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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 29—Instructions of Alma to His Sons

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 29—Instructions of Alma to His Sons

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(Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma, chapters 36-42)

For Tuesday, February 2, 1955

Objective: To show how Alma's admonitions to his sons emphasize that only through keeping the commandments of God can we achieve happiness in this life and joy in the world to come.

IN the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges, Alma sensed an increase in iniquity among his people. He, therefore, called his three sons together and gave "... unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness . . ." (Alma 35:16). These three sons were Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton.

Helaman Told of Alma's Conversion

Alma related to Helaman an account of his own sinful past, and how he had gone "... about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God . . ." (Alma 36:6). He recounted the appearance of the angel to him, who had said: "... If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy

the church of God" (Alma 36:9). Alma told Helaman that after these words he had fallen to the earth, "... and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs" (Alma 36:10). The other brethren, Alma told Helaman, had heard more words from the angel, but Alma declared that after he had heard the words of the angel addressed to him:

... I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more. But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins (Alma 36:11-12).

The terrible responsibility which weighs upon a man who leads others

astray into unrighteousness was thus expressed by Alma:

Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction . . . Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds (Alma 36:14-15).

At last, however, Alma told Helaman, remembering the words of his father, Alma, prophesying to the people concerning the coming of the Son of God, had caused Alma to cry within his heart “. . . O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me. . . . I could remember my pains no more . . .” Alma added (Alma 36:18-19). Thus the teachings of his father had come to him in his extremity and given him guidance.

In speaking to Helaman, Alma also impressed upon him the joy of righteousness when he said, “. . . there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21). The great joy which the Lord had since given to Alma as the fruits of his labors in bringing souls to repentance, was affirmed and the goodness of the Lord extolled when Alma spoke of his mercy. “And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions . . .” (Alma 36:27). Alma impressed upon Helaman the promise:

Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land . . . inasmuch as ye will not keep

the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence (Alma 36:30).

Helaman Entrusted With Records and Other Sacred Relics

Alma entrusted Helaman with all of the records and other sacred relics, dating from early times. He impressed Helaman with the magnitude of his responsibility in keeping these sacred histories. He pointed out that these records had been instrumental in bringing many to a knowledge of God and of convincing many, including thousands of the Lamanites, of the error of their ways. In instructing Helaman regarding his record-keeping responsibility, Alma said:

And I . . . command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept (Alma 37:2).

In speaking of the plates of brass, Alma said they had “. . . enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways . . .” (Alma 37:8). In regard to the twenty-four plates [from which the Book of Ether had been abridged], Helaman was instructed to keep from the people the secret oaths and covenants contained therein and “. . . only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them . . .” (Alma 37:29). Also entrusted to Helaman were the interpreters.

Alma used the Liahona, the compass which guided the Nephites to the land of promise, to teach an impressive lesson to Helaman. He reminded Helaman that this instrument was symbolical of things

spiritual, that it worked according to the faith and diligence of the people.

For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land (Alma 37:44).

Instructions of Alma to Helaman

Sensing the needs of the people, Alma gave Helaman specific instructions regarding what he should teach. He emphasized that he should teach four things in particular:

(1) to have “. . . an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity” (Alma 37:32).

(2) to “Preach . . . repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

(3) “. . . to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart . . .”

(4) to “. . . never be weary of good works . . .” (Alma 37:32-34).

He further said: “. . . The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever” (Alma 37:46).

Concerning Helaman's personal welfare, Alma advised him to “. . . learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God” (Alma 37:35). He admonished Helaman to:

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day (Alma 37:37).

Alma's Commandments to Shiblon

Alma's instructions to Shiblon indicated his deep concern that his son should endure to the end. Alma was extremely pleased with Shiblon and commended him for the patience, diligence, and faithfulness which he had shown in adversity as a missionary among the Zoramites. He referred to the time when Shiblon was stoned by the people, and expressed “great joy” in him for his steadiness, but, at the same time expressed the hope that, “. . . as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end” (Alma 38:2).

Alma further instructed Shiblon, after telling of his own conversion, that he should learn of him:

. . . that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness (Alma 38:9).

He admonished Shiblon that he should continue to teach the word, to:

. . . be diligent and temperate in all things. See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength. Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness (Alma 38:10-12).

Alma then warned Shiblon not to pray as the Zoramites with the intent to be heard and praised by other men; but always to acknowledge his unworthiness before God. Alma's instruction to both Helaman

and Shiblon end with the words “. . . Be sober. My son, farewell” (Alma 38:15 and 37:47).

Alma's Reproof to Corianton

We see from Alma's instructions to his third son, Corianton, that he was bitterly disappointed in the way Corianton had conducted himself while doing missionary work among the Zoramites, in contrast to the example set by Shiblon. Coming directly to the point, Alma said to Corianton:

. . . Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom. And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel. Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted. Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost? (Alma 39:2-5).

In calling attention to Corianton's sins, Alma said:

And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good. But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day (Alma 39:7-8).

Owing to his weaknesses and to his youth, Alma counseled Corianton to seek advice and guidance from his older brothers, saying, “. . . ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers . . .” (Alma 39:10).

In pointing out the grievousness of these sins, Alma explained to Corianton “. . . how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

Alma's Teachings on Plan of Salvation

Alma's explanations to Corianton about the plan of salvation, the universality of the resurrection; the separate states of the righteous and wicked between death and resurrection, the reasons for laws governing right and wrong, on punishment, and how mercy may claim the repentant; and the meaning of restoration, are among the most powerful and explicit found in all scripture. Alma foretold the coming of Christ, and explained that it was important for the people living then to understand that Christ would come to take away the sins of the world and to declare glad tidings. He asked:

. . . is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming? . . . Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming? (Alma 39:17, 19.)

Alma explained the resurrection to his son. He said that “. . . there is no resurrection . . . until after the coming of Christ” (Alma 40:2). He further elucidated, “Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” (Alma 40:6).

Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this

mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life. And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow. And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil (Alma 40:11-13).

Restoration Explained

Alma also carefully explained the meaning of the restoration, saying to Corianton:

. . . the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. . . . that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself . . . that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil . . . (Alma 41:2-4).

He emphasized the fact that no one must suppose that he shall be restored from sin to happiness, explaining that “. . . wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). The importance of earth life as a probationary period, and a period in which to learn to prepare oneself and to repent, was explained. Alma said:

And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God (Alma 42:4).

Alma perceived that his son did not understand the justice of God in the punishment of sinners. He, therefore, gave him a clear explanation of the plan of salvation as it applies to the laws of the gospel, and the blessings and penalties which come from obedience or disobedience. He explained, “. . . there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted . . .” (Alma 42:22). He warned his son not to attempt to excuse himself for his sins through the process of denying the justice of God, which would bring condemnation upon his head. Alma entreated Corianton to “. . . let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility” (Alma 42:30).

Alma concluded:

. . . And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen (Alma 42:31).

Alma's great sermons to his sons give a clear explanation of God's great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the beginning of the world and upon which salvation and redemption are based.

Questions on the Lesson

1. What instructions did Alma give to Helaman? to Shiblon? to Corianton?
2. Why was Alma disappointed in Corianton?
3. What is the meaning of restoration? How does it exemplify the justice of God?