offering unto” Christ (Omni 1:26). From the Book of Mormon, we also learn that the higher law of sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit is prerequisite to obtaining baptism and receiving of the Holy Ghost and is likewise necessary to receive forgiveness of sins through the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Moroni 6:2-4; 3 Nephi 9:20; 2 Nephi 2:7). Joseph Smith taught that sacrifice always precedes faith in receiving eternal life:

Those, then, who make the sacrifice, will have the testimony that their course is pleasing in the sight of God; and those who have this testimony will have faith to lay hold on eternal life, and will be enabled, through faith, to endure unto the end, and receive the crown that is laid up for them that love the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who do not make the sacrifice cannot enjoy this faith, because men are dependent upon this sacrifice in order to obtain this faith: therefore, they cannot lay hold upon eternal life, because the revelations of God do not guarantee unto them the authority so to do, and without this guarantee faith could not exist.¹⁰

EXAMPLE OF ALMA AND AMULEK

In the Book of Mormon, we read of numerous examples of this triangle connecting and relating these three principles of faith, power, and sacrifice. In Alma 14 we read a stirring account of the missionary efforts of Alma and Amulek among the Lamanites. These were faithful men who desired to bring as many people as possible back to the fold of Christ by preaching the gospel to them. They desired the salvation and exaltation of the people they taught. Like all missionaries, they had been specially called and set apart to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to their brothers, the Lamanites.

We read of Alma and Amulek's persecutions and how the people reviled against them. In verse 4, Alma and Amulek were bound in strong cords and taken to the chief judge. Following this unreasonable and illegal arrest, Alma and Amulek had to witness the death by fire of many believers, including women and children. As they look upon this horrific scene, Amulek says to Alma in Alma 14:10: "How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames." Furthermore, in verse 12, it states that Amulek also saw his and Alma's life in danger and feared they would be burned also. On the contrary, in verse 13, we read the faith-filled response of Alma: "Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not."

This conviction and testimony that Alma had obtained through his faithfulness and through a lifetime of sacrifice had prepared him to act in faith in this very moment of despair and uncertainty. Alma continued believing and stood up for the cause of righteousness, even in the face of death. What incredible faith he had!

The persecutions do not stop there, though; we read in the following verses how they were beaten and physically abused by their persecutors. In verses 14, 15, 20, 24, and 25, we read the phrase "[he] smote them." Alma and Amulek were hurt again and again. Alma and Amulek were also thrown

in prison (see v. 17). In verse 22, it states how Alma and Amulek were stripped of their clothes and were not given food or water. Furthermore, they had to endure this kind of persecution “for many days” (v. 23).

Verse 21 seems to sum up best the kind of persecution that Alma and Amulek had to go through: “And many such things did they say unto them, gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them, and saying: How shall we look when we are damned?” The scene is gruesome; Alma and Amulek’s sacrifices are immense. It is a sobering thought to consider how we would react and how our faith would be in the face of such persecutions. Notwithstanding, Alma and Amulek persevered and continued exercising faith.

In verses 25 and 26, we see the culmination of this extraordinary faith after having sacrificed so much: “And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; and when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet. And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.”

We see that they received the strength necessary to break their bands because of their faith in Christ. What power! Consequently, all of this happened because of the amazing sacrifices and faith of Alma and Amulek. In verse 28 of this same chapter, we read a good summary of the relationship between faith, power, and sacrifice: “And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; *for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ.* And they straightway came forth out of the prison; and they were loosed from their bands; and the prison had fallen to the earth, and every soul within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, was slain; and they straightway came forth into the city” (emphasis added).

This story of Alma and Amulek is truly one of the gems of the Book of Mormon because it clearly teaches us the connection that exists between the vital principles of faith, power, and sacrifice. This is one of many scriptural examples showing that faith is power and that both these traits can be increased by sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

The gospel of Jesus Christ gives us unparalleled peace and comfort in a world full of turmoil, uncertainty, and chaos. By abiding by gospel precepts, we will come to know Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ better; we will not just know *about* Them, but we will truly come to *know* Them, which is ultimately eternal life (see John 17:3). Some of the most fundamental parts of this gospel of peace are the principles of faith, power, and sacrifice. As we learn about each one of these principles through the scriptures and through the words of the prophets, we quickly realize the important and even indispensable connection that exists between them. President Gordon B. Hinckley gives this prophetic statement about the need for us to increase our faith: “If there is any one thing you and I need in this world it is faith, that dynamic, powerful, marvelous element by which, as Paul declared, the very worlds were framed (Hebrews 11:3). . . . Faith—the kind of faith that moves one to get on his knees and plead with the Lord and then get on his feet and go to work—is an asset beyond compare.”¹¹

The relationship between these three principles can be summarized as follows: faith, coupled with works, is power; and one of the quickest, and most effective ways to increase faith, and thus power, is through sacrifice. The kind of sacrifice we need is to be willing to cultivate a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Elder Neal A. Maxwell put it this way: “Real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed!”¹² When we overcome our own selfish desires, let our will be swallowed up in the will of the Father, and covenant to serve Him regardless

of the cost or consequences, we are then living the law of sacrifice. As we sacrifice, we are promised an increase of faith and an increase in our ability and power to keep the commandments, overcome the temptations of Satan, and serve those around us, thus firmly placing us on the strait and narrow path leading back to the presence of Heavenly Father.

NOTES

1. Orson Pratt, as quoted in Dennis L. Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 260; see also Hebrews 11:1.
2. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 3, 5.
3. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Behold the Lamb of God: Selections from the Sermons and Writings, Published and Unpublished, of J. Reuben Clark, Jr., on the Life of the Savior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 285–86.
4. John K. Carmack, “Faith Yields Priesthood Power,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 41.
5. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 50–51.
6. Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 649.
7. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 70.
8. Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 649.
9. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 69; emphasis added.
10. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 70.
11. Gordon B. Hinckley, “God Shall Give unto You Knowledge by His Holy Spirit,” *BYU Speeches of the Year*, September 25, 1973, 109.
12. Neal A. Maxwell, as quoted in M. Russell Ballard, “The Law of Sacrifice,” *Liahona*, March 2002, 10.