

The Covenant of Baptism: To Be in the Kingdom and of the Kingdom

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After recovering from three major surgeries which have prevented me from speaking in the past two general conferences, what a joy it is to be able to stand in this beautiful Conference Center today to teach and bear testimony to those who desire to hear the word of the Lord.

In the past two years, I have waited upon the Lord for mortal lessons to be taught me through periods of physical pain, mental anguish, and pondering. I learned that constant, intense pain is a great consecrating purifier that humbles us and draws us closer to God's Spirit. If we listen and obey, we will be guided by His Spirit and do His will in our daily endeavors.

There were times when I have asked a few direct questions in my prayers, such as, "What lessons dost Thou want me to learn from these experiences?"

As I studied the scriptures during this critical period of my life, the veil was thin and answers were given to me as they were recorded in lives of others who had gone through even more severe trials.

"My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

"And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high" (D&C 121:7-8).

Dark moments of depression were quickly dispelled by the light of the gospel as the Spirit brought peace and comfort with assurances that all would be well.

On a few occasions, I told the Lord that I had surely learned the lessons to be taught and that it wouldn't be necessary for me to endure any more suffering. Such entreaties seemed to be of no avail, for it was made clear to me that this purifying process of testing was to be endured in the Lord's time and in the Lord's own way. It is one thing to teach, "Thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42). It is another to live it. I also learned that I would not be left alone to meet these trials and tribulations but that guardian angels would attend me. There were some that were near angels in the form of doctors, nurses, and most of all my sweet companion, Mary. And on occasion, when the Lord so desired, I was to be comforted with visitations of heavenly hosts that brought comfort and eternal reassurances in my time of need.

Though my personal suffering is not to be compared to the Savior's agony in Gethsemane, I gained a better understanding of His Atonement and His suffering. In His time of agony, He asked His Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). His Father in Heaven sent an angel to sustain and comfort Him in His time of need (see Luke 22:43).

Jesus chose not to be released from this world until He had endured to the end and completed the mission He had been sent to accomplish for mankind. Upon the cross of Calvary, Jesus commended His spirit to His Father with a simple statement, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Having endured to the end, He was released from mortality.

We, too, must endure to the end. The Book of Mormon teaches, "Unless a

man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved" (2 Ne. 31:16).

The experiences of the last two years have made me stronger in spirit and have given me courage to testify more boldly to the world the deep feelings of my heart. I stand before you today with a resolve to teach the gospel principles like the prophets of old--without the fear of man, speaking clearly with plain talk, and teaching simple gospel truths.

In that spirit, I wish to speak on the ordinance of baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, which takes us out of this world and into the kingdom of God.

There is a familiar phrase: to be in the world, but not of the world (see John 17:11, 14-17). Our mortal existence is necessary to fulfill the plan of salvation. We must therefore live in this world, but we must also resist the worldly influences that are ever before us.

Jesus taught, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). These words led me to ponder more concerning His kingdom. I concluded that when we are baptized by immersion by one with the proper priesthood authority and choose to follow our Savior, we then are in His kingdom and of His kingdom.

Being of the kingdom of God requires that we heed the Savior's admonition "Follow thou me" (2 Ne. 31:10). Nephi taught that we follow Jesus by keeping Heavenly Father's commandments: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the

commandments of the Father?" (2 Ne. 31:10).

At baptism we make a covenant with our Heavenly Father that we are willing to come into His kingdom and keep His commandments from that time forward, even though we still live in the world. We are reminded from the Book of Mormon that our baptism is a covenant to "stand as witnesses of God [and His kingdom] at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life" (Mosiah 18:9; emphasis added).

When we understand our baptismal covenant and the gift of the Holy Ghost, it will change our lives and will establish our total allegiance to the kingdom of God. When temptations come our way, if we will listen, the Holy Ghost will remind us that we have promised to remember our Savior and obey the commandments of God.

President Brigham Young said: "All Latter-day Saints enter the new and everlasting covenant when they enter this Church. They covenant to cease sustaining, upholding and cherishing the kingdom of the Devil and the kingdoms of this world. They enter the new and everlasting covenant to sustain the Kingdom of God and no other kingdom. They take a vow of the most solemn kind, before the heavens and earth, . . . that they will sustain truth and righteousness instead of wickedness and falsehood, and build up the Kingdom of God, instead of the kingdoms of this world" (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young [1997], 62-63).

Entering into the kingdom of God is so important that Jesus was baptized to show us "the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which [we] should enter" (2 Ne. 31:9).

"Notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments" (2 Ne. 31:7).

Born of a mortal mother, Jesus was baptized to fulfill His Father's commandment that sons and daughters of God should be baptized. He set the example for all of us to humble ourselves before our Heavenly Father. We are all welcome to come into the waters of baptism. He was baptized to witness to His Father that He would be obedient in keeping His commandments. He was baptized to show us that we should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Ne. 31:4-9).

As we follow the example of Jesus, we, too, demonstrate that we will repent and be obedient in keeping the commandments of our Father in Heaven. We humble ourselves with a broken heart and a contrite spirit as we recognize our sins and seek forgiveness of our trespasses (see 3 Ne. 9:20). We covenant that we are willing to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ and always remember Him.

"For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

"And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:17-18).

This is the promise that we were given when we came into the kingdom through baptism and when hands were laid upon our heads, the gift of the Holy Ghost was bestowed upon us, and we were confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--which means we became "fellowcitizens with the saints" in the "household of God" (see Eph. 2:19) and should walk in a newness of life (see Rom. 6:4).

We cannot take lightly the law given to us to teach our children the doctrine of repentance; faith in Christ, the Son of the living God; and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands when eight years old, which is the age of accountability appointed by God. We need to do a better job of teaching our children and our grandchildren to understand what it means to enter the kingdom of God, for we will be held accountable. Many members of the Church do not fully understand what happened when they went into the waters of baptism. It is very important for us to understand the marvelous gift of the remission of sins, but there is much more. Do you understand and do your children understand that when they are baptized they are changed forever? Adult converts to the Church often have a better understanding of this transformation because they feel the contrast as they come out of the world into the kingdom of God.

When we are baptized, we take upon ourselves the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Taking upon us His name is one of

the most significant experiences we have in life. Yet sometimes we pass through that experience without having a full understanding.

How many of our children--how many of us--really understand that when we were baptized we took upon us not only the name of Christ but also the law of obedience?

Each week in sacrament meeting we promise to remember the atoning sacrifice of our Savior as we renew our baptismal covenant. We promise to do as the Savior did--to be obedient to the Father and always keep His commandments. The blessing we receive in return is to always have His Spirit to be with us.

The gift of the Holy Ghost, given to us when we are confirmed, gives us the ability to discern the difference between the giving ways of the kingdom of God and the taking practices of the world. The Holy Ghost gives us the strength and courage to conduct our lives in the ways of the kingdom of God and is the source of our testimony of the Father and the Son. As we obey the will of our Father in Heaven, this priceless gift of the Holy Ghost will be with us continually.

We need the Holy Ghost as our constant companion to help us make better choices in the decisions that confront us daily. Our young men and women are bombarded with ugly things of the world. Companionship with the Spirit will give them the strength to resist evil and, when necessary, repent and return to the strait and narrow path. None of us are immune from the temptations of the adversary. We all need the fortification available through the

Holy Ghost. Mothers and fathers should prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to dwell in their dedicated homes. Having the gift of the Holy Ghost helps family members make wise choices--choices that will help them return with their families to their Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, to live with Them eternally.

The scriptures confirm that the truly converted do more than just forsake the enticements of the world. They love God and their fellowmen. Their minds and hearts are centered on the Savior's atoning sacrifice. From the moment of their respective conversions, Enos, Alma the Younger, Paul, and others turned wholeheartedly to the task of bringing themselves and their fellowmen to God. Worldly power and possessions lost their former significance. The sons of Mosiah refused an earthly kingdom and risked their lives for the sake of others. These faithful sons were driven by the hope that they might be able to help save even one soul--thus winning for themselves and their brethren a place in God's eternal kingdom.

By choosing to be in His kingdom, we separate--not isolate--ourselves from the world. Our dress will be modest, our thoughts pure, our language clean. The movies and television we watch, the music we listen to, the books, magazines, and newspapers we read will be uplifting. We will choose friends who encourage our eternal goals, and we will treat others with kindness. We will shun the vices of immorality, gambling, tobacco, liquor, and illicit drugs. Our Sunday activities will reflect the commandment of God to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. We will follow the example of Jesus Christ in the way we treat others. We will

live to be worthy to enter the house of the Lord.

We will be examples "of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

We will receive "a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually." We will keep our "covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things . . . all the remainder of our days" (Mosiah 5:2, 5).

We will demonstrate that we "are desirous to . . . be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

"Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

I urge all parents to prepare your children, and missionaries to prepare your converts, for the sacred baptismal ordinance. Teach of its significance so that their baptism will be impressed upon their spiritual memory for the rest of their lives. Take them to sacrament meeting weekly to renew their baptismal covenants through the ordinance of the

sacrament. Be a good example for them to follow. Teach them that because of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, the way they look at the things of the world should change. A mighty change must take place in their hearts and in their minds so they will be able to turn from temptations of the world and from that time forward put their "heart, might, mind and strength" (D&C 4:2) into being citizens in the kingdom of God.

I feel great gratitude for my baptism and confirmation into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am grateful for the spiritual strength and guidance the gift of the Holy Ghost has given me throughout my life. I am thankful for goodly parents and teachers who impressed the significance of baptism upon me so that the memory and feelings of that occasion have been an enduring influence throughout my life.

I testify of the divinity of the gospel, restored in this latter day. I testify of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the efficacy and power of the priesthood and its gospel ordinances. I pray that each of us as members of His kingdom will understand that our baptism and confirmation is the gateway into His kingdom. When we enter, we covenant to be of His kingdom--forever! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.