

Christ's visit to the Americas marks the climax of the Book of Mormon when we would expect the greatest of epiphanies, the most illuminating of revelations and the most marvelous of mysteries to be unfolded. Truly, great epiphanies were displayed as Christ descended from heaven or when the angels came down and ministered to the children. Revelation did pour forth and mysteries were indeed expounded. But upon closer examination we recognize that it was the revelation of the simple truths of the gospel accompanied by clear explanation that comprised the mysteries of the kingdom. Our endeavor today as we study these chapters will be to highlight and explore a few simple principles of the gospel that Christ taught during his American ministry, namely prayer and sacrament.

Christ perceived that the multitude felt overwhelmed by the events of his first day among them when he said, "Behold, my time is at hand" (3 Nephi 17:1). Already during that day the people had experienced Christ descending from heaven, the calling of 12 disciples, the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount, an exposition of the scriptures that explained Christ as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, the descendants of Lehi as the "other sheep" and the gathering of the Lord's people that would take place in the Later-days as taught by Isaiah. With this in mind it is easy to understand why Jesus exclaimed, "I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all of my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time" (3 Nephi 17:2). So he commanded the multitude to go to their homes "and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand" (3 Nephi 17:3). Certainly the people needed time to consider all that they had witnessed and all that they had been taught.

But Christ's departure was temporarily delayed because of his compassion towards the people, "Behold, my bowels are fill with compassion towards you" (3 Nephi 17:6). In our terminology we would say "my *heart* is filled with compassion." The ancient world on the other hand believed that the bowels were the seat of emotions. Christ acted on his compassion by healing all of their sick and afflicted because of their great faith. He tarried even longer to have the children brought to him so that he might bless them. This echoes a similar event recorded in Matthew 19:13. Before Christ blessed the children, he set an example for how to pray, "he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father" (3 Nephi 17:15). Kneeling may be the most powerful physical symbol of contrition and humility that we can actively express. In the Hebrew language "to kneel" and "to bless" come from the same word (*barakh*), which suggests a conceptual connection between the two actions.

After instituting the sacrament (which we will discuss momentarily) Christ issued strong counsel about the purpose and power of prayer: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him" (3 Nephi 18:15). Christ held himself up as the example, reminding them of how he had prayed among them. He encouraged the multitude to follow his light (3 Nephi 18:16). But what is probably the most emphatic reason that Christ gave for prayer is that "Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. *Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name*" (3 Nephi 18:18-19, emphasis added).

Christ also counseled the multitude that they should pray in their families, again reminding them that they were to address the Father in the name of the Son (3 Nephi 18:21). We can learn from the Book of Mormon that we are not only to pray to God for the welfare of our families but we are also to pray for the spiritual well-being of those around us (3 Nephi 18:22-23).

After these instructions and others pertaining to the order of sacrament, Christ departed. The people immediately undertook a massive missionary project to proclaim the good news that Christ had appeared and would return the next day. As the messengers sallied forth we perhaps can hear the ringing words of missionary service:

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

As promised Christ returned the next day. The first thing that Christ did was to reinforce the principles that he had taught the day before. He commanded the multitude to kneel and to pray. Then Christ himself knelt and prayed. We have a marvelous record of what he spoke which can serve to inspire us in our own prayers and teach us how we can pray in greater humility and power. Before we further explore Christ's prayer on this day, let us consider the multitude's description the day before of the power of Christ's prayer:

The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father. (3 Nephi 17:16-17)

We truly are blessed to have Christ's prayers from this day recorded for us. Let us survey what we can learn from Christ's manner of prayer. First, he bowed himself to the earth in an act of submission and humility (3 Nephi 19:19). He addressed the Father directly and then specifically thanked Him for blessings already bestowed. Christ then asked the Father for a specific blessing and he followed that with specific reasons why he was seeking particular blessings. Finally, it is clear that Christ had the Father's will in mind. He was seeking to glorify the Father by means of the blessings he was asked for because he prayed "that we may be one" (3 Nephi 19:22). This manifests the majestic concept of the "at-one-ment," the state of being as one.

Christ closed his prayer and went to observe his disciples. We are told that his countenance did shine upon them; the disciples were as white as the countenance and garments of Jesus (3 Nephi 19:25). Christ had prayed that the Father would bestow the Holy Spirit upon those whom he had chosen. The prayer was answered and the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. They were thereby purified by the power of the Spirit even until they were pure like Christ. We will explore this process more thoroughly in connection to the sacrament.

Christ then prayed a second time. We are taught again the pattern we are to follow (3 Nephi 19:27-29). Christ bowed himself to the earth in an act of submission and humility. He thanked the Father for a specific blessing that had been bestowed. Christ then asked for another specific blessing. And he reasoned with the Father about why he was seeking particular blessings. Here are a few principles of prayer that we can draw from Jesus' example:

1. Show humility by kneeling
2. Talk to God as our Father
3. Thank Him for specific blessings
4. Discuss our lives in detail with Him
5. Express and explain our righteous desires
6. Reason with Him

7. Be specific

Now let us turn to the principle of sacrament. Before Christ departed on that glorious first day he instituted the covenant of the sacrament. He also taught the multitude the gospel principles that accompany the covenant of the sacrament. He began by asking the disciples to bring bread and wine. Bread is the staple of life and symbolizes the body. Christ is the "bread of life" and so it is fitting that the "bread of life" was born in the "house of bread" (the Hebrew name *beth-lehem* literally means "house of bread"). He gave his body so that we might live. Just as the Israelites were sustained for 40 years on manna, similarly we are spiritually sustained on the manna of Christ's body. Wine is the symbol of the precious blood of Christ. Since ancient days wine has symbolized the life blood of the body. In the Old Testament this notion is expressed when wine is figuratively described as "the blood of grapes" (see Genesis 49:11 & Deuteronomy 32:14). Wine is produced by stamping grapes under feet with great intensity. Thus we often hear Christ exclaim that he has trodden the wine press alone (D&C 76:107). It was he who poured forth the wine of healing by means of his own work. He was both the agent that created the wine of salvation and the wine itself.

We know that God is a God of order. At the same time when Jesus taught the covenant of sacrament he also established an orderly system for that covenant to be administered with disciples properly ordained to officiate in that capacity (3 Nephi 18:5). Christ then explained the sublime importance and purpose of the sacrament - *to always remember him*. The majesty of this covenant is found in the promise, "And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:7). It was within the context of teaching the sacrament that Jesus exhorted the multitude to always pray for their own welfare and for the welfare of those around them. He taught that those for whom they prayed may perhaps repent, come unto him, and receive the emblems of his body and be saved. In this light we are to invite all to come unto Christ. He has not turned us away. Therefore, we are not to turn others away from feasting at the Lord's supper.

The following is an outline of what Jesus taught about how one can come to the altar-table of the Lord's supper.

1. We are to minister unto those who are not yet worthy.
2. We are to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ for them.
3. Once they have repented and have been baptized they then shall have the flesh and blood of Christ administered unto them.
4. If they do not repent they are not to be numbered among the "sheep".
5. But that does not mean that such a person is to be cast out. Rather we are to continue to minister to them for perhaps they may repent and be healed by the atonement of Jesus Christ.

However, we are to always remember that "ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it" (3 Nephi 18:28). President David O. McKay once stated:

To partake of the sacrament unworthily is to take a step toward spiritual death. No man can be dishonest within himself without deadening the susceptibility of his spirit. Sin can stun the conscience as a blow on the head can stun the physical senses. He who promises one thing and deliberately fails to keep his word, adds sin to sin. On natural principles such a man 'eats and drinks condemnation to his soul.'" (*Conference Report*, October 1929, pp. 14-15.)

What are some of the ways that we can be sure that we are worthy to partake of the sacrament?

1. Have we repented of all of our sins?
2. Before going to Church on the Sabbath consider offering a sincere prayer unto the Lord asking him to have the Spirit confirm to you that you are worthy to partake of the sacrament. By so doing, you will have sure knowledge of where you stand before the Lord and that you are making covenants in righteousness.

Let us end our discussion today by bringing together the power of the principles prayer and sacrament. We will tie these principles together through a brief case study of the spiritual progression of the twelve disciples chosen in the American hemisphere. First, the disciples were chosen out of the world because of their faith. Second, they expressed in prayer their fervent desire that the Holy Ghost be granted unto them. Third, they received the Holy Ghost because they believed in Christ and prayed in faith (3 Nephi 19:22). Fourth, they were then filled with the purifying power of the Holy Ghost and were cleansed.

They became pure as Christ is pure. This purification is attributed to the purifying effects of the atonement made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and mediated unto us through the fiery presence of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot partake of the effects of the atonement. But when the Holy Spirit is with us we are purified by its holy presence. Therefore, the sacrament covenant reminds and teaches us that if we always remember Christ we will *always* have the Spirit to be with us. If we always have the Spirit to be with us we will *always* have a remission of our sins: We will be pure, white and spotless as is Christ.

Let us pray that our hearts may be one with God in this righteous desire.