

MATTHEW 16-20

JESUS TRAINS THE TWELVE IN TRUE LEADERSHIP

The following is based on John W. Welch and Brent J. Schmidt, The Gospel of Matthew, BYU New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).

Matthew 16–20 sets forth principles of righteous leadership. One may call these chapters the leadership handbook of Jesus’s Church. Of the two dozen episodes in Matthew’s Gospel in which Jesus gives specific leadership instruction, a third are found in this segment alone. Here Jesus teaches explicit lessons, gives several short answers, offers memorable examples and prophecies, and shares notable experiences regarding priesthood authority, including the Transfiguration. This is priesthood leadership training for all time. Here, Jesus directly addresses His disciples, preparing them to be able to answer important questions as they serve as Apostles after His death and Resurrection. Being one of the Twelve and organizationally knowledgeable as a Levite, Matthew took particular note of these operational guidelines and priesthood responsibilities as Jesus taught them.

Matthew 16:1–4. Sign 2: Jesus Reiterated the Sign of Jonah in Response to a Wicked Demand

The Pharisees and Sadducees again approached Jesus with a test and asked yet again for Him to give them a sign (see also Matthew 12:38–42). The Greek term often refers to a temptation that results from testing someone through questioning (see also 4:1–11, in which Satan tested Jesus by tempting Him). He responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees by pointing out their own wickedness for seeking a sign and declared, yet again, that the sign of Jonah was the only sign they would receive. True leaders do not keep asking for further revelation when what they have been given is sufficient (see, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 10).

Jesus used a metaphor from the weather. These men who considered themselves wise were accustomed to forecast the weather by interpreting the peculiarities of the appearance of the sky, but they did not give similar attention to “the signs of the times.” They should just as much have already known the times in which they lived. As a local Galilean fisherman and scholar has noted, “a red sunset indicates a stable atmosphere; because there are no upward air currents, dust in the atmosphere remains close to the earth and these particles refract rays of light into red. This is also true for the morning forecast: the atmosphere is stable, but the appearance of low clouds signifies a possible change from fair weather to rainy. . . . This weather forecast as it appears in Matthew is accurate, and confirmed by generations of Kinneret residents, including this writer.”¹

16:4. *The sign of Jonah.* Jesus then restated (as in Matthew 12:38–42) that the sign of Jonah was the only sign they would be given. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “The sign of Jonas (or Jonah) was that for three days he had been in the belly of the fish and then had been restored to liberty; so would the Son of Man be immured in the tomb, after which He would rise again. That was the only sign He would give them, and by that would they stand condemned.”² Jesus speaks here of Jonah’s “burial and coming forth” as symbolizing Jesus’s own “death, burial and coming forth.”³

16:4. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.* While commenting on Jesus’s bold statement that sign seekers are “wicked and adulterous,” Joseph Smith taught: “That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives. The principle is as correct as the one that Jesus put forth in saying that he who seeketh a sign is an adulterous person.”⁴ Joseph Smith provided a literal example of the Savior’s teaching: “When I was preaching in Philadelphia, a Quaker called out for a sign. I told him to be still. After the sermon, he again asked for a sign. I told the congregation the man was an adulterer; that a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and that the Lord had said to me in a revelation, that any man who wanted a sign was an adulterous person. ‘It is true,’ cried one, ‘for I caught him in the very act,’ which the man afterwards confessed, when he was baptized.”⁵

Matthew 16:5–12. Instruction 17: Leaders Should Beware the “Leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Shortly after Jesus had been asked to show signs of His divinity, He told His Twelve that they should “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” Since the disciples had forgotten to bring some bread, they assumed that Jesus was referring literally to leavened bread. As illustrated in the parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:33), a little yeast will change the whole volume and nature of the dough by puffing it up. Likewise, leaders within the Church should gently mentor humble followers one step at a time and not be puffed up or grandiose. Elder Bruce R. McConkie further explained that “to beware of the leaven

of the Pharisees and Sadducees is to shun their false doctrines, their concept that the Messiah must prove his claim to divinity by signs, for instance. Similarly, today, the warning is to beware of the leaven of any group whose false doctrines and antichrist philosophies work to keep men from accepting the truths of the restored gospel.”⁶

Matthew 16:13–20. Event 10: The Testimony of Christ Is Built upon the Rock of Revelation

Next Jesus took the Twelve up to the headwaters of the Jordan River at Caesarea Philippi, where a stream gushes out of the base of a large rock cliff on the base of Mount Hermon. There He asked His Twelve what people thought of Him. Peter’s answer lets us know that people were all over the map on this question. Some said He was John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet brought back to life. But Jesus wanted to know what Peter thought. Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Peter’s answer was similar to what he stated after he and Jesus had miraculously walked on the water, when he said, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (14:33). But now, Peter can additionally answer by way of spiritual testimony and revelation, “You are the Christ, the Son of the *living* God.” How did Peter now know that Jesus was the Christ? “He knew it by revelation; he had the Gospel, and the Gospel brings life and immortality to light, and reveals unto the human family the existence of a God and their relationship to him. We are indebted to God for light, for the intelligence we enjoy, for the knowledge of the Gospel that is placed within our reach.”⁷

16:18–19. “Upon this rock I will build my church.” In the scriptures, the word *rock* (*petra* in Greek) can refer to several solid foundational things. The rock can refer to Peter (*Petros* in Greek), meaning the prophet or leader of the Church. The rock can refer to the foundational rock of revelation, for flesh and blood had not given Peter his testimony of Jesus as the Christ. The rock can refer to the sealing power to bind covenants and blessings in heaven and on earth for time and for all eternity. And the rock refers to the Lord Himself, for scriptures often acknowledge that “the Lord is my rock.”⁸ All of these are valid parts of Jesus’s affirmation and instruction to Peter here.

Jesus explained to Peter the essential importance of this rock and of all that it will make possible. He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Peter will soon be given all “the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” and whatever is thereby “bound on earth shall be bound in heaven” and likewise whatever is unbound or canceled on earth shall be “loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). These keys entrusted to Peter include the sealing powers of the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. In a letter regarding the eternal sealing power in Doctrine and Covenants 128:10, Joseph Smith quotes as “the precedent, Matthew 16:18–19: ‘And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock . . . whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’” Doctrine and Covenants 127:7 adds that these

ordinances must be recorded on earth in order that they “may be recorded in heaven.” Several times in the modern dispensation, the Lord has reminded His Church of the blessings and promises that come to the righteous by building upon all of these necessary holy powers and principles: “If you shall build up my church upon *the foundation of my gospel and my rock*, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:5; emphasis added).

Matthew 16:21–23. Sign 3: Jesus Foretells His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection to His Disciples, and Peter Protests

In this personal setting with the Twelve, Jesus next explained in more detail the central part of the plan of salvation—namely, that He would suffer, be executed by “the elders . . . [and] chief priests and the teachers of the law,” and then would rise on the third day, alluding here again to the sign of Jonah. At the time of Jesus, elders served on the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem, and they, along with the Sadducees and Pharisees, would be complicit in the condemnation of Jesus (Matthew 27:1). Even so, even the whole world could not prevail against Him. Teaching this central doctrine of Christ’s Resurrection will become a major responsibility of leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ, but for the time being Jesus commanded His disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.

Peter, taking Jesus aside, expressed great concern. The Greek word *hileōs* means something like “Mercy no!” or “Never, Lord!” Hearing that, Jesus referred to Peter as a stumbling block. A *skandalon* is literally a snare or a small trap. In this verse, Peter is not so much offending the Savior as he is testing Jesus’s resolve to perform the Atonement. Jesus’s response commanding Peter to “depart” or to “get behind me” shows that the follower of Jesus should follow, not counsel. Jesus thus warned Peter that he was not understanding God’s eternal plan, “for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” All who hold priesthood power should focus on the things of God and not on the ways of the world. David Whitmer was warned in this dispensation with a correction similar to that given here to Peter: “Your mind has been on the things of the earth more than on the things of me, your Maker, and the ministry whereunto you have been called” (Doctrine and Covenants 30:2).

Matthew 16:24–28. Instruction 18: Forsake Your Life for Christ’s Sake to Find Your Life

Next, Jesus defined the level of devotion that would be required for leaders in the ministry: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” This instruction echoes back to the calls of the fishermen and of Matthew himself, who immediately left their nets and tax collection table to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:18–22; 9:9). In restoring the gospel in this dispensation, the Lord similarly said, “I say unto all the Twelve: Arise and gird up your loins, take up your cross, follow me, and

feed my sheep” (Doctrine and Covenants 112:14). The phrase “take up your cross” admonishes leaders to face difficult, even personal, challenges. Taking up one’s cross is analogous to placing oneself in the firing line or putting one’s head on the chopping block, as Jesus would do. These Apostles were to follow Jesus even at the cost of their own lives, and for many of the early Christian disciples, their calling would later entail just that.

In the Joseph Smith Translation, the Prophet Joseph Smith expanded this verse (additions in italics): “*And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself from all ungodliness, and from every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments, for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come; and whosoever will lose his life in this world for my sake shall find it in the world to come.*”

16:27. In the Glory of His Father. Whereas Matthew 16:27 quotes the mortal Jesus as saying that He would come “in the *glory of his Father* with his angels,” Doctrine and Covenants 65:5 prophesies that the Son of Man would come “clothed in the brightness of *his glory*,” and in Doctrine and Covenants 45:56 the Lord said, “I shall come in *my glory*,” rather than calling Himself the Son of Man. By the time of the modern revelations, Jesus had received a glorified, resurrected body.

Matthew 17:1–13. Event 11: Peter, James, and John Witness the Transfiguration of Jesus

As Matthew tells of this event, “Six days later, Jesus took aside Peter and James and John his brother and led them up into a high mountain by themselves, and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with him” (Matthew 17:1–3).

Significantly, about thirty years later, Peter himself bore personal testimony about what the three chief Apostles experienced on that mountain:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (2 Peter 1:16)

The Greek term translated as “eyewitnesses” can also mean “endowed” in ancient temple-centered religions. In such holy context, seeing is becoming and beholding is receiving. Jeffrey R. Holland has testified, “Then prophets from earlier dispensations, including at least Moses and Elijah, appeared in glory also and conferred the various keys and powers that each held.”⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith once added, “It appears that Peter, James, and John received their own endowments while on the mountain.”¹⁰ Earlier, Joseph Smith taught, “We are of the opinion that Peter [was] taught by the Lord, and commissioned by

the Lord, and endowed by the Lord.”¹¹ This apparently happened when, upon hearing the voice of God the Father, the three Apostles “fell face down” in complete reverence. Jesus then approached them, touched them with His hands, and then said, “Arise, and fear not.”

Matthew 17:14–21. Miracle 18: The Healing of a Boy Possessed by a Demon

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus came down where there was a crowd, including a man with a son that had some affliction that may have been epilepsy. He was referred to as “lunatic,” meaning someone that had been influenced by the moon—a common ancient explanation for epilepsy. Though we do not know exactly the cause, the poor boy suffered great distress at times as he fell into fire, water, or whatever was closest to him. The man explained that he had previously brought the boy to the disciples, but they had been unable to cure him.

After Jesus healed him, the disciples asked privately why they were unable to do so. Jesus said to them, “Because of your lack of understanding; for truly I say to you, if you had understanding the size of a mustard seed, you might say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move; and nothing would be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

According to Mark 9:29 and later manuscripts containing Matthew 17:21, Jesus then taught that this kind of ailment could not be removed without prayer and fasting. This is an important item of leadership instruction. To accomplish some difficult tasks in the work of the Lord, one should fast and pray in order to tap into the powers of the Lord (see also Matthew 6:16).

Gifts of the spirit, even the gift of faith, can be sought with fasting and prayer. Doctrine and Covenants 46 elucidates that any particular gift may be sought and asked for explicitly with fasting and prayer (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:76; 95:7). Latter-day Saint leaders and members are encouraged to fast for many reasons, including to worship God and express gratitude to Him (Alma 45:1), to receive answers to prayer (Alma 5:46), to gain strength to resist temptation (Isaiah 58:6), to receive guidance in Church callings (Acts 13:2–3; Alma 17:3), and for comfort during times of difficulty, sorrow, or mourning (Alma 28:4–6; 30:1–2).

Matthew 17:22–27. Sign 4: Jesus Again Foretells His Betrayal, Death, and Resurrection

To the dismay of His Apostles, Jesus reiterated that He would be betrayed into the hands of men, that they would kill Him, and that then He would be resurrected on the third day. The Greek verb *egerthēsetai* refers, in this case, to exalted resurrection, not to just being “raised up” as was Lazarus. In addition, the King James Version says that the disciples became “exceeding sorry” at Jesus’s statement, but the Greek verb *elypēthēsan* often means “to be troubled or distressed.” Jesus’s suffering and death enabled Him

to atone for all so that He could lift up everyone in their sorrows and pains. His Resurrection makes it possible for Him to lift up all humankind in eternal glory.

Jesus spoke here of being betrayed “into the hands of men,” and in Matthew 26:45 He will say that He was “betrayed into the hands of sinners.” In words of revelation to Joseph Smith while he was incarcerated in Liberty Jail, the Lord provided an alarming list of potential bad results—many of which came to pass in Jesus’s and Joseph’s cases—including being “cast into the hands of murderers, . . . the sentence of death passed upon thee, . . . the billowing surge conspire against thee, the very jaws of hell gape open the mouth wide after thee” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:7). Some leaders, Jesus clearly recognized, will suffer and die as a part of leadership for the benefit of His gospel.

Matthew 18:1–5. Instruction 19: Be Humble like a Child

Jesus next taught the Apostles several things about children that are just as relevant for Church leaders to know now as then. The disciples asked Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Instead of answering directly, Jesus called a little child, set him in the middle of them, and said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3–4). That was not the answer the Apostles expected. But being humble is essential for spiritual leaders. Jesus then added, “And whoso accepts one such little child in my name accepts me” (18:5).

This doctrine puts children in a higher status than most people recognize. At most times and places, children in the ancient world were sadly ignored. Jesus tells His leaders that receiving, blessing, and caring for little children is fundamentally the same as receiving and caring for Jesus Christ Himself. He also added that Church members should never despise one of these children: “For I say unto you that in heaven their [guardian] angels always have access to the presence of my Father which is in heaven” (18:10).

The Church nursery and Primary is a blessed place in which to be called to serve. Those little children are precious and pure, and there is so much to learn from them. They are fragile; they learn and remember a lot more than we realize, and offences have durable effects. This was one of the most important responsibilities that Jesus wanted His priesthood leaders to understand.

Matthew 18:6–9. Instruction 20: Offend Not and Remove Things That Cause Offense

Jesus added that there are consequences for offending little children: “If anyone causes one of these little ones who trusts in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Some millstones are large, heavy stones used to grind wheat. In Palestine, millstones are usually about two or three feet high; some in other places

in the Roman Empire are even larger. Jesus speaks here of a *mylos onikos*, literally “a mill turned by donkeys,” or in other words, a large millstone. All such millstones have a hole in the middle of them so that the ground grain can drop down and out of the bottom. Through that hole a rope could hypothetically be passed, and such a thing would then make extremely heavy jewelry. Someone wearing it around their neck would never come back up after being thrown down into the sea. This would have been a very graphic image to ordinary people in Galilee in Jesus’s day.

Jesus then added a set of woes, drawing heavily upon similar statements found in the Sermon on the Mount. He begins here: “Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come” (18:7). Jesus recognizes that problems such as child abuse will occur. But the verse goes on to read, “But woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!” Referring to Matthew 5:29–30 (about an offending eye or an offending hand), Jesus now emphatically and deliberately says (in chiastic order): “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell” (18:8–9). Because Jesus had already taught the Apostles the covenant provisions of the Sermon on the Mount, He could hold them particularly accountable should they commit such atrocities.

The term “offend” here is a translation of the Greek word *scandalizō*, “to trap, trip, or cause to stumble.” Leaders must be extremely careful not to offend, to put off, or to cause people to stumble. There are many ways to cause offense. Of course, leaders hope to never be the ones through whom offenses happen. They also have an obligation to remove whatever is offensive—a hand, an eye, or more commonly, an attitude. Being alert and careful is part of good leadership.

The obligations we have to little children and the love Jesus has for them also apply to those who are new in the gospel, who are having difficulties, and who are financially or spiritually poor, or indeed, our neighbor. This bears thinking about in places such as Sunday School classes when people make comments. Looking around and thinking ahead is important. Freedom of speech means that people can say all kinds of things without concern for the listener. People have to think who might be affected by what they are saying. Yes, they are free to say it, but there are consequences. If it might offend even the least of the children of God, the millstone is best to be avoided.

Matthew 18:10–14. Parable 10: The Lost Sheep and the Rescuing Grace of the Lord

In the next set of three parables Jesus taught His disciples a series of profound leadership principles, focusing on God’s desire for His leaders to seek after followers who have gone astray and are lost, and admonishing the apostles to be generously forgiving.

The parable of the good shepherd leaving the ninety and nine to rescue the one lost sheep is well known. Jesus here was teaching His Apostles, but these leadership principles are applicable anyone who is doing the Lord's work, from a bishop to a class president. Such work requires "receiving the one in the name of Jesus Christ; not offending or damaging the faith of anyone; not thinking poorly of anyone." Beyond that, "one must be prepared to leave home, to go out into the wilds, to search high and low, to find, and to rescue."¹²

Jesus often portrayed Himself as a shepherd, as one entrusted with the safeguarding sheep, a most vulnerable animal. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:10). Here, Jesus assured His listeners that He loves every single person and is willing to go to lengths to save each one of us. Leaving His other ninety-nine sheep to search for the one is risky but necessary. In John 10:1–16, Jesus tells a related parable of a good shepherd who has a sheep fold or fenced corral. One leadership lesson could be that in preparation for such an event of their sheep wandering off and getting lost, leaders may want to build some protection to take care of the ninety and nine while they are gone.

In this parable, the shepherd made a great effort searching for the lost sheep. When he went looking for it, he had no idea where it could have gone. It was out there, wandering around, and he himself may have been exposed to snakes, bears, and even lions in Judea in those days. Nevertheless, "If so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray" (Matthew 18:13). Luke recounted that when the shepherd had found the sheep, "he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing"—a heavy and stinky undertaking—and then he called his neighbors to come and rejoice with him (Luke 15:5–6).

On an instructional level, this parable encourages Jesus's disciples, His kingdom workers, to care about every individual as He ministers one by one; to be loving and compassionate in moving the Lord's work forward; and to be diligent. Allegorically, it portrays that the Savior, too, has a mission to teach and save each one of us. On an even higher level of meaning, this parable points to Jesus's Atonement, available and ready to rescue each one of us and return us to the eternal fold. "His willingness, from the foundation of the world, to save every soul is the eternal anchor that holds the plan of salvation in place in the midst of the change that pervades our mortal, temporal existence."¹³

Matthew 18:15–20. Instruction 21: Dealing with Those Who Transgress and Offend

After speaking of "these little ones" and telling the parable of the one lost sheep, the Savior continued training the Apostles how to deal with conflicts and transgressions, or as Elder James E. Talmage put it, how should we adjust "the differences between brethren" and what are the "fundamental principles of Church discipline."¹⁴

In His teachings, Jesus often began with a principle that He had taught earlier and then developed it for a particular purpose or new situation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught that if a person

brought their offering to the altar and realized that there was some offense, they should leave and first make amends (Matthew 5:23–25). There Jesus was talking about how an individual should respond to situations requiring forgiveness. Here, He developed that same idea further, putting it into the context of leadership and discipline within the Church.

If an actual offense has occurred to an individual, the offended person is encouraged to go to the offender and talk “between thee and him alone” (18:15). Quoting Matthew 18:15, the Latter-day Saint scholars Ogden and Skinner apply the Savior’s advice thus: “Talk things over, work them out, resolve differences, forgive, and forget. . . . Then we can approach the Lord and his sacred things with full purpose of heart, and, as he says, ‘I will receive you’ (3 Ne. 12:24).”¹⁵ Strained relations or friction should be worked out before going to sacrament meeting and renewing covenants or before going to the temple.

Though the King James Version says, “Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass *against thee*” (18:15; emphasis added), the words “against thee” are not in about half of the Greek manuscripts of Matthew. Some people have thought that this just meant, “If your brother sins.” President Spencer W. Kimball defined a twofold function of Church leaders in helping a person to repent and resolve matters of transgression: (1) to exact proper penalty—for example, to initiate official action in cases that warrant either disfellowshipment or excommunication—and (2) to waive penalties and extend the hand of fellowship to the one in transgression. “Whichever of the two steps is taken, either forgiveness or Church disciplinary action, it must be done in the light of all the facts and the inspiration which can come to those making the decision. Hence the importance of the repentant transgressor making full confession to the appropriate authority.”¹⁶

If a priesthood leader becomes aware of a transgression, following what Jesus said in the Book of Mormon about not allowing people to partake of the sacrament unworthily (3 Nephi 18:29), he has an obligation to find a tactful way to talk to that person as a Church leader, not as a volunteer or critic. Of course, it is best for transgressors to come in and confess, but a righteous leader cannot know and simply sit idly by.

Jesus set forth instructions on how such disciplinary procedures were to be handled: “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over, but if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17). Jesus saw this procedure as falling under the binding and sealing powers given to the Apostles: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything for which they ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three gather together in my name, I am among them” (18:18–20).

Matthew 18:21–35. Parable 11: The Forgiven but Unforgiving Servant

In response to these instructions by Jesus about Church disciplinary procedures, Peter asked: “Lord, how many times may I forgive a brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus answered him, “Not seven times, but seventy times seven.” Seventy multiplied by seven is four hundred and ninety, or in other words ten times forty-nine, which would be ten Jubilees of forty-nine years each. The Jubilee was the time on the ancient Israelite calendar when debts were forgiven and slaves were released, no matter the size of their debt. Ten Jubilees is a long time.

That led Jesus to give the Apostles the parable of the forgiven but unforgiving servant. A king wanted to settle accounts with his servants who managed his assets. One of them had been entrusted with ten thousand talents. When the king called for those assets to be brought to him and the servant was not able to deliver what he owed, the master ordered that he and his family and all he had be sold into slavery or liquidated to cover the obligation. The servant begged for mercy, and the king not only let him go but also canceled the entire obligation.

The worth of ten thousand talents of valuable metal would be in the billions of dollars today. A talent was not minted money; it was a large ingot of ore. There were talents of copper, gold, silver, or iron. At the mine, workers smelted the ore to purify it, and then they poured it into a mold. Such talents weighed anywhere from sixty to ninety pounds. In Roman times, talents were round so they could be rolled, for example, down to the dock, where they were loaded onto ships. Sometimes one of these large rounds would fall off the plank and land in the harbor. Underwater archeologists have found some of these, and in Marseilles, France, you can see such talents in the harbor museum.

In the parable, the servant who had been forgiven that huge debt by the king then found a fellow servant who owed him a debt of a hundred denarii. A single talent was the metallic equivalent of six thousand denarii in Roman times. A denarius was a day’s wage, so, the second debtor owed the first the value of one hundred days of work. That is not an insignificant amount, but compared with ten thousand talents, it is nothing. Yet the forgiven but unforgiving servant did not forgive his fellow servant.

He grabbed him, choked him, and demanded that he pay back what he owed! “His fellow servant fell to his knees and appealed to him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back,’ but he refused the plea. Instead, he threw his fellow servant into prison until he paid back the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and declared to their master everything that had happened” (18:29–31).

The lord then called the first servant back in and said to him, “You wicked servant! I canceled all that debt of yours because you desired and asked me to do that. Should you then not have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?” In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to torture him until he should pay back all he had owed (18:32–34). Jesus then applied this principle of reciprocal justice to His leaders, in whom He had entrusted the duty to care for His most valuable assets: “This is how my Heavenly Father will treat you unless each of you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (18:35).

The Savior had already mentioned this concept of reciprocal justice in the Lord's Prayer during the Sermon on the Mount. He prayed, "And forgive us our debts *as* we forgive our debtors." The word "as" in this verse can be translated into English not so much with the temporal word "when" but with comparative words such as "to the extent that" or "to the same degree as." This principle is also found in Jesus's similar warning that "by whatsoever measure you measure, it will be measured unto you" (Matthew 7:1; Mark 4:24). After the Lord's Prayer, Jesus added plainly, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if not, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15). In all these senses, we are going to be forgiven as we forgive.

This parable of the unforgiving manager teaches this same crucial principle. It tells Church leaders and all the members of His kingdom how the Savior wants them to behave so that all may receive the benefits of His Atonement and enjoy the abundance of celestial glory.

Matthew 19:1–12. Challenge 8: Why Do You Disallow Divorce as Permitted under Deuteronomy?

In the presence of His Apostles, Jesus next answered a question raised by some Pharisees who came testing Jesus about whether or not it was legal for a man to divorce a wife for just about any reason. In answering them, Jesus taught a higher law of marriage than was given under the law of Moses. Because Jesus had spoken previously about not sanctioning divorce among His covenant disciples except on grounds of adultery (see Matthew 5:32), Jesus may have been asked more than once about this subject. Clearly, marriage was very important to Jesus.

On this occasion, Jesus answered by first quoting Genesis 2:25, reminding the Pharisees that in the beginning the God-given divine rule of marriage was that a man should leave his parents and "cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh." Jesus then said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

The text continues as they then asked him: "Why, then, did Moses command *that a man should provide a written separation agreement in order to divorce a wife?*" (see Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus replied, "Moses commanded you *under that law to use that procedure* to divorce your wives *only* because your hearts were hard. But it was not *intended to be that way* in the beginning. So, I tell you that, *in the new covenant*, whoever divorces *his or her spouse*, except for sexual immorality and in order to marry another, commits adultery, *being still covenantally bound*" (19:7–9; implicit interpretive elements in italics).

As the italicized words in this exchange clarify, the logic of this text is understandable only if two different levels or types of marriage were being addressed. One type, under the law of Moses, was allowable, in which a divorce could be initiated solely by the husband so long as he simply gave the wife a written bill of divorcement, having found some flaw in her. Another type of marriage was a covenantal marriage, which *bound* together a couple by the power of God and therefore was able to be dissolved only by the *loosen-*

ing power authorized by God. The prophet Malachi—the same who spoke about the sealing of parents and children in Malachi 4—spoke of this higher holy order of matrimony as he delivered the word of the Lord, saying, “She is thy companion, and the wife of thy *covenant*” (Malachi 2:14; emphasis added). To Latter-day Saints, Malachi’s two types of marriage can be seen in the difference between a marriage for time performed by a bishop, who is the president of the Aaronic Priesthood in his ward, and an eternal temple marriage performed by a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood authorized to act under sealing authority.

The law that Jesus taught here in Matthew 19 conforms to the laws of eternal marriage. Many general authorities, including Elder Bruce R. McConkie, support this view: “The [New Testament] record is somewhat fragmentary and incomplete, and can be fully understood only in the context of celestial marriage.”¹⁷

When the Pharisees persisted, asking, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away,” Jesus turned the question back on them, explaining that Moses had allowed that law of divorcement only because of hard hearts, “but from the beginning it was not so” (19:8). Because of that hardheartedness, the people were unable to live the original plan intended by God and introduced in the Garden of Eden.

The underlying correctness of Jesus’s logic is clear: Because a couple and a judge in a civil union or marriage contract have the power as human beings to make that arrangement, they also have the power to disconnect that union. However, where God is a necessary party and an enabling power in creating a covenant marriage, it is a three-party and not just a two-party arrangement, and in those cases the couple cannot simply decide to separate without God also approving the loosening of that eternal bond.

This explains why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “I say unto you, that whosoever of you [who are covenant-makers] shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication [which would be a valid reason for cancelation], causeth her to commit adultery [for in that case they are still, in that sense, married]” (5:28). However, it was not clear where that statement in Matthew 5 was leading until here, in Matthew 19:9, when Jesus explained His deeper eternal teaching on certain marriages being sealed under authority by God. Here we see that in an eternal marriage, if someone sets aside the spouse and then marries another, they can consider themselves civilly divorced but could not remarry covenantally until the release of first covenant marriage has gone through proper priesthood channels.

Matthew 19:10–12. Instruction 22: Receive Covenant Marriage If at All Possible

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus had given the Twelve the keys of the sealing power: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” It is little wonder, then, that after He had stated these things about marriage in Matthew 19 as far as He could go with the Pharisees, His Apostles had some questions.

Jesus clearly wanted His leaders to be married and sealed, as God intended in the beginning. After realizing that Jesus was referring to an eternal form of marriage, the Apostles—most of whom were still below

the customary Jewish marrying age of thirty years for men—recognized that Jesus’s order of marriage was a serious matter, especially if it made the easy divorce option no longer available. No wonder they questioned whether it was wise to marry in this higher manner. They stated, “If such is the situation between the husband and the wife, it is not advantageous to marry” (Matthew 19:10). They were not saying that it was not good for all men to marry. They were not thinking they should advocate celibacy. They were evaluating under what conditions it would be wise for them or others to marry according to this higher order.

Jesus’s answer can be rendered as follows: “Not everyone will live in harmony under this covenantal teaching, but those will to whom it is given” (19:11). Only they to whom that doctrine of covenantal marriage is given and properly received will be able to live that law. Marriage is part of the purpose of life, as it was from the beginning. It is not good for human beings to be alone since God’s children are, by eternal nature, social beings. If marriage and family are fundamental for sons and daughters of God to fill the purpose and measure of their creation, leaders must be able to model that example (see 1 Timothy 3:2).

Nevertheless, Jesus also recognized that there would be some circumstances under which such marriage could not work in this mortal life. Jesus acknowledged that “there are eunuchs who were born that way out of their mother’s womb; there are eunuchs who have been made that way by men; and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs because they think doing that is for the benefit of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:11). But the existence of those exceptions does not mean that the ideal of eternal marriage should not be aimed for as the goal whenever possible (see also Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–2). As the King James Version reads, Jesus concluded, “He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*” (emphasis added). The sense of the Greek is: “He who ‘has the power’ [*dynamenos*] to live ‘in harmony with’ [*chorein*] this covenantal teaching ‘should live in harmony with’ it [*choreito*]” (19:12). For those who do not have that capability or opportunity, Jesus did not broach the subject of how those situations might be handled in the life to come or what else might then be possible.

19:12. Eunuchs. Matthew provides no transition between Jesus’s conversation with the Pharisees and His words to the Apostles, so it is not known whether the Apostles raised the three examples of eunuchs as situations in which it would not be advantageous or possible for people to marry or whether Jesus volunteered those cases as exceptions to the general rule of marriage. But in recognizing that eternal marriage may not always be easy, Jesus did not invalidate that rule; He referred to eunuchs simply to acknowledge that not all people, at least in this stage of mortal life, would have the ability or take the opportunity to enter the covenant of eternal marriage (Matthew 19:12).

Why might Jesus or the Apostles have brought up the subject of eunuchs? For one thing, eunuchs were not uncommon in the ancient world: some men were born sexually dysfunctional; some were made to be sexually dysfunctional (for example, as part of the slave culture); and others might themselves have chosen to live as singles for many possible reasons. Jewish and Christian monks started voluntarily living that way as early as the first century, but the Apostles of Jesus would in time speak out against that practice, at least for Church leaders, who were to be married (see 1 Timothy 3:2).

Nevertheless, in the early Christian world, eunuchs were welcomed as followers of Jesus. In Gaza, Philip was led to, encountered, taught, and baptized a eunuch, who was a minister of the Queen of Ethiopia. The man was baptized upon his profession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 8:25–40).

Jesus was not using the word *eunuch* as a desirable human status but simply in recognizing that there would be cases in this world in which marriage would not be possible. In God’s merciful plan and temple ordinances, options will eventually make more things possible than we can imagine here and now. Speaking of eunuchs and the heavenly worlds to come, Isaiah stated: “Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant, even unto them will I give in mine house and within my holy walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall never be cut off” (Isaiah 56:3–5).

Jesus said, “He that is able to receive my sayings, let him receive my sayings” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 19:12). The sayings in this context include teachings about sealing ordinances and eternal covenant marriage, offered to all of God’s children, living and dead.

Matthew 19:13–15. Instruction 23: Allow the Little Children to Come and Be Blessed

Next Jesus demonstrated and reinforced what He had taught in Matthew 18:1–6 about little children. Matthew’s record states, briefly, that some parents were bringing little children to Jesus so “that he should put his hands on them, and pray.” The disciples, however, rebuked these parents and were about to send them all away. To the King James Version text (which reads, “And the disciples rebuked them”), the Joseph Smith Translation added that the disciples were saying to the parents, “There is no need [for them to take the children to Jesus], for Jesus hath said, such shall be saved.” This is a much stronger reason for not bringing the children forward than the common explanation that Jesus was tired, which may, nonetheless, have been the case. In any event, Jesus saw what was happening and invited the children, saying to His disciples, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” He laid His hands on them, likely one by one, blessed them, and then moved on.

19:14. Infant baptism. Historically this passage has been used in support of the idea of infant baptism. However, “infant baptism is not clearly mentioned in patristic literature until Tertullian (*On Baptism* 18), who opposed it in the late second century CE.”¹⁸

In the latter days, the Lord taught that in the next life all children come directly to Him because they have not yet reached the age of accountability: “And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:10). Baptism before that time is disallowed (see Moroni 8:12–14). The years of accountability in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints begins at the age of eight. Parents are accountable for teaching their children by

that age to understand the first principles of the gospel or the children's sins will fall upon the parents' heads (Doctrine and Covenants 68:25). Before that time, children should be brought to the Church to receive a blessing (Doctrine and Covenants 20:70–71), following Jesus's example here in Matthew.

Matthew 19:16–30. Instruction 24: Go, Sell, Give to the Poor, and Have Treasure in Heaven

The Savior next used the opportunity, to teach about the law of consecration. The Apostles learned that they were to consecrate their property and devote it to the Lord and to give to the poor. This record illustrates how leaders, even today, should be prepared to dedicate all the resources at their disposal in doing the work of the Lord.

In this case, a young man who was trying to keep all the commandments sought further guidance on how to gain eternal life (Matthew 19:20). To his initial question, Jesus responded, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The young man answered that he was doing that, but added, "What lack I yet?" His question now moved from "How do I gain eternal life?" to "What more can I do?"

Jesus responded that he could liquidate his assets, donate to the poor, and follow Jesus. If he were to do this, working as a full-time disciple with the Twelve, Jesus promised that he would have "treasure in heaven." However, the young man had many possessions, which were apparently more important to him than heavenly treasure, and so unlike Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew, "he went away sorrowful" (19:21–22). But as Jesus reassured His Apostles, "with God all things are possible" (19:26).

19:29. Forsaking, or consecrating, one's family. Jesus gave a list of what one may be asked to sacrifice, and it raised some questions. The blessings are promised to "everyone that forsaketh houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake." Jesus was not saying here that in order to enter the celestial kingdom, individuals must *leave* or *abandon* their spouse and family and disconnect from relatives, but exactly what did He mean?

In Matthew 19:27, Peter had said that he and the disciples had forsaken all, but everyone knew that Peter had not *abandoned* his wife or his mother-in-law. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in Peter's own home (8:14–15), so "forsake" here cannot mean "to abandon" or "to renounce." Jesus said that the disciples had met the required level of consecration by giving what was asked and by being willing to give all that might be required, and Jesus indicated that their sacrifices were complete and accepted.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, "When you come to the altar and you remember that your brother has aught against you," then you should "*leave* your gift there and go and reconcile" (5:24). The word "leave" here is the same Greek word (*aphēkame*) used in 19:29. This word does not mean "to abandon"; it means "to leave on the altar or to consecrate." Thus, the word "forsake" here means "consecrate" rather than "walk away from."

The Joseph Smith Translation says all things are possible “*if* they will forsake all things for my sake. With God, whatsoever things I speak are possible.” That is a helpful elaboration tying all these principles into what Jesus meant. These are eternal principles, and Jesus equipped His Apostles with these teachings so that they could keep their covenantal commitments and fulfill their leadership roles.

19:29–30. Rewards promised for following Jesus. Peter asked Jesus, “Behold, we have left everything and we followed you! What will there be for us?” So Jesus swore an oath to them that “in the resurrection of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, or wife or children, or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as many and will inherit eternal life.” But remember, He said, “many first will be last, and last will be first.” That final statement sets the stage for the parable of the eleventh-hour workers, which follows immediately.

Matthew 20:1–16. Parable 12: The Covenant-Keeping Lord and His Eleventh-Hour Workers

This parable portrayed a man with a vineyard that needed harvesting. Early in the morning at sunrise, the first hour of the Roman day, the man hired a crew for “a penny [one denarius or silver coin] a day,” the going rate. He went back to the marketplace at the third hour (or nine o’clock in the morning), where there were still people hoping to be hired. He returned and hired more workers in in the sixth hour (or at noon). Then he hired more still at the ninth hour (at three in the afternoon) and, and finally others even in the eleventh hour (or five o’clock p.m.), only one hour before sundown.

As he hired the eleventh-hour workers, he did not say exactly what he would pay them; he simply said, “Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.” They did not know how much they were going to earn, but they all worked hard and together they got the job done. As his steward paid all the workers, he began with the eleventh-hour workers, and they received one denarius, the normal pay for a whole day’s work. The earlier workers, then, were offended, thinking they should receive more or that at least the latecomers should have received less. After all, the first workers had worked many more hours, even though they had been hired and agreed to work for the going day’s rate.

This parable shows that God will keep His covenants. What He has agreed to give us, He will give. This parable also teaches that the Lord is merciful. He was pleased to get the needed work done and did not feel bad about being generous to those whom He had hired even late in the day. The reality in that world was that day workers were desperate for work. The workers who waited patiently in the marketplace were still available there at five o’clock in the afternoon hoping that somebody would hire them. In a sense, they had worked for that whole day. But only a very generous lord of the vineyard would have given them that work and that pay.¹⁹

What does this parable symbolize? While some commentators see this as referring allegorically to the Gentiles who convert early and to the Jews who will be slow to recognize Jesus, modern revelation sees the eleventh hour as the last days and the workers as missionaries and ministering brothers and sisters (Doctrine and Covenants 33:3; 88:60). As the end time gets closer and closer, the need is greater because the harvest is still great and time is short.

The Lord's agreement represents the covenants that He makes with those of us who are willing to work in the kingdom. By keeping covenants, we all can receive the same payment of eternal life. It is not for us to judge whether we should receive more or less than others who have worked more or less than we have. We should have faith that the Lord is fair and that "whatsoever is right, that shall we receive" (Matthew 20:7).

Interestingly, the telling of this parable follows on the heels of Peter's asking Jesus, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Jesus assured him that he would inherit everlasting life, but He added a caveat: "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (19:27–30). This parable was taught initially to the Apostles, encouraging them to be generous, for the Lord is generous. Despite the fact that they had been called first and had labored longer than others outside the apostolic group, all who are worthy can inherit the same. This principle applies to all members of the kingdom, new and old.²⁰

Matthew 20:17–19. Sign 5: Jesus Foretells His Crucifixion and Resurrection

Turning then to the Twelve, Jesus told them as they entered Jerusalem that He, the Son of Man, would be delivered to the chief priests and scribes; that they would condemn Him to be put death; that they would hand Him over to the Romans, who would mock, scourge, and crucify Him; and that on the third day He would be resurrected from the dead. The sequence of these political, legal, and miraculous actions was still undetermined, yet this prophecy would soon come to pass precisely.

The King James Version translates the word *paradothēsetai* here as "betray," but this Greek word more often means to "turn over" or "hand over," which in this context seems to fit this situation best, assuming that Jesus had already been found guilty and worthy of death by the Sanhedrin a few weeks earlier after His raising of Lazarus (John 11:47–53; 12:10).

In the Doctrine and Covenants, when the resurrected Jesus spoke of the plan of salvation, He talked of the same events, though some were now in the past tense: "Wherefore, the Almighty God gave His Only Begotten Son, as it is written in those scriptures which have been given of him. He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them. He was crucified, died, and rose again the third day" (Doctrine and Covenants 20:21).

Matthew 20:20–28. Event 12: Christ’s Response to the Request of the Mother of James and John

The woman who was mother to James and John and wife to Zebedee then approached Jesus in hope of securing a particular eternal honor for her two sons. Matthew lists her with the women at the Crucifixion (Matthew 27:56). She is assumed to be the Salome that Mark lists as accompanying Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene to the Crucifixion and the tomb (Mark 15:40; 16:1). Eric Huntsman claims, “Usually identified by the name Salome, the mother of James and John may also have been a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, making them first cousins of Jesus and relatives of John the Baptist.”²¹

James E. Freeman wrote, “It is evidently the intention of this ambitious mother to have positions of the greatest honor for her two sons. The right hand is usually considered the post of the highest honor. See 1 Kings 2:19; Psalms 45:9; 80:17. For this reason Jesus is said to be at the right hand of God. See Psalms 110:1; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42; 22:69; Acts 2:34; 7:55–56. . . . In the East generally although the right hand may be esteemed more honorable than the left, yet a position on either hand near the king is considered a post of great honor.”²²

Jesus responded, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” The cup was a common metaphor for suffering that appears in Psalm 75:8 and Isaiah 51:17. Jesus added that this privilege of sitting on His right- and left-hand sides was not His to give. His Father retained that authority.

Although the phrase “and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with” is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew, Joseph Smith retained it in his inspired version, “And he *said* unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is *for whom it is prepared of my father, but not mine to give.*”

Matthew 20:29–34. Miracle 19: The Opening of the Eyes of Two Blind Men

Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, and a crowd followed him. David L. Turner noted that this must have been a strenuous walk for Jesus and His disciples: “Jericho [was] about ten miles northwest of the Dead Sea. They will walk about fifteen miles southwest to reach Jerusalem (Wilkinson 1975). This entails an uphill climb of almost thirty-five hundred feet, since Jericho (846 feet below sea level) is in the Jordan rift valley, near the lowest spot on earth, the Dead Sea, and Jerusalem (2,625 feet above sea level) is in the central hills of Judea.”²³

Jesus, however, was always focused on blessing others. According to Matthew, two blind men called out to Jesus for a healing blessing but were being quieted by the people around. This may or may not be the same incident recorded in Luke 18:35–43, in which only one blind man calls out, or the event recorded in Mark 10:46–52, in which the blind man is identified as Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Of the three recorders, Matthew was likely present.

As did several of the people who asked Jesus for help, the blind men addressed Him as “thou Son of David,” recognizing His lineage and messiahship. As the crowd sought to quiet them, they cried out even more fervently, repeating their request: “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.”

As was often the case, Jesus asked them what they wanted, though He already must have known their desires. He wanted them to express their need. He “had compassion on them,” and touching their eyes, He miraculously restored their sight. No matter the size of the crowd or the distractions or pressures of the circumstances, Jesus always exhibited great compassion along with His power, and He still heard and healed one by one. Likewise, Latter-day Saints strive both to call upon the Lord for His miraculous help and then to emulate Jesus through demonstrating compassion and serving others, even the least among us.

Notes

- 1 Mendel Nun, *The Sea of Galilee and its Fishermen in the New Testament* (Ein Gev, Israel: Kinnereth Sailing, 1989), 59.
- 2 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Sale Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 270–271.
- 3 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:278.
- 4 “Discourse, 2 July 1839, as Reported by Willard Richards,” pp. 14–15, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-2-july-1839-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
- 5 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1466, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/109>; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
- 6 McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:379.
- 7 John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1881), 11:162.
- 8 See, for example, 2 Samuel 22:2; Psalms 18:2; 31:3; 62:2; 2 Nephi 4:35.
- 9 Jeffrey R. Holland, “Our Most Distinguishing Feature,” April 2005 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 10 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, vol. 2 of 3 (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1972), 165.
- 11 “Times and Seasons, 1 September 1842,” p. 904, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-september-1842/10>.
- 12 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 97.

- 13 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 96.
- 14 Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 391.
- 15 D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The New Testament*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 1:193.
- 16 Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 325–326.
- 17 McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:546.
- 18 David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 464–465.
- 19 See Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Laborers in the Vineyard,” April 2012 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 20 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 156–163.
- 21 Eric Huntsman, “John, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved,” *Ensign*, January 2019.
- 22 James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 449.
- 23 Turner, *Matthew*, 491.

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