

# *Why a Savior Is Necessary, and Why Only Jesus Christ Could Qualify*

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I have sought for the help of the Lord in selecting a subject and also for help in delivering that subject. My desire to do well is not a selfish one. I'm concerned that if I do not do well, it might reflect adversely upon Religious Education, and I would not want that to happen. Or it might appear that the subject matter is not important, and I would not want to convey that impression either. So, for the sake of the message and the reputation of this university, and out of consideration for your time, I pray for a facility of expression, that I will be helped by the Holy Spirit. I pray also that the same Spirit will carry this message into your hearts so that where I might lack, the Spirit will generously supply. For what I say today, I alone am responsible, although I believe what I am going to say is true.

I am particularly grateful for the help I received from the topical guide in the LDS edition of the Bible and also for the index in the new edition of the triple combination, which helped me find the references I wanted more quickly.

## **The Scriptures Are Witnesses of Christ**

This is a happy time of year. We become excited about Christmas, we sing, we get the spirit of giving, we talk, and we think about

the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and about his birth into mortality. He was born in a manger—it really was a holy night. He is the son of God the Father and of Mary. Prophets testified of his coming, angels sang, shepherds rejoiced, stars shone, wise men came, Herod worried. The Father smiled upon that birth, and the devil did everything he could to destroy that child after he was born. Eternity was intensely interested in what went on that day.

The record of the birth of Jesus is given in the New Testament, and we are more or less familiar with the story. The New Testament is a witness for Jesus Christ. But the Book of Mormon is also a witness for and a testament of Jesus Christ, and it gives us additional insights and concepts about *why* the birth of Jesus took place and *why* it was so important. There is no other book in all this world that tells us as clearly about the mission of Jesus Christ as does the Book of Mormon. Whereas the Bible tells us *what* happened, the Book of Mormon and other latter-day scriptures tell us *why* it happened. The Bible writers also knew why, but the Bible has not come to us

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in its original purity and clarity, and thus the Lord has brought forth these other records in plain terms so that we might not wander in darkness and oblivion. The Lord wants us to know about the greatest truths in the history of mankind.

A number of years ago, when the first astronauts landed on the moon, the president of the United States said it was “the greatest week in history.” The Reverend Billy Graham corrected him and said, “No, the greatest week in history was the week in which Jesus died and rose from the grave.”

And I thought to myself, “The Reverend Graham was correct—that time.”

I’d like to read some basic scriptures, first from the Doctrine and Covenants. We do not ordinarily think of this scripture in connection with Christmas, but I would like to read it to you, and I think you will see before we get through that it does have a connection.

*There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—*

*And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. [D&C 130:20–21]*

You notice that the scripture said those laws were laid down before the world was created.

Now I have been impressed with many things in the Book of Mormon. I will read a comment from Nephi:

*Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given, and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.*

*And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.*

*And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. [2 Nephi 11:4–6]*

It was just that important: If Christ did not come, all men would perish.

Now, in a missionary situation, Alma says:

*Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God, and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.*

*And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.*

*And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. [Alma 12:22–24]*

And from Alma 22:13–14, another missionary situation:

*And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.*

*And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.*

## Two Kinds of Death Were Introduced by Adam

There is passage after passage in the Book of Mormon and in other scriptures indicating that the fall of Adam brought death upon mankind, two kinds of death: the death of the body, which is the death we are familiar with in relation to mortuaries and funerals and undertakers, and then the death of the spirit, which means a separation from things of righteousness or an alienation from the things of God. Because of the fall of Adam, first Adam and then all of his posterity suffered both of these deaths. If there were no atonement made by someone who was not subject to those deaths—if there were no atonement made by Jesus Christ—then mankind would everlastingly remain subject to those two deaths and could not redeem himself.

And so it was absolutely critical that the Lord come into the world and work out an atonement.

I will read a passage from Nephi's younger brother Jacob. Jacob is the great doctrinal preacher of the Book of Mormon. He is the great theologian. It would be hard to measure one prophet against another, but some have gifts in one direction and others have gifts in another, and Jacob, whom I will now quote, had a great insight and a great facility of expression to explain the atonement.

*O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.*

*And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.*

*And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.*

[2 Nephi 9:20–22]

Now also from this same Jacob, in this same chapter, but a little earlier, verses 6–10:

*For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.*

*Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. . . .*

Now the first judgment which came upon man was “thou shalt surely die.” It involved both of those deaths, the death of the body and the death as to things pertaining to righteousness, which the scriptures call spiritual death.

*O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more [that is, if there were no resurrection of the body] our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.*

*And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself. . . .*

*O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit. [2 Nephi 9:6–10]*

### “I Am Come That They Might Have Life”

I have noticed that quite often, when we talk about our Savior, we talk about the resurrection, but we rarely talk about what would have been our circumstances if there had been no atonement by Jesus. I remember a discussion in

a class many years ago when I was a teenager, when one of the students asked the teacher—this was not here at BYU—what would have become of our *spirits* if there had been no redemption by Jesus.

He said, “Well, I do not know what would have happened to our spirits, but I give it as my guess that, if there were no atonement by Jesus, we would still go on to whatever degree of glory we had merited, but we would have to go there as spirits without bodies because Jesus brought to pass the resurrection, and if there were no resurrection we would have no bodies.”

None of us in the class knew enough about the gospel to know whether that was the right answer or not. But sometime later, on my mission, I was reading 2 Nephi and I realized that if Jacob had been in that meeting that day he would have said, “Now wait a minute. This is what the atonement of Jesus does for us. It not only brings the body forth from the grave, but it redeems the spirit from what otherwise would have been an endless, miserable condition with the devil.” Or, to say it in other words, every man, woman, and child, everybody who belongs to the family of Adam, would have become sons of perdition had there been no atonement by Jesus Christ. Jacob, knowing that and having commented upon it, then says these words—which we have already read but need to read again:

*O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit. [2 Nephi 9:10]*

And so, when we sing and think and read and talk and meditate upon the coming of the Son of God into the world, we need to think in terms of what he did for mankind, all mankind, both as to the resurrection of the body and in bringing them forth out of what would

have been a most miserable and gloomy existence. Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). You see that when we understand the alternative, it gives altogether new meaning, and additional meaning, to his words.

There are so many passages, we could not read them all right now. I will read from Luke, who tells about Jesus going into the Garden of Gethsemane and there working out an atonement for all mankind:

*And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.*

*And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

*And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down and prayed,*

*Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

*And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

*And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,*

*And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. [Luke 22:39–46]*

It was in Gethsemane, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, that Jesus made his perfect atonement by the shedding of his blood—more so than on the cross. We have a corroboration of that concept in the Doctrine and Covenants in section 19:16–20:

*For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;*

*But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;*

*Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—*

*Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.*

*Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.*

All of us have at some time or another done something that caused the Spirit to leave us; we felt low, we felt down, we felt alone. And yet we were losing the Spirit only because of something we had done individually. But then there is Jesus, who had the Holy Ghost all the days of his life (and the Holy Ghost is the Comforter)—he had had the help of the Holy Ghost ever since birth. At every trial and at every endeavor and every temptation, he had had the strength of the Holy Ghost to be with him.

But as he went into the Garden of Gethsemane and began to take upon him our sins, the Father withdrew the Spirit from him, and he worked out the atonement alone (see *JD* 3:205–6). He refers to that in the verses we just read where he indicated that it was a hard thing to bear, and then he said, “You tasted it in the smallest, yea, in the least degree at the time I withdrew my Spirit from you.” Jesus committed no sins, but he did carry upon himself our sins, as indicated in the scripture that says “I have trodden the wine-press alone” (*D&C* 133:50). It appears that the Father withdrew the Spirit at that time so Jesus might tread the winepress alone. Jesus alone is our redeemer and savior.

In John 3:16–17 we read:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

The Bible makes this great statement and says that without the Savior we would perish. Paul discusses these things in 1 Corinthians and in Romans, but not as clearly as we would like. It takes the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price to explain more fully why we would have perished. We would have perished because of the fall of Adam; we being unable to save ourselves either from his fall or our own sins.

### **Premortal Life Is the Key to the Mission of Christ**

We often talk about the War in Heaven and what took place there. We understand that the Savior was selected in that premortal life as our Redeemer. We knew him there. Our first acquaintance with Jesus began many thousands of years before we were ever born into mortality. When we talk about our relationship to the Savior and our redemption, we must begin with our premortal life.

I think we often miss the real issue of the contention in the spirit world that eventually led to the War in Heaven. We talk about it as though Lucifer was going to force everybody to obey. He said, “I will save them all,” and we interpret that as meaning that he was going to have forced obedience.

It has seemed strange to me that a third of all the spirits that could have been born into this world would have favored a plan that would cause them to have forced obedience. Most of us do not like to be forced. As I see it, the real issue was not so much one of force as it was that Lucifer said he would *guarantee*

their salvation. He promised salvation without excellence, without effort, without hard work, without individual responsibility. That is the lie he promulgated in the pre-earth councils.

That so-called shortcut to salvation captivated many gullible and lazy spirits. They wanted something for nothing. We have certain aspects of that in our life today where something is offered for nothing (a free lunch we sometimes call it), with certain kinds of subsidies that promise to guarantee the reward without the effort. On that basis, Lucifer led away many spirits, but individual progress does not come that way.

Only by serious and strenuous exertion do we improve in character and in spiritual growth. In our society we still come in contact with many who are influenced by this erroneous philosophy. They think they can achieve salvation and exaltation without a struggle. We are still fighting the War in Heaven with the same participants and the same issues, but we are fighting it on new territory and on a different battleground.

Having ascertained that the devil's program was one of promising excellence without effort, we can better appreciate the real struggle that Jesus had, that we all have, to do our best in this world to overcome our weaknesses and to obtain redemption from the effects of mortality. It is in view of the premortal life and the issues that were fought in the War in Heaven that everything else in the ministry of Jesus and in the gospel must be understood.

If we overlook premortal life, then we will never get the clear perspective necessary to understand the gospel in mortality. But when we do have that concept, and talk about Christmas—the night Christ was born, the star that led the way so that later the wise men might find him, the angels who came and spoke to the shepherds—and when we find the enthusiasm of the prophets in predicting

and prophesying the coming of the Savior, we begin to see why they were so excited. This was an absolutely essential event in the history of mankind.

Jesus was the divinely appointed Beloved Son of God the Father, and he was born of Mary into mortality. In many ways, in the incidentals like eating and talking and the wearing of clothes, he was like other men. But in parentage, being sired by the Eternal Father himself, he was very different from all others. It was necessary that he be different from others so that he could make a payment for the transgression of Adam and for everyone's personal, individual sins.

Every other person who has been born into the world has been born subject to the fall of Adam and therefore subject to death. Only Jesus was able to die but remain undominated by death. Thus, when he chose to die, not having been made subject either by Adam's fall or by any sins of his own, he could shed his blood and give his life as an offering for others. He could also rise from the dead with a perfect, glorified physical body. No one else was able to do that.

I suppose that many of us, if not all, labored as missionaries for the Savior in the premortal life, going among the spirits to persuade others to choose the Savior, and following him in preparing for earth life. We now have a veil of forgetfulness drawn over our minds, and we do not remember the details of those events; yet the spiritual capacity that we developed in the pre-earth life has come with us into mortality, and when we hear the gospel preached it strikes a familiar note. We are learning again principles we once knew; that capacity responds to every true doctrine that is taught to us when it is properly stated. Our main business in this world is to continue that spiritual development we started so long ago, and this we will do by obedience to the gospel.

### Jesus Is the Only True Redeemer

Jesus said about himself, “I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light, the Resurrection. I am the Law. I am the Lawgiver. I am the Standard, the Door, the Savior, the Shepherd, the Redeemer, the Example, the Master, the Advocate. I am your Judge. I am your Friend. I am your Lord. I am your God. And I am the only way that you can be redeemed.”

Paul wrote to the Philippians about Jesus: “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

As I have reflected upon the importance and the seriousness of all of this and how quickly we complain when something goes wrong, and how often we feel we have been wronged, I remember the Lord has enjoined us to be patient, to be full of love, to be long-suffering, to be forgiving, and to pattern our lives after him.

We started this devotional today by quoting from the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord said that every blessing we obtain in this life is by obedience to a law and a plan that was worked out before the foundations of the world. We then read a statement from Nephi, where he said he delighted in proving to his people the importance of the coming of Christ and that, save Christ should come, there would be a dearth and a gloom come upon all mankind.

Now a word from Alma:

*Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us.*

*And [the gospel is] made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers*

*in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored. . . . [Alma 13:22–23]*

Not to recognize and appreciate the atonement is the greatest of all ingratitude; to ignore Christ is the height of folly; to obey him is the greatest happiness. The greatest display of wisdom that we can demonstrate on this earth is to follow the Lord and to keep his commandments.

If we take away from the plan of salvation the doctrine of the fall of Adam and the doctrine of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and the concept of the pre-earth life, then we make of the gospel simply a system of ethics. And that will not do. The gospel is ethical, but it is so much more than that. I rejoice with you in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am so glad he came.

We see that our association with him is not optional, it is not casual—it is absolutely critical and necessary. He has honored us by letting us bear his name—for all of us when we are baptized take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. That is an honor, a privilege. He calls us servants until we reach a certain level of faithfulness, and then he calls us friends. The promise is that we can become joint heirs with Jesus in all that the Father has.

As we move in the next few days toward the day on which we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let us all remember and mingle our testimonies with those of the prophets that Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, the Son of God, is our Leader, our Example, and our Savior. I bear testimony that I know those doctrines which I have taught to you this day are true, and I pray that the Spirit of the Lord might carry that feeling into your hearts, that, as we read the Christmas story, we might realize not only *what* happened, but *why* it happened—and then measure our favored condition today. I say this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.