

Press Forward Unto Christ

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Press Forward

I have heard it said by many people that once we have received the ordinances of baptism, confirmation, the endowment, and have been sealed to our spouse in the temple, our responsibility is to simply endure to the end of life, without falling away from the church. While enduring to the end of life is a true requirement of the gospel (Mosiah 4:6), there is a deeper meaning to enduring. Let's read from the instruction manual for coming unto Christ—the Book of Mormon.

2 Nephi 31:19-20

19 And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; ...

20 Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

Enduring to the end also means pressing forward to the end of the path. What path? Let's go back to our instruction manual and read part of Lehi's vision of the tree of life.

1 Nephi 8:30

30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.

This tree is the tree of life and is a representation of Jesus Christ. Coming unto the tree means coming unto Christ.

1 Nephi 11:25

25 And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

Jeremiah 2:13

13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, [and] hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Jacob 1:7

7 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.

The gospel is not simply membership in the church, but a real spiritual path that leads literally to Christ. We must press forward until we come unto him. When people first join the church, they are usually focused on the church; they have a testimony of the church and the prophets, etc. However, *if* they continue in their spiritual progression the focus of their testimony shifts from the church to the Savior. The church cannot save you. Only Christ can save you. You can often discern where people are in their spiritual journey by listening to their testimonies.

So how does one become Christ centered? Let's learn how it's done.

Gospel Brings Change

Before we can return to our Father in heaven, we must go through several important changes:

1. The first change is that we must become innocent, have our sins washed clean by the atoning blood of Christ.
2. Another change is that we must be sanctified. This means we must be made pure and holy. We must be changed from our fallen telestial state to a renewed terrestrial state that can bear the presence of the Father without burning up.

This is taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which each of us is the certain man who fell among thieves, was stripped of his raiment (glory), and left half dead (spiritually dead). The Samaritan is a half breed, and often despised. So is Christ a half breed (half mortal, half god) and despised. But he is the only one who can save us. Our wounds are our sins. He pours in wine to cleanse the wound, then oil to help heal the wound. Those who are acquainted with the sacrament or communion know that wine represents Christ's blood. Through Christ's blood, spilt during the atonement, we can become innocent. However, we are still fallen telestial people, unfit to dwell with God. We must be healed of our sins – taken from the fallen telestial level and renewed to a terrestrial state where we can withstand the presence of God. Oil is a representation of the Spirit, or Holy Ghost. He is the one who heals our wounds, or renews us through the process of sanctification.

D&C 45:56-57

56 And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins.

57 For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived--verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.

1 Samuel 16:13

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Since this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God, we have been given the perfect tools to help us go through these changes:

1. First, the atonement has been provided. Our sins have already been paid for – if we exercise sufficient faith in Christ.
2. Second, we have the Book of Mormon to teach us how to come unto Christ –not just join his church, but to see him face to face.

3. Third, we have the priesthood, which allows us to perform ordinances that teach us how to come to Christ, and also give us the spiritual gifts necessary to make this journey.
4. Fourth, we have been given Holy Ghost to lead us to Christ, and to sanctify us – in other words, to make us pure and holy so we can stand in his presence without having to be transfigured.

We will only cover the major points of this process in this talk.

Remission of Sins - Enos

One enters the path to the Savior through the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins. We're then given a gift of the Holy Ghost, which means he can dwell with us if we are worthy. What does this mean? It means that when you feel the Holy Ghost, your sins are in remission. Unfortunately, it is usually a temporary thing.

Enos teaches us what it's like to receive a complete and lasting remission of our sins. In his story he goes through what is sometimes referred to as the Mighty Change of Heart. This is the process of being converted to Christ – not just converted to the church. (Now there's a thought to consider.) This conversion to Christ is also known as being born of God, born of the Spirit, and several other names. Let's read part of his experience.

Enos 1:2-11

2 And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins.

3 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

5 And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.

6 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

7 And I said: Lord, how is it done?

8 And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.

So how was he forgiven of his sins? Was it repentance? No, it was his faith in Christ. That does not mean that repentance is not necessary. Our faith cannot grow without repentance. The reason I make a point of this is because too many people think they are not good enough, or haven't repented enough, to receive this great gift. They focus on their works, which will always fall short. Remember, remember, when you're asking for forgiveness, do not focus on your weakness. Focus on Christ's strength. He has the power to save even the most wretched of us, if we will come to him in faith.

Now that Enos is forgiven he is innocent, and the Holy Ghost can dwell with him all the time. Look at what happens to him when he receives the Holy Ghost.

9 Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.

Notice that he begins to care about the people around him. The Holy Ghost is giving him the gift of charity, or the pure love of Christ. This is what the mighty change in heart does to you. Bishops and quorum leaders, if you want your priesthood holders to do their home teaching, have them become converted and go through this mighty change of heart. They will then visit those around them, not because it's their duty, but because they have a genuine love and concern for them. Let's read on.

11 And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites.

Enos has progressed to the point where he loves even his enemies and is deeply concerned for them. The change of heart is a process, not an event. It can take place in as little time as a few minutes or as long as several months.

Mighty Change of Heart – King Benjamin's People

So how can we develop the faith to do what Enos did? The answer goes beyond the focus of this talk, but I'll tell you where you can find the answer. In the first four chapters of the book of Mosiah, we read of people who went to the temple and listened to King Benjamin speak. (Benjamin literally means "son of the right hand," another title for Christ.) During his speech, everyone except little children received a remission of their sins and experienced the mighty change of heart. I will leave it to you to look for five things from these four chapters:

1. First, what did the people do to prepare for this event?
2. Second, what did King Benjamin tell them that increased their faith in Christ?
3. Third, how did they ask for forgiveness?
4. Fourth, what were the results of the mighty change?
5. Fifth, what were they told to do to continue their spiritual progress?

Sanctification

Our heart, as important as it is, is only part of us. After our heart has changed, how do we change the rest of our bodies to become pure and holy? The answer is: we don't. That is something that the Holy Ghost does to us. It is called sanctification. And it requires the ordinances of Melchizedek priesthood. So what is the real purpose of the Melchizedek priesthood? It's found in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

D&C 84:19-22

19 And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

20 Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

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21 And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

22 For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

Does this sound like strange doctrine? Moses understood it and taught it to the children of Israel. Let's continue reading in verse 23.

D&C 84:23-26

23 Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

24 But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

Being in the presence of God and seeing his face is also known as entering into his rest.

25 Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;

26 And the lesser priesthood continued,

Because the Israelites rejected the purpose of the Melchizedek priesthood, it was taken from them. "For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?" (D&C 88:33)

The book of Mormon teaches us that there were not just a few who achieved this, but a great many. Let's read in Alma, chapter 13.

Alma 13:10-14

10 Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God;

Understand that when they talk about the high priesthood and they say High Priest here, they are talking about anyone who holds the Melchizedek priesthood, including Elders and Seventy, etc. It is not the church office of HP that we commonly think of. Let's continue

and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

...

12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

13 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

Would you like to know what it's like to come into the presence of the lord? Read the third chapter of the book of Ether. It tells us how the brother of Jared had his calling and election made sure and entered into the presence of the Lord. This is how we become Zion people, people that the Lord can dwell with.

With what we have read concerning the mighty change of heart, and sanctification, and entering into the rest of the Lord, the **oath and covenant of priesthood** should take on new meaning.

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D&C 84:33-39

33 For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

34 They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

35 And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

36 For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;

37 And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;

38 And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

39 And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood.

Conclusion

What if we don't complete our journey during this life? If we are pressing forward along the path to Christ when we leave this world, we will continue and successfully complete our journey in the spirit world. But as long as we are in this world, let us heed Moroni's last words:

Moroni 10:30-33

30 And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.

31 And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

I bear solemn testimony that these things are true. My mother in law used to say that if we're not going upward then we're coasting. And if we're coasting we're going downhill. I invite you to reexamine your life, and if you're not pressing forward toward Christ as you should be, open the manual. Immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon. It is filled with examples of people who have traveled this path. And as you read it the Holy Ghost will descend upon you and open your mind and teach you how to come to Christ. That is why President Hinckley told us to read it.

When Jesus says, "Come unto me", he really means it.