

“Who Then Can Be Saved?”

DAVID H. YARN, JR.

Following a familiar New Testament passage in which the Lord had a conversation with a rich young man, who was unable to meet the standard the Lord had given him,

said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? [Matthew 19:23–25]

Their reasoning seems to have been, “If a rich man can’t be saved, then who can?” After all, in this world the sentiment obtains that the rich man can do or have anything. It appears that Jesus was not necessarily condemning riches but warning his disciples that the magnitude of one’s stewardship increases as do his earthly possessions. The rich man has more with which to bless the lives of others than the poor man and has the greater challenge to use those things within his jurisdiction for benevolent and righteous purposes rather than simply to use them to satisfy his own selfish desires.

I repeat, when the disciples heard the Lord’s statement “they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?” Possibly the Lord’s response to their question startled them more than the statement which evoked their question. Jesus said unto them, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Obviously, this is a signal declaration of the Lord regarding his atoning sacrifice. If mankind—rich or poor—were left exclusively to their own resources, their own powers, there would be no salvation for them. “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Sacrifice Taught from the Beginning

Near the outset of man’s sojourn upon the earth Adam and Eve were taught that Heavenly Father had made provision for the redemption of his children. Adam and Eve had been cast out of the Garden of Eden. They had sons and daughters who “began to divide two and two in the land, and to till the land, and to

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tend flocks, and they also begat sons and daughters” (Moses 5:3). Adam and Even sought guidance from the Lord and were commanded to worship him and to offer the firstlings of their flocks as an offering unto him (see Moses 5:4–5). Adam and Even were now at least grandparents.

The scripture says,

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will. [Moses 5:6–9; emphasis added]

Summarily, may I emphasize four points. First, they were to offer sacrifices of the firstlings of their flocks. Second, the sacrifices were symbolic of the sacrifice which was eventually to be made by the Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father. Third, they were to do all things in the name of the Son. And fourth, because of the sacrifice of the Son of God, “all mankind, even *as many as will*,” will be redeemed.

Symbolic Anticipation of the Savior’s Sacrifice

The practice of sacrifice which was established by God in the days of Adam, symbolic of and pointing to the sacrifice of the Son of God who would eventually come into the world, was perpetuated until the time of

Moses. Extensive instructions regarding sacrificial rites were given to Moses by the Lord.

There is one verse of particular illumination and significance regarding the doctrine of the atonement—the necessity of sacrifice and the shedding of blood. The Lord said,

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. [Leviticus 17:11]

Again, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” If we substitute the word *mortality* for the word *flesh*, the passage reads, “for the life of mortality is in the blood.” As I understand what the Lord was saying, it might be put like this: Inasmuch as the life of the flesh (or mortality) is in the blood, and it is the mortal (or finite) soul that sins, the blood, which contains the life of mortality, must make the atonement for the soul.

The blood sacrifices were continued as a part of the broad principle called the law of Moses. The prophet Abinadi taught his people that it was expedient that they keep the law of Moses but that salvation did not come by the law alone. He said, “Were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13). Thus, as the apostle Paul was later to say, the law was a “school-master” to prepare them for the Christ (see Galatians 3:24).

Speaking of the Christ’s atoning sacrifice, symbolically anticipated in the thousands and thousands of ritual offerings from the days of Adam, the prophet Amulek declared:

It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all

fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away.

And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. [Alma 34:13–14]

Observe that again: “This is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

As the atoning sacrifice of the Lord was “the whole meaning of the law,” so in our own dispensation the Lord gave the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon a glorious vision in the account of which is recorded,

And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us —

That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him;

Who glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands [in one of the three degrees of glory], except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him. [D&C 76:40–43]

Thus, as “the whole meaning of the law” of Moses pointed to the great and last sacrifice, the atonement of Jesus Christ, so modern revelation declares, in effect, that the whole meaning of the gospel is rooted in the atonement of the Christ. “He came into the world . . . to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved.”

The Savior’s Unique Mission

As I reflect upon the mortal life, teachings, and works of the Lord Jesus Christ in ancient Palestine, it seems appropriate and not inaccurate to describe them with two familiar terms, *ministry* and *mission*.

I think of the word *ministry* as applicable to the great parables; sermons; sometimes seemingly incidental teachings that arose out of various events, situations, or circumstances; and the wonderful manifestations of his compassion when he healed the sick, caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, when he cast out evil spirits, and raised the dead, when he changed the water into wine, fed the multitudes with a few loaves and a few fish, and on and on, including his cursing of the barren fig tree, demonstrating that he had the power to destroy as well as the power to heal and bless. As marvelous as were all of those things, both the teachings and the works or miracles, through his power similar teachings and works or miracles have been performed by his prophets and apostles or others among his authorized servants, both before he was born and since his ascension into heaven.

However, I think of the word *mission* as applicable to the atoning sacrifice, described by the prophets as “infinite and eternal.” His ministry was much greater, but not altogether dissimilar from those of his authorized representatives. However, his mission was altogether unique. Although prophets and/or apostles, both before and after his coming into the world anciently, suffered torturous forms of persecution and even death, they had no power through their suffering and death to redeem even one soul from sin and the grave, not even their own. “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

The Lord Jesus Christ declared:

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

. . . I lay down my life for the sheep. . . .

No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. [John 10:14–15, 18]

His unique mission from before the foundations of this earth were laid was to come into the world and freely give his life, no man having the power to take it from him; to die and be raised again, that all mankind would be raised from their graves and can be forgiven of their sins upon the merciful conditions established by Heavenly Father and his Holy Son, the Only Begotten, and our Redeemer, even Jesus Christ.

The Anguish of Gethsemane

On the night of the Last Supper, there having been “a strife among” his disciples earlier in the evening regarding “which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24–30), supper being ended, he gave them an impressive answer and unforgettable example when, as John described it,

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. [John 13:4–5]

The sacred ordinance being concluded, when he had sat down again,

he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. [John 13:12–17]

Later, while still in the upper room and apparently even later while on the way to Gethsemane, he gave them the sublime teachings recorded in John, chapter 13 through 16.

He seems to have given the great intercessory prayer in behalf of his disciples, then to have crossed the Brook Cedron to the Garden of Gethsemane. There he sought the Father, saying, “If thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Luke said, “There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43). Luke further testified, “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” (Luke 22:44). It is important to recognize that the Lord had not yet been nailed to the cross or suffered the humiliations of the trials before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again; he had not yet been condemned to die or even arrested. The agony of the atonement, at least as regards his shedding of blood for mankind, commenced not on the cross but in Gethsemane. We have not only Luke’s witness concerning this, but in our own time the Lord Jesus Christ himself has given his own witness about that suffering, saying,

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. [D&C 19:18–19]

Subsequently, he did suffer the trials and the excruciating pain of and death by crucifixion. Doubtless the chief priests and many among the Pharisees and scribes thought they had triumphed, but in that irony of ironies, when he gave up the ghost, it was he who had triumphed. Furthermore, between his death and resurrection, he visited the spirit world and in that vast realm inaugurated his work for the unrighteous dead—another triumph over Satan and his unholy purposes.

The Reality of the Resurrection

Then came that glorious morning of the Resurrection. That day the Lord was seen by Mary, several of the women, two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Simon, and that evening by ten of the twelve:

Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in you hearts?

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.

And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

And he took it, and did eat before them. [Luke 24:36–44]

But Thomas, one of the twelve . . . was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. [John 20:24–29]

With three of their five senses they experienced the resurrected Christ. They saw him, they heard him, and they touched him.

They saw and conversed with him on yet other occasions, on a mountain in Galilee, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and on the Mount of Olives at the time of his ascension into heaven. Paul reported that on one occasion “he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once” (1 Corinthians 15:6). He was seen repeatedly for a period of some forty days, almost a month and a half (see Acts 1:3).

When he appeared to his disciples in ancient America,

the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his

feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

[3 Nephi 11:12–15]

And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children. [3 Nephi 17:25]

Our own dispensation of the gospel began when the resurrected Christ and his and our Father appeared to the young Prophet Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820 and announced the commencement of their latter-day work. The anciently written title page of the Book of Mormon declared the purpose of that record to be for “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.” When the Lord himself began to pour forth revelation upon revelation to his chosen prophet for his latter-day kingdom, in one of them he declared, “For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 115:4).

In one of the early revelations, he referred to his atonement as he identified himself. He said:

Thus saith the Lord you God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I AM, Alpha and Omega . . .

I am the same which spake, and the world was made, and all things came by me.

I am the same which have taken . . . even as many as have believed in my name, for I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them. [D&C 38:1, 3–4]

Please note that again, “By the virtue of the blood [that is, by the excellence or power of

the blood] which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them.”

In a still earlier revelation, he declared that he had suffered and shed his blood for all. He said, “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” (D&C 19:16). He said, your suffering will “be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not” (D&C 19:15).

“Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength”

When we begin to realize and in some measure comprehend who he is, and what he has done and does for us, and makes possible for us, and recognize the love that he and Heavenly Father have for us, we should begin to understand in at least a limited way the reasonableness and logic of the first and great commandment: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30).

Traditionally, the heart has been a familiar symbol of love. But in the Lord’s commandment, the heart represents only one of four ways in which he said we should love him. As I understand the terms *heart*, *soul*, *mind*, and *strength*, it seems to me the Lord is saying we must love him with all our emotions, our volition, our intellect, and our physical vitality. Putting it otherwise, it seems that he is saying that all that we think and do and say should be permeated with our love for him. That is consistent with the counsel he gave Adam and Eve when the angel explained to them that their sacrifices were in the similitude of the sacrifice which would later be made by the Christ. The angel said, “Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son” (Moses 5:8). Consider that for a moment. Suppose we never thought or said or did

anything that we could not do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous standard! It is a criterion we should all strive to apply constantly in our daily lives.

On another occasion and in another way the Lord emphasized how much we should love him. As he gave counsel to his apostles prior to sending them on their first mission, among other things, he said to them: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Regarding the first commandment, and this remarkable statement, may I make only two observations. First, surely parents should love their children and children should love their parents—such love is fundamental to the gospel. However, as great as that love is, or should be, it would be at best short-lived and without ultimate significance were it not for the Lord and his atoning sacrifice. That love has more meaning both here and hereafter because of him. Second, husbands and wives, parents and children, are finite, imperfect beings, or objects of love. Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are infinite, perfect beings, or objects of love. It appears to me that one’s love relationships can be no more perfect or higher than his supreme love object. All our love relationships would necessarily be distorted if we had a less than perfect love object as our standard. Loving Heavenly Father and his Holy Son our Redeemer as our supreme love objects provides the illumination, inspiration, and motivation, to love all other things in the proper way. Comparable illumination, inspiration, and motivation cannot come from a lesser love object.

Recall the question of the disciples, “Who then can be saved?” and the Lord’s answer, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Come unto Him

On one occasion the Lord told the ancient Jews they had three witnesses of him, John the Baptist, his own works, and the Father (*see* John 5:33–37). He then spoke of a fourth witness in this familiar verse, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

A reflective reading of that verse might suggest that the word *think* should not be there. Cursorily considered, who would want to merely *think* eternal life is in the scriptures? Perhaps most people who love the scriptures would *want* eternal life to really be in the scriptures. However, an analysis of this verse in its context suggests that the word *think* is integral to the concept the Lord was trying to get his listeners to grasp. He had just named the three witnesses which testified of him and then bade the Jews to “search the scriptures,” for they also testified of him. However, the real power of his statement is implicit in that word *think* when one considers the verse which follows. May I read the two verses together:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. [John 5:39–40]

In other words, he was saying his listeners “thought” eternal life was in the scriptures, but eternal life is in him, and they would not come to him that they might have life. Putting it otherwise, the scriptures are a guide to get mankind to come to him, for he is the source of eternal life, not the scriptures. Yes, there is power in the written word, but it is only because of him who is the Living Word.

In another place it is recorded,

Ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood,

even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory. [Moses 6:59]

If one searches the scriptures, he will find that they do testify of Jesus and that he is the Christ, and that it is not enough simply to acknowledge him, as important as that is, but one must come unto him, and that involves humbling oneself and being grateful for the high privilege of receiving the sacred ordinances the Lord has provided and commanded we receive from one whom he has authorized to administer them. One should not expect to “be cleansed by blood, even the blood of [the] Only Begotten . . . and sanctified from all sin” if he does not do what the Lord tells him to do.

Observe also in the verse just cited, that, when one does what he is commanded to do, he is told that he will “enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.” In light of the assurance that one can “enjoy the words of eternal life in this world,” it is clear why the prophet Nephi charged mankind to “feast upon the words of Christ,” saying, “If ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 32:3; 31:20).

Most of us in the immediate hearing of my voice have received the basic ordinances the Lord offers all mankind and asked us to receive. We have made covenants with him, and no doubt in varying degrees we are enjoying the words of eternal life daily. Doubtless much more is available to all of us than any of us is presently enjoying.

Again, recall the question of the ancient disciples, “Who then can be saved?” and the Lord’s answer, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Ask Yourself

Now, in view of the foregoing principles, may I respectfully request that each of you apply the following questions to yourself, and I shall attempt to do the same.

How does his atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ affect the things you think about?

How does the atonement affect the things you say?

How does his atonement affect the kind of language you use?

How does the atonement affect the kinds of books and other things you choose to read?

How does the atonement affect the kinds of movies and TV shows you choose to watch?

How does the atonement affect the kind of music you voluntarily hear?

How does the atonement affect the way you take care of your health?

How does the atonement affect the way you use your time?

How does the atonement affect the way you use your talents and skills?

How does the atonement affect the way you use your means or resources?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your wife or husband?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your parents?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your children?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your brothers and sisters?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your neighbors?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your employer, employees, or fellow employees?

How does the atonement affect the way you treat your customers, your students, or your patrons?

How does the atonement affect the way you perform your civic duties?

How does the atonement affect your personal morals?

Really, what difference does the atonement make in your life? If it doesn't make a difference, it should.

Only on His Terms

Perhaps such questions could be multiplied endlessly. Life consists of a multitude of details, specifics, and we must not let the specifics be swallowed up in the general any more than we must let the general be swallowed up in the specifics.

Each specific must be met in its own time, but two remaining generic thoughts from the scriptures are always useful guides: The Lord said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). And the angel said, "Do all that thou doest in the name of the Son" (Moses 5:8).

"Who then can be saved?" We all can because of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we *can* be only on *his* terms. He has paid the price and made it possible for all mankind to be saved *if* they will repent, accept him for who he is, receive his holy ordinances from his authorized servants, and be faithful and true to their covenants.

May we all strive to live in such a way that our lives constantly reflect our profound appreciation for the atonement, and may our lives be permeated by the ennobling influence that can come only from the presence of God, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Amen.