

A Rare Trait: To See Others as the Lord Sees Them

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Anyway, I am delighted and honored to be with you tonight as you begin this annual seminar. May I begin by thanking you for the great and important work that you do. I don't know what brought you to this career, but I believe with all my heart that the decision was influenced in some way by heaven. So, on behalf of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, I thank you for answering that call from heaven and choosing this important service.

As I begin tonight, I want to take you to several stories from the Old Testament that represent my answer to why, in addition to this call from heaven, you are doing what you are doing. Now, we are all familiar—the first story—we're all familiar with the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, who was sold by his brothers and was taken to Egypt. Now, being sold by family seems like one of the worst things that could happen. Yet in this case, it was actually a sign of compassion.

You see, Reuben had to talk his brothers out of killing Joseph. And it was Reuben's intent that at some point later, he would free him and return him to his father. But while he was away, another brother, Judah, said to the others, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh" (Genesis 37:26–27).

And that's a great statement until you remember that he was selling him. But this brought contentment to the others, and Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites. The Ishmaelites sold him again to Potiphar, who was an officer and a pharaoh and captain of the guard. So things began to work out quite well for Joseph until he found himself in prison for his choice to remain chaste.

His experience in prison found him interpreting Pharaoh's dream, becoming an important person in Pharaoh's court, and leading the initiative to prepare for a seven-year famine. This famine was the cause of Joseph's brothers coming to Egypt to obtain food. The brothers did not recognize Joseph, and he freely gave them what they needed, keeping one brother, Simeon, in prison.

Joseph directed that the rest of the brothers would go home and return with Benjamin as evidence that they were who they said they were—"twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and . . . the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not" (Genesis 42:13).

Now, only when the food ran out did the brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin. See, Jacob did not want to lose Benjamin, or wouldn't let Benjamin leave, even to rescue Simeon, who was held back in Egypt. Jacob finally relented and allowed Benjamin to go to Egypt with his brothers, partly because Judah promised. And this is a quote: "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones" (Genesis 43:8).

And he promised, "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever" (Genesis 43:9).

When they all arrived in Egypt, Joseph treated them well again and set them in their birthright order as they dined with him. He provided food for them, again, to take to Canaan. And as they prepared to return to Canaan, Joseph had his silver cup placed in Benjamin's sack. Then as soon as they left, he sent his guards to find out who had stolen from him.

You remember the brothers were convinced nothing had been taken. They had their food. They had the money that they took to buy food with them. Why would we take anything? But when they searched, they were surprised to find this cup in Benjamin's sack.

Joseph's punishment was to keep Benjamin for this deed. It was then that Judah offered himself in the place of Benjamin. He explained to Joseph by saying, "For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever" (Genesis 44:32).

Judah said then the statement that changed everything in this story. It was the reason that Joseph finally revealed who he was. Judah's statement was this: "For how shall I [return] to my father, and the lad [not be] with me?" (Genesis 44:34).

Now, I believe that each of you feel this way about those you serve. Certainly, we all feel this way about our children. How can we return to Heavenly Father, and the lad or the lass not be with us?

It is a rare trait, indeed, to feel this way about others, some who are complete strangers. Thank you for feeling this way about Heavenly Father's children. Your work is ministering in ways that will allow others to make changes and make decisions that will allow them to return home to Heavenly Father.

The next story comes from Esther. As you may recall, Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai. Mordecai was a devout Jew whose great-grandfather had been carried away captive from Jerusalem. Esther was chosen by the king to replace Queen Vashti. When she was chosen, she did not reveal that she was Jewish to the king. Now, because of Mordecai's faithfulness to his religion, he refused to bow down to Haman, who the scriptures say had been appointed and advanced above all the princes. Haman was basically the second in command.

Now, Haman was upset at Mordecai's actions and, discovering that he was a Jew, he convinced the king that the Jewish people were a threat to the kingdom and should be destroyed. The king sent a decree for this to happen on a certain day and then even offered to pay money to those who carried out his orders.

Prior to all of this happening, Mordecai had shown his loyalty to the king by making known through Esther a plot to kill the king. This act of loyalty was written in the book of Chronicles before the king. And that's an important thing to remember.

When Mordecai learned of the decree to destroy the Jews from the kingdom, he pled with Esther for her to approach the king and plead for her people. Remember, Esther hadn't told the king that she was Jewish. Esther also explained that she could not approach the king without being summoned, and doing so would put her own life in jeopardy.

After some dialogue back and forth, Mordecai finally prevails with these words: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Esther pled with Mordecai to gather all the Jews and to fast with her for three days.

As Haman is planning his own plot against Mordecai to actually hang him before the decree to kill them, Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet. On the night before the banquet, the king could not sleep.

And I guess when kings can't sleep, they have a servant read from them the book of Chronicles, which he did. That night, the story that was read was the story of Mordecai uncovering the plot to kill the king. He asked what was done—when he heard the story, he asked what was done to reward Mordecai, and the answer was nothing.

The next day, the king asked Haman, "What [should] be done [for a man I want] to honour?" (Esther 6:6). Haman was convinced that he was the man the king wanted to honor. And so he gave this elaborate way of honoring this

man, only to find out, to his horror, when the king said to Haman, Make sure all that you described is done for Mordecai. That evening, Esther revealed that she was a Jew and that her people were about to be destroyed because of Haman's plot, bringing an end to a great story of faith, answered prayers, and a sleepless night.

I love this statement by Mordecai: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" For each of you, this statement is true. You have come to this place in your career for just such a time as this. The guidance you provide will often come at just the right time and will bring together the answers of faith and prayers and, no doubt, some sleepless nights. Thank you again for answering the call from heaven to do this important and critical work.

The next story comes from 2 Kings chapter 6. During a period of war between Syria and Israel, the king of Syria is making plans for war and finds out—maybe he's been to your [INAUDIBLE] college, [INAUDIBLE] I don't know. But he finds out that Israel is always one step ahead of him. The king of Syria is convinced that there was someone telling Israel his plans. He wants to search among his troops and find out who is betraying him—who is the spy.

One of the servants of the king says, "Elisha, the prophet . . . in Israel, [is telling] the king of Israel the words . . . thou speakest in thy bedchamber" (2 Kings 6:12). The king of Syria, hearing this, does the only logical thing: he finds out where Elisha is and goes to find him. He finds him in Dothan. The king of Syria sends horses and chariots and a great host of men and surrounds the city.

Early in the morning, Elisha's servant wakes up to discover they are surrounded. He turns to the prophet and says, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). Elisha's answer was simple and inspired: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). And then "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the [mountains were] full of horses and chariots of fire [around] Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

Please know, in your vital role and in your significant role, that those that are with you will always be greater than those that are against you. After all, we know how the battles we are helping others fight can end. Partnering with Heavenly Father and the Savior will always help us be on the winning team. Now, in your service, keeping the lessons learned from another Old Testament story will find you in a place to always provide just what is needed.

Naaman, the Syrian captain of the host, as recorded in 2 Kings chapter 5, plays the prominent role in this story. Although Naaman is a Syrian, we know that he was an honorable man who was a great asset to his king. Because of his personal character, the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.

Imagine that: the Lord blessing a gentile nation because of the character of the captain of the guard or the host. The scriptures say he was "a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1). Sometime in the past, the Syrians had brought captives from Israel, one of whom was a servant to Naaman's wife.

Now, obviously, the servant loved her master, because she voiced her wish that Naaman "were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy," she cried (2 Kings 5:3). Hearing this, Naaman approached the king, who gave his blessing for Naaman to go find the prophet and actually send a letter to the king of Israel stating his expectation that Naaman would be healed. Now, when the king read the letter from the Syrian king, he rent his clothes. He wondered if the Syrians were actually seeking a reason to come to war against them.

When the prophet Elisha heard of the king renting his clothes, he sent a comforting message. He said, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8). Now, can you imagine Naaman's

feelings? He had been summoned to meet the prophet his wife's servant had borne testimony of, with a firm belief that this prophet would heal him from his leprosy.

When Naaman arrived at Elisha's, he and his horses and his chariot stood at the door. I'm sure he was expecting to be invited in, yet Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying simply, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (2 Kings 5:10). Now, we're not told in the story who the messenger was, but we do know from the previous story of Elisha being surrounded by the king that his servant then was described as a young man.

And Naaman was visibly upset. The scriptures used the word wroth to describe his feelings. He said, "I thought, He [would] surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (2 Kings 5:11).

He didn't say, but surely he thought, Instead of coming to see me directly, he sends a young man to tell me to dip in the Jordan River. He then laments that the rivers of Damascus are so much better than the Jordan. He was so upset, he turned and went away in a rage.

Fortunately, Naaman also had a wise servant who posed this question: "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (2 Kings 5:13). And Naaman did as the servant suggested and came up from the river clean. The story ends with Naaman returning to Elisha and saying, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

Now, I love the focus on doing something so simple that, oftentimes, it may be overlooked. I bear my testimony that the most important things you will do in your capacity as chaplains will not be with others; rather, it will be done in your own homes as you spend time in prayer, scripture study, and gospel-centered activities in your home. These simple acts will leave you in a position to access the Holy Ghost when it is most needed.

Now, these wonderful lessons from the Old Testament are part of my testimony and my appreciation for what you do. How can we return to Heavenly Father without those we love and serve? Who knows if you are called to this position for just such a time as this?

Those who are with you are and always will be greater than those against you. The simple things done daily in your home will find you prepared for the challenges you will face as you serve others and help them heal. Their ailments may be much greater than leprosy. We must be prepared and in tune to provide the help and healing that will be needed.

In your desire to serve and minister to others, the lessons learned from Ananias in the New Testament may be instructive. First, we ought to understand who Ananias was. There are three men mentioned by this name. One was punished for his lying and was carried out from his meeting with Peter dead. He's not the one we're talking about.

One was an evil high priest before whom Paul was brought by Caesar. Our Ananias was described as a Christian disciple at Damascus. Paul himself described him as a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt at Damascus.

Now, Ananias was at home minding his own business when he heard the voice of the Lord. The Lord instructed him to "arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he [may] receive his sight" (Acts 9:11-12).

Now, Ananias had a problem with this. He knew who Saul was. He knew that he had been doing much evil to the [INAUDIBLE] to Jerusalem. And he knew that he had come to Damascus with authority to bind those who called upon the name of Christ.

As Ananias voiced his concerns, he heard this answer: “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Ananias arose immediately and did as he was instructed. He blessed Saul, calling him Brother Saul, and saying he was there at the request of Jesus, who had appeared to him. He restored his sight and strengthened him. He also baptized him and set him on a course that changed the world.

Now, Ananias didn’t really want this ministry and assignment. We can understand why. Perhaps it wasn’t that it was too hard that it bothered him. Perhaps it was going to a person who he wasn’t sure wanted or would welcome his help. That was the real issue. What we learned from this experience is that Ananias was available when called. He might not have understood at first, but he responded to the call.

He also chose to see Paul the way Christ saw him. Seeing Paul through those eyes changed everything when he heard that Paul “is a chosen vessel unto me.” It changed his view. He simply loved Paul from the moment he arrived to minister to him.

Can you imagine him greeting him with the words Brother Paul? Brother Saul? And then he built him up as he restored his sight, and he strengthened him. These traits are all valuable in our service in ministry and assignment in the Church. But perhaps they have even more meaning to you in your unique and important calling.

I pray that you will make yourselves available to help others in your service by being in tune with the Spirit, that you may be blessed in every circumstance to see the person as Heavenly Father sees them. As you love them and strengthen them, you will change their life. And by doing so, you will change the world.

So you sit in a special position to not only help an individual, but by doing so, to help their family or their future family for generations to come. You were brought to this place for such a time as this. There are always more with you than against you. As you focus on simple personal righteous practices in your home, you will have the ability to respond to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, helping bring many back to Heavenly Father.

Now, each of these stories I told involved miracles. The day we live in, we may experience what Mormon taught, as recorded by his son Moroni at the end of the Book of Mormon. It was also the end of righteousness in this society, as all who believed in Christ were hunted and killed.

The question then and now is, “has the day of miracles ceased? . . . Or has [God] withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there [is] one man upon the face thereof to be saved?” (Moroni 7:35–36). The answer Mormon gives is a resounding no.

Consider this miracle from my personal study this morning, as found in Helaman chapter 5. Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman—son of Helaman, son of Alma, son of Alma—there’s your genealogy—they’re in prison, and 300 Lamanites and former Nephites go to the prison to kill them. When they get to the prison, they find they are unable to do this because Nephi and Lehi are surrounded by a circle of fire.

These wicked people hear a voice from heaven three times and are then encouraged to pray to the voice that they heard until they believe in Christ. This encouragement came from a person who had left his people and his faith, a former Nephite. All 300 were converted and then helped to convert thousands of others.

As I read that this morning, I thought, if a miracle will come to them with what they had in their heart to do,

certainly it will be part of your ministry. My testimony is, it will and always will be. Time still lasts. The earth still stands. And you are helping save souls. Thank you for what you do.

I testify of the significant work that you do in the kingdom of God and working with Heavenly Father's children, no matter where they are in the world and no matter which circumstance you find them in. God is pleased with the work you're doing. That's my feeling tonight, and my testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.