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Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon: Lesson 40—Christ Among the Nephites

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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Abstract: The objective of the lesson is to testify to the appearance to the Nephites of the resurrected Christ; and to comprehend Christ's teachings on baptism; the calling of the Twelve Disciples; and the Sermon on the Mount.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 40—Christ Among the Nephites

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi, chapters 11-14)

For Tuesday, May 1, 1956

Objective: To testify to the appearance to the Nephites of the resurrected Christ; and to comprehend Christ's teachings on baptism; the calling of the Twelve Disciples; and the Sermon on the Mount.

Appearance of Jesus Christ

After the cataclysm which they had experienced, a group of survivors was gathered around the temple in the land Bountiful. They were conversing about the changes which had taken place and about Jesus Christ who was to come. Suddenly they heard a voice, but they did not understand. Three times they heard it. The third time they heard it distinctly saying, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7).

As they looked toward heaven they:

... saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe;

and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them. And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Nephi 11:8-11).

The people were so astonished that they fell to the earth for then "... they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto

them after his ascension into heaven" (3 Nephi 11:12).

Jesus spoke to them again saying:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world (3 Nephi 11:14).

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying, Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him (3 Nephi 11:16-17).

In this decisive manner, Jesus affirmed his divinity, and by means of displaying his wounds established beyond doubt that he was Jesus the Christ, and that he had atoned for the sins of the world.

Twelve Disciples Chosen

Singling Nephi out of the multitude, Jesus said to him, ". . . I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven" (3 Nephi 11:21). Eleven others were endowed with this same power. ". . . (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) . . ." (3 Nephi 12:1). Jesus gave them specific words to be used in performing the ordinance and instructed them to baptize by immersion.

Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another (3 Nephi 11:23-29).

In regard to baptism the Savior further said:

And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth (3 Nephi 11:33-41).

After calling the Twelve Disciples Jesus instructed the people “. . . Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants . . .” (3 Nephi 12:1).

After instructing the people that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel were prerequisites to salvation, and following his empowering the Twelve Disciples to baptize the people, Jesus turned to the multitude and gave them his Sermon on the Mount, substantially as he gave it on the Eastern Hemisphere.

The Sermon on the Mount Retold

This Sermon on the Mount gives in detail the Christian pattern of living. This pattern is needed today perhaps as much as anything in

the gospel, for we have learned many things, but we have not yet learned how to live the more abundant life.

The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes represent Jesus' blueprint for happiness and blessedness. “. . . Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .” (3 Nephi 12:3) may mean blessed are those who feel the need of spiritual direction and come to Christ for help. Pride, self-righteousness, self-conceit are condemned. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is a good commentary on this beatitude. “. . . blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (3 Nephi 12:4) has been interpreted by James E. Talmage as follows:

. . . the mourner shall be comforted for he shall see the divine purpose of his grief, and shall again associate with the beloved ones of whom he has been bereft . . . (*Jesus the Christ*, page 231).

The meek, in the beatitude “. . . blessed are the meek . . .” (3 Nephi 12:5) are those people who refuse to answer evil with evil, which requires real strength of character, for it requires restraint of anger, hatred, and revenge. “. . . blessed are the merciful . . .” (3 Nephi 12:7) reminds us that God will pardon our evil deeds in proportion as we pardon the evils others do to us. He who shows mercy will be judged mercifully. The peacemakers are blessed because they bring so much to others. Peacemakers placate; they bring about concord. They reconcile men who are at variance with one another, whether as individuals, classes, or nations.

Instructions to the Twelve Disciples

Jesus then speaks of the responsibility and dignity of the ministry of the Twelve Disciples. He emphasizes it with the following ideas:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house; Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven (3 Nephi 12:13-16).

Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law

When Jesus instructs citizens of his kingdom concerning righteousness, he frequently contrasts his teachings with those current in the law and the prophets, indicating in each case the impressive gulf which divides his sublime morality from the morality of the law and the prophets. The old law punished only the act of murder, but the law of Christ disapproves of the emotion of anger, thus working for a purification of the heart, a schooling of the feelings. The old law punished the act of adultery, but the law of Christ forbids a man to lust after a woman, for then he has already committed adultery in his heart. Christ wanted an inward purity. The old law required an ". . . eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (3 Nephi 12:38).

The new law required:

But I say unto you, that ye shall not

resist evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain And behold it is written also, that thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; But behold I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away and all things have become new. Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect (3 Nephi 12:39, 41, 43-48).

Jesus further states:

Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor; but take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven (3 Nephi 13:1).

That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly (3 Nephi 13:4-6).

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (3 Nephi 13:19-21).

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other,

or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon (3 Nephi 13:24).

Importance of Spirituality

In this sermon to the Nephites, Christ points out that materialism is made to serve spirituality; it is never an end in itself. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (3 Nephi 13:33), Jesus promised.

Jesus calls censorious persons hypocrites, and classifies them as worse than the people they criticize.

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he turned again to the multitude, and did open his mouth unto them again, saying: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye (3 Nephi 14:1-3, 5).

The Golden Rule

Jesus explained his readiness to bless mankind:

Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened (3 Nephi 14:7-8).

Jesus then gave the golden rule: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this

is the law and the prophets" (3 Nephi 14:12). Notice that this rule makes Christianity a positive religion rather than a negative one. It inculcates active benevolence. Jesus also warns us to:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (3 Nephi 14:15-16).

Finally, Jesus urged men to activate the doctrines he taught in their own lives. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (3 Nephi 14:21). And he closed the sermon with the parable of the man who built his house upon the sand and the man who built his house upon the rock, emphasizing the need for applying gospel truths to our lives. Jesus was interested in life service to humanity; not lip service. The urgent words of the Lord to Moses are apropos:

These words which I command you this day, shall be in your heart, and you shall meditate upon them, sitting in your house and walking on your journey, sleeping and rising.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Are we applying the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount today?
2. How does the sermon in The Book of Mormon differ from the one in the Bible? Give instances where Christ points out the need for correcting practices.
3. How does this account of Christ's appearance and teachings strengthen your testimony?