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Ensuring a Righteous Judgment

To ensure a righteous judgment, the Savior's atoning sacrifice will clear away the underbrush of ignorance and the painful thorns of hurt caused by others.

The Book of Mormon Teaches the Doctrine of Christ

Last October, President Russell M. Nelson challenged us to consider how our lives would be different if our “knowledge gained from the Book of Mormon were suddenly taken away.”¹ I have pondered on his question, as I am sure many of you have. One thought has come again and again—without the Book of Mormon and its clarity about the doctrine of Christ and His atoning sacrifice, where would I turn for peace?

The doctrine of Christ—which consists of the saving principles and ordinances of faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end—is taught numerous times in all the scriptures of the Restoration but with particular power in the Book of Mormon.² The doctrine begins with faith in Christ, and every one of its elements depends upon trust in His atoning sacrifice.

As President Nelson has taught, “The Book of Mormon provides the fullest and most authoritative understanding of the Atonement of Jesus

Christ to be found anywhere.”³ The more we understand about the Savior’s supernal gift, the more we will come to know, in our minds and in our hearts,⁴ the reality of President Nelson’s assurance that “the truths of the Book of Mormon have the *power* to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console, and cheer our souls.”⁵

The Savior’s Atonement Satisfies All the Demands of Justice

A vital and peace-giving contribution of the Book of Mormon to our understanding of the Savior’s Atonement is its teaching that Christ’s merciful sacrifice fulfills all



the demands of justice. As Alma explained, “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.”⁶ The Father’s plan of mercy⁷—what the scriptures also call the plan of happiness⁸ or the plan of salvation⁹—could not be accomplished unless all the demands of justice were satisfied.

But what exactly are the “demands of justice”? Consider Alma’s own experience. Remember that as a young man, Alma went about seeking “to destroy the church.”¹⁰ In fact, Alma told his son Helaman that he was “tormented with the pains of hell” because he had effectively “murdered many of [God’s] children” by leading “them away unto destruction.”¹¹

Alma explained to Helaman that peace finally came to him when his “mind caught hold” on his father’s teaching “concerning the coming of . . . Jesus Christ . . . to atone for the sins of the world.”¹² A penitent Alma pleaded for Christ’s mercy¹³ and then felt joy and relief when he realized that Christ had atoned for his sins and paid all that justice required. Again, what would justice have required of Alma? As Alma himself later taught, “No unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God.”¹⁴ Thus, part of Alma’s relief must have been that unless mercy interceded, justice would have prevented him from returning to live with Heavenly Father.¹⁵

The Savior Heals the Wounds We Cannot Heal

But was Alma’s joy focused solely on himself—on *his* avoiding punishment and *his* being able to return to the Father? We know that Alma also

agonized about those whom he had led away from the truth.¹⁶ But Alma himself could not heal and restore all those he had led away. He could not himself ensure that they would be given a fair opportunity to learn the doctrine of Christ and to be blessed by living its joyful principles. He could not bring back those who may have died still blinded by his false teaching.

As President Boyd K. Packer once taught: “The thought that rescued Alma . . . is this: Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.”¹⁷ The joyous truth on which Alma’s mind “caught hold” was not just that he himself could be made clean but also that those whom he had harmed could be healed and made whole.

The Savior’s Sacrifice Ensures a Righteous Judgment

Years before Alma was rescued by this reassuring doctrine, King Benjamin had taught about the breadth of healing offered by the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. King Benjamin declared that “glad tidings of great joy” were given him “by an angel from God.”¹⁸ Among those glad tidings was the truth that Christ would suffer and die for our sins and mistakes to ensure that “a *righteous judgment* might come upon the children of men.”¹⁹

What exactly does a “righteous judgment” require? In the next verse, King Benjamin explained that to ensure a righteous judgment, the Savior’s blood atoned “for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam” and for those “who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have



CHRIST PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, BY HERMANN CLEMENTZ

ignorantly sinned.”²⁰ A righteous judgment also required, he taught, that “the blood of Christ atoneth for” the sins of little children.²¹

These scriptures teach a glorious doctrine: the Savior’s atoning sacrifice heals, as a free gift, those who sin in ignorance—those to whom, as Jacob put it, “there is no law given.”²² Accountability for sin depends on the light we have been given and hinges on our ability to exercise our agency.²³ We know this healing and comforting truth only because of the Book of Mormon and other Restoration scripture.²⁴

Of course, where there is a law given, where we are not ignorant of the will of God, we are accountable. As King Benjamin emphasized: “Wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁵

This too is glad tidings of the doctrine of Christ. Not only does the Savior heal and restore those who sin in ignorance, but also, for those who sin against the light, the Savior offers healing on the condition of repentance and faith in Him.²⁶

Alma must have “caught hold” of both these truths. Would Alma truly

have felt what he describes as “exquisite . . . joy”²⁷ if he thought that Christ saved him but left forever harmed those he had led away from the truth? Surely not. For Alma to feel complete peace, those he harmed also needed the opportunity to be made whole.

But how exactly would they—or those we may harm—be made whole? Although we do not fully understand the sacred mechanics by which the Savior’s atoning sacrifice heals and restores, we do know that to ensure a righteous judgment, the Savior will clear away the underbrush of ignorance and the painful thorns of hurt caused by others.²⁸ By this He ensures that all God’s children will be given the opportunity, with unobscured vision, to choose to follow Him and accept the great plan of happiness.²⁹

The Savior Will Mend All That We Have Broken

It is these truths that would have brought Alma peace. And it is these truths that should bring us great peace as well. As natural men and women, we all bump, or sometimes crash, into each other and cause harm. As any parent can testify, the pain associated with our mistakes is not simply the fear of our own punishment but the fear that we may have

limited our children's joy or in some way hindered them from seeing and understanding the truth. The glorious promise of the Savior's atoning sacrifice is that as far as our mistakes as parents are concerned, He holds our children blameless and promises healing for them.³⁰ And even when they have sinned against the light—as we all do—His arm of mercy is outstretched,³¹ and He will redeem them if they will but look to Him and live.³²

Although the Savior has power to mend what we cannot fix, He commands us to do all we can to make restitution as part of our repentance.³³ Our sins and mistakes displace not only our relationship with God but also our relationships with others. Sometimes our efforts to heal and restore may be as simple as an apology, but other times restitution may require years of humble effort.³⁴ Yet, for many of our sins and mistakes, we simply are not able to fully heal those we have hurt. The magnificent, peace-giving promise of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel is that the Savior will mend all that we have broken.³⁵ And He will also mend us if we turn to Him in faith and repent of the harm we have caused.³⁶ He offers both of these gifts because He loves all of us with perfect love³⁷ and because He is committed to ensuring a righteous judgment that honors both justice and mercy. I testify this is true in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Closing Remarks," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 122.
2. See 2 Nephi 31; 3 Nephi 11:28, 32, 35, 39–40; Doctrine and Covenants 10:62–63, 67–70; 68:25; Moses 6:52–54; 8:24; Articles of Faith 1:4.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?" *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 62.

4. See Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?" 62.
6. Alma 42:15.
7. See Alma 42:15.
8. See Alma 42:8.
9. See Alma 24:14; Moses 6:62.
10. See Mosiah 27:8–10.
11. Alma 36:13, 14.
12. Alma 36:17, 18.
13. See Alma 36:18.
14. Alma 40:26; see also 1 Nephi 15:34; Alma 7:21; 11:37; Helaman 8:25.
15. See 3 Nephi 27:19; see also Moses 6:57.
16. See Alma 36:14–17.
17. Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19–20.
18. Mosiah 3:2, 3.
19. Mosiah 3:10; emphasis added.
20. Mosiah 3:11; see also 2 Nephi 9:26.
21. Mosiah 3:16; see also Mosiah 15:25; Moroni 8:11–12, 22.
22. 2 Nephi 9:25.
23. See 2 Nephi 2:26–27; Helaman 14:29–30.
24. See Articles of Faith 1:2; see also Doctrine and Covenants 45:54. Elaborating on the doctrine of baptism for the dead, the Prophet Joseph once said: "While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring. . . . He is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men. . . . He will judge them, 'not according to what they have not, but according to what they have'; those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah; He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and . . . we shall all of us eventually have to confess that the Judge of all the earth has done right" (*Teachings of*

Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [2007], 404).

25. Mosiah 3:12; see also 2 Nephi 9:27.
26. See Mosiah 3:12; Helaman 14:30; Moroni 8:10; Doctrine and Covenants 101:78. Individuals may be ignorant of certain commandments and covenants or be unable to exercise their agency in some circumstances but still be accountable in other circumstances because of the Light of Christ they possess (see 2 Nephi 9:25; Moroni 7:16–19). The Savior, who is our judge and who has assured a righteous judgment, will distinguish these circumstances (see Mormon 3:20; Moses 6:53–57). And He has paid the price for both—the former unconditionally and the latter upon the condition of repentance.
27. Alma 36:21.
28. See Mosiah 3:11; see also D. Todd Christofferson, "Redemption," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 110; Alma 7:11–12 ("He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. . . . And he will take upon them their infirmities"); Isaiah 53:3–5 ("Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"); 61:1–3 ("The Lord hath anointed me to . . . bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning"). It is instructive that the Savior quoted from these verses in Isaiah when He announced His Messiahship: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (see Luke 4:16–21).
29. In the spirit world, "the gospel is preached to the ignorant, the unrepentant, and the rebellious so they can be freed from their bondage and go forward to the blessings a loving Heavenly Father has in store for them" (Dallin H. Oaks, "Trust in the Lord," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 27). See 1 Peter 4:6; 2 Nephi 2:11–16; Doctrine and



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- Covenants 128:19; 137:7–9; 138:31–35.
30. See Moses 6:54. President M. Russell Ballard taught this doctrine with respect to suicide: “Only the Lord knows all the details, and he it is who will judge our actions here on earth. When he does judge us, I feel he will take all things into consideration: our genetic and chemical makeup, our mental state, our intellectual capacity, the teachings we have received, the traditions of our fathers, our health, and so forth. We learn in the scriptures that the blood of Christ will atone for the sins of men ‘who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned’ (Mosiah 3:11)” (“Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 8; *Tambuli*, Mar. 1988, 18).
31. See Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 29:20; 3 Nephi 9:14; Doctrine and Covenants 29:1.
32. See Helaman 8:15.
33. See Leviticus 6:4–5; Ezekiel 33:15–16; Helaman 5:17; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.
34. It was just this sort of effort in which Alma himself engaged (see Alma 36:24).
35. President Boyd K. Packer taught this precept powerfully:
- “There are times you cannot mend that which you have broken. Perhaps the offense was long ago, or the injured refused your penance. Perhaps the damage was so severe that you cannot fix it no matter how desperately you want to.
- “Your repentance cannot be accepted unless there is a restitution. If you cannot undo what you have done, you are trapped. It is easy to understand how helpless and hopeless you then feel and why you might want to give up, just as Alma did. . . .
- “How all can be repaired, we do not know. It may not all be accomplished in this life. We know from visions and visitations that the servants of the Lord continue the work of redemption beyond the veil.
- “This knowledge should be as comforting to the innocent as it is to the guilty. I am thinking of parents who suffer unbearably for the mistakes of their wayward children and are losing hope” (“The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” 19–20).
36. See 3 Nephi 12:19; see also Matthew 6:12; 3 Nephi 13:11.
37. See John 15:12–13; 1 John 4:18; Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Perfect Love Casteth Out Fear,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 107.