

EPISODE 18 • PART II

Dr. Brent L. Top



D&C 45

- John Bytheway: 00:02 Welcome to Part II of this week's podcast.
- Dr. Brent Top: 00:06 Jump over to verse 55. We begin that glorious Millennial reign. We're going to read more and more about this in the Doctrine and Covenants and other revelations. Section 101 is one of the great revelations on the Millennial. That it really comes down here as he tells the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Remember we talked about that this was Matthew 24 and Matthew 25. When I was working on my book, *Watch and Be Ready*, I looked particularly at Chapter 25. Even when we look at Section 29 and 45 and 101, we tend to focus on the Signs of the Times that are challenging difficulties, and we look at the tribulations. We joke about the eyeballs falling out and all of those kinds of things, but the revelation itself uses those maybe as, for lack of a better way of saying it, it's not a great metaphor, as hors d'oeuvres.
- Dr. Brent Top: 01:16 Chapter 25, the parables of preparation is the main course. In fact, in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew, and I haven't counted it up, but I think section 45, it may be the same ratio. But when I was working on my book, *Watch and Be Ready*, as I went through that carefully, because there's so many people that distressed about the signs of the times, the Savior's words concerning preparation and not being troubled, the ratio of those two... the negative signs of the times is 4:1. The Lord's counsel to us and his promises to us appear in the Revelations four times more than the desolation prophecies. Doesn't that tell you what we ought to focus on?
- Hank Smith: 02:17 Yeah.
- Dr. Brent Top: 02:18 And so then you go to the revelation, when he talks about the Ten Virgins, and we're all so familiar with that parable of Matthew 25 there, but there are three parables of preparation there and all of them are counsel that the Lord is saying to us, "You got to be ready for this." Now, at the first of Section 45, he said to us, "All you got to do is believe me." Well, that's really

what he's telling us here. So you now to go over to verse 57, where he's now going to give us part of the interpretation of the parable of preparation that we get in Matthew 24 in Joseph Smith—Matthew.

- Dr. Brent Top: 03:03 Look at this. "The 10 Virgins, for they that are wise have received saved the truth, believed on me, accepted him, embraced the everlasting covenant. And then they've had hands laid upon their heads, confirmed members of the church and commanded to receive a gift. And we believe on Christ and we press forward and believe him that he's got our back. And then what happens? They take the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived. Barely, I say unto you. They shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day."
- Dr. Brent Top: 03:50 So I go back when my children or grandchildren or students, or stake or ward members are stressed out by all the signs, all the falsehoods that are happening in 2021, just like they were in 1831 or in century one. If they have the Spirit and they treasure up the words of the Lord, "They shall not be deceived." So mom and dad, I'm thinking of my own kids, are not just not paying attention, but as we have the spirit, we can be not troubled. We can have confidence even though we have concern about the effects and the things that are going on around us. Confidence is what is going to give us greater trust. Doesn't mean that the pain is any less.
- Dr. Brent Top: 04:52 I've had, I'm trying to think, I think I've had 11 members of my family that have had COVID, some more than others. So I can't say, "Oh, that's no big deal." Can't say that at all, but I have the confidence on the promises of God. That's really the message of Section 45. And so as you look down at the end there, verse 58 of 45, "And the earth shall be given unto them for an inheritance. And they shall multiply and wax strong and their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation." Every time I read that verse and thought, "Why did we start our family now?"
- Hank Smith: 05:34 Into Millennium.
- Dr. Brent Top: 05:35 Why didn't we wait? Yeah, that would have been a whole lot better raising our kids then, but here in verse 59, "For the Lord shall be in their midst and his glory shall be upon them. And He will be their King and their lawgiver." When President Nelson talks to us about the difficulties may surround us, you will have difficulties, he says, "I'm not saying it's easy." But then when he talks about the glorious promises that await." And so we look at

Section 45, we see "The wars and rumors of wars and the wars in our own land." Now look down to verse 66, "When Zion is established, look at the glorious promises, look at the power."

- Dr. Brent Top: 06:35 And so while we see people around us that verbally, online, with literature, terrorize us and our beliefs and mock us, ultimately, they're the ones that are going to be afraid because, "The glory of God will be with Zion." And then I just love this part in verse 67. "And the terror of the Lord also shall be there because God's power is so strong." It is so incredible. It swallows up every other attack or tribulation upon us, including death will be swallowed up. That terror will swallow up any of those things that have bothered us. And those that are wicked that have not trusted in God's power and promises will not come unto it because they will recognize the strength and power of Zion.
- Dr. Brent Top: 07:43 Verse 71. "And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion singing the songs of everlasting joy." In Section 29, as you read and studied that, there was a ton of stuff there wouldn't be songs of joy. The things we've highlighted in Section 45, there's not... There could be R-rated movies for the violence and for the difficulties. And we're witnessing it around us, but I think the Lord is saying to us, "Hang on because the glorious promises are more than you can imagine right now."
- Dr. Brent Top: 08:36 And while we may have those moments of fear and wonder of how we're going to make it day to day, I think Section 45 is a reminder that Zion is a place of safety, Zion is a place of peace, Zion is a place of power, incredible power. And our job is to believe in Christ, accept the everlasting covenant, follow Him to Zion and stay put. I think that's Section 45. That's Brother Top's Cliff Notes version.
- Hank Smith: 09:22 Oh, Brent, it was just absolutely wonderful to recognize that this isn't a negative section. It's almost like when you read the Book of Revelation and you realize it's our hopeful message. The message is of the Second Coming.
- Dr. Brent Top: 09:36 Yeah, victorious.
- Hank Smith: 09:38 Yeah. We focus on the scourges and the desolations and the earthquakes, and no one ever gets to the end where the Lord says, "Oh, you got..." the end is the best part.

John Bytheway: 09:49 I think there's something settling to have the Lord say... to tell us even the bad stuff, "This is going to happen. This is going to happen." Actually, it can strengthen our testimony because we can look around and say, "Wow, that's what the Lord said would happen. Wow, that's what the Lord said would happen." And instead of saying, "Where is God?" We can say, "Whoa, the prophecy works. This is exactly... so stay close family, because he is preparing us."

Dr. Brent Top: 10:17 That's right. Well, and you can just see, in the Church, how the Lord prepared us for the pandemic and we didn't even see it.

John Bytheway: 10:27 Oh my goodness! The Home Church and everything.

Dr. Brent Top: 10:29 All of those things. And so, as you pointed out, John, is that if you're seeing all these things being fulfilled around us, that ought to give you greater confidence, not fear that it's going to turn out okay. It's like bookends. And so in Section 45, the bookends where... Remember, we started out our discussion today saying, "I'm your Advocate." And then he's saying, "Zion is established and I'm in your presence" Well, all the stuff in between those two bookends, those ought to say to us, "Wait a second. I had the preface that told me he's got me and I've got the ending that tells me he's with me. All I've got to do is stay true to those promises and hang on." That's my simplistic approach to Signs of the Times.

Dr. Brent Top: 11:26 So if you wanted a book that says, "On Thursday, April 1st, this will happen, on Friday, April 2nd, this will happen," it's not there because four times more preparation counsel from the Lord to his disciples than signs. And so I'm personally going to observe the signs around me, but with four times the spiritual and emotional and physical energy, I'm going to focus on the preparation that my soul will be saved at the harvest.

Hank Smith: 12:06 I think it was Elder Oaks once who said, "A 72-hour kit is useful, but a 72-year spiritual kit is much more useful."

Dr. Brent Top: 12:17 That's right. Maybe I'll get in trouble, but I have a line in my book there about having guns in the bomb shelter and having your prepper supplies won't cut it if we haven't filled our souls with the reservoirs of righteousness that the Lord has asked us to.

John Bytheway: 12:40 Because I love the Book of Mormon, and I love the War Chapters. You will watch Captain Moroni. It is always spiritual preparation first. It is always, get your act together. Oh, and

then, let's make some swords and some forts and some fortifications, but get your minds faithful to God then we'll go to the next part. And that's why I like the comparison of the 10 Virgins there. I was going to say something else too. I think I've heard Robert Millet use this example, but have you ever watched a football game where you knew the outcome, but maybe you were protecting other members of your family. Can't watch it until later. And they don't know what's going to happen and they are unsettled and up and down and you are just laughing inside because you know your team's going to come back and win.

- John Bytheway: 13:28 I feel like that's how the Lord's prepping us, "Hey, this will happen. This will happen." And we can look and say, "That's true. That's true." But in the end, the Savior is the Savior. He is the victor as promised. And that's why I love the way you've put this together. The bookends. There's a lot of stuff here, Section 29. But look at the beginning, look at the end. We know what's going to happen in the end.
- Dr. Brent Top: 13:52 If I could just build upon that, John, you can see all throughout the scriptures those promises that should strengthen us. And that's why the signs should not overly trouble us. You remember where the Lord says, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly." I know the two of you and I have spoken to youth a zillion times about those phrases, but it's not just moral cleanliness. Virtue is the power of Christ. "Let the power of Christ garnish thy thoughts unceasingly."
- Dr. Brent Top: 14:39 And then you wonder when people are doubting or thanking, "Brother Top, you have this Pollyannish view of the world, this naiveté that isn't real." No. Remember the Lord said, "If I am letting the power of Christ permeate my thoughts and my being," he says, "then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God." That's what Section 45 is about also, is there's stuff happening, but thy confidence can wax strong when you understand the promises in the Everlasting Covenant.
- Dr. Brent Top: 15:24 If I could just maybe, in a personal vein without being too personal or too inappropriate, as you mentioned, John, in my introduction, I serve as a sealer in the Mount Timpanogos Temple, one of the most incredible blessings in my life. The authority and the power that was conferred upon me is truly awesome; truly awesome when you think about it. And so when I have the... This week, I have this privilege again with a couple that kneeled across the altar. And I asked them to make a covenant, the covenant that is mentioned in Section 45 and throughout the Restoration, that New and Everlasting

Covenant. And then I seal upon them blessings and promises that are beyond comprehension of the mortal mind. That is what the Lord is doing for us.

- Dr. Brent Top: 16:36 He's saying, "Will you take this covenant? And if you will take this covenant, then I'm going to bless you with the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all that that entails." That is awesome in the truest sense of the word. And so that's how I look at the revelations and those... If you put all the "negative" things in the Doctrine and Covenants, in that context then can our confidence wax strong as we face the future.
- Hank Smith: 17:19 Man, that was so just powerful and wonderful. I was thinking of when I teach the Parable of the Ten Virgins in my New Testament class, I try to make it personal for the students. A lot of them are getting married or just recently married, and I'll ask someone, "Who's been recently married? And they'll say, "Maddy, raise your hand." And I'll say, "Maddy, who's your best friend in the whole world, your best friend?" And she'll say, "Oh, it's so-and-so, it's my friend, Julie." I'll say, "Did Julie come to your wedding?" "Oh, yeah. She wouldn't miss it." "What if she missed it? Would you be worried about her?" "Yeah." "What if she told you the next day, 'You know what? I just couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it. I missed it. I'm sorry.'" She said, "That would hurt."
- Hank Smith: 18:07 And I think in a way, the savior in the Parable of the Ten Virgins is saying, this is my big day and we're friends. I want you to be there. Be ready. This is my big moment. And when we are foolish, we think, "Oh, it's no big deal. It's no big deal. I'll do other things." To me, it's a personal relationship where the Lord is saying, "Be like these wise single girls," that's what a virgin in the New Testament-
- John Bytheway: 18:33 Right. A maid.
- Hank Smith: 18:35 ... "Be like these wise girls and care, just care. And get involved and take the Holy Spirit for their guide. The idea of that's your oil, store it up, store it up and involve yourself with me."
- Dr. Brent Top: 18:52 That's beautiful, Hank. I love that because when you say the word "care," we could add another one to that. The reason why my best friend is going to be at my wedding, or hopefully my best friend is going to be at my funeral, is because of love. And if we love the Lord, and you use the word care, and I think they're synonymous there, is that I wouldn't miss it because I love him so much.

Hank Smith: 19:25 That's exactly right. When the door is shut, some of my students say, "Oh, he's so mean when the door is shut in the Parable of the Ten Virgins." And I think the mean one is those who didn't show up.

Dr. Brent Top: 19:36 Right. They don't care.

Hank Smith: 19:39 It's my wedding. They don't care.

Dr. Brent Top: 19:40 When you say, "Well, they were filling their oil lamps," that's not like a checklist of saying, "I got to go to church three times this month to count it. I've got to read my scriptures five days out of seven to count it." As we've taught seminary, we've fallen into that category a time or two [crosstalk 00:20:00] of focusing so much of, "A star on the forehead for this and do this." If I had to prepare myself or to travel a certain distance because I loved my best friends so much, I would not view that as a checklist burden of a bunch of things that I have to do. That would be, "I am glad, I am honored to be able to do this because I love my friend so much."

Hank Smith: 20:31 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 20:31 I am aware of two metaphors for the last days of Jesus' coming. In verse 19, "But verily I say unto you that desolation shall come upon this generation as a thief in the night." And another one that I heard is, "as a woman in travail." And I always like the latter one because the woman in travail knows, and she has known for months. And the very fact that the Lord is telling us all this puts us more as the woman in travail. We know the signs, we're watching for it, whereas a thief in the night, you have no idea when that's going to come. Could you comment on that?

Dr. Brent Top: 21:11 I agree with you totally. And I think for those that do not know the pregnant woman that is in labor, it will be like a thief at night [crosstalk 00:21:24], but if you're close and you're relatives, or you know this woman that is about to give birth and you're part of that extended family, for lack of a better way of saying it, then it doesn't come as a thief in the night; it is coming in a way that we can see this. As you mentioned, I'm a Gospel Doctrine teacher. Last time I was teaching was section 27 on the sacrament. But I pointed out to my ward that there's a lot more to the latter half of Section 27, when the Savior's talking about the great last Sacrament meeting that he's going to attend with us at the end of the world. And as you have Elder McConkie's Commentary, it is Adam-ondi-Ahman.

- Dr. Brent Top: 22:17 And so if you think about that, those faithful covenanted Saints are going to be like those surrounding the woman in travail. We're seeing the signs of labor and delivery. And so I don't know exactly what hour or maybe even what day she gives birth, but when I'm at that sacrament meeting at Adam-ondi-Ahman, whatever way God uses technology to get us all there, I don't think we're going to be too shocked that the glorious Second Coming is nigh at hand.
- John Bytheway: 23:02 Yes. I think that's a great way to look at all of this, is the Lord loves us and cares enough. He could have... "I'm not going to tell you, you're just going to be surprised after the surprised," but instead he's saying, "You're going to see this, you're going to see this, you're going to see this. But don't worry. But you're going to see this and you're going to see this, but don't be troubled because I got ya." That is a nicer way of looking at it, that, "Well, thank you for telling us what to expect so that we don't lose hope."
- Dr. Brent Top: 23:31 In fact, I've got... What you've said is right on target, and I've got maybe a more simplistic way of saying it in my own life, is that as I had never gotten into signs of the times that much as a focus of my study, in some way. I had a very, very prominent member of the Church when I was serving as Dean, and I've got to be careful how I say this... No, he will not be speaking at General Conference, but maybe he did in the past. Called me and wanted me to review a manuscript or coauthor a work with him that would put the signs of the times in the proper sequence.
- Dr. Brent Top: 24:21 I refused to do it respectfully because, one, I don't think you can, I don't think the Lord has ever really done that for us in the scriptures. And then my personal philosophy has been and it really doesn't matter. And so with the Second Coming, and even with all of the parables of preparation and the latter-day revelations that we have, it really doesn't matter in that if I am faithful, and if I am continually repenting, and changing, and trying to improve, and trusting in the Lord, and trying to keep my covenants, I will be a participant in the Second Coming. Period, exclamation point, and with whatever great emoji and gif you could add to it.
- Hank Smith: 25:22 I love that because you don't have to be a Second Coming scholar, having listed out every sign, and that's not what the Lord is asking here.
- Dr. Brent Top: 25:30 That's right. Exactly.

John Bytheway: 25:31 So are you saying this dry erase board I've got behind me, I can just erase this? I like to tell my students, "Rather than wondering when Christ will come, let's just come on to Christ. And then it doesn't matter when he comes, because we will already be with him."

Dr. Brent Top: 25:47 And no, it was not John that was submitting the manuscript for me to look at. No, but with my students, I would emphasize over and over again what the Lord emphasized to the disciples in the Olivet Discourse, but also in section 29, 45, 101, other places when he says, "No man knoweth." And I often quote President Ballard when he says, "I would think that if the Lord was going to reveal it to anybody, he would reveal it to the living prophet, the First Presidency, and the Council of the Twelve." And he says, "We haven't heard that, and I don't know."

Dr. Brent Top: 26:30 And so I emphasize over and over again, thief in the night, woman in travail, whatever, it's we just don't know. And he wants it to remind us, "You don't know." But he will say, "It's nigh at hand." And I often say, "If it was nigh at hand in 1831, it's nigher at hand in 2021."

John Bytheway: 26:52 I started looking at the end of all these sections that are in the '30s. "I come quickly, I come quickly. I come quickly." You know?

Dr. Brent Top: 26:59 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 26:59 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 26:59 "You've been saying you're coming quickly for 190 years."

Dr. Brent Top: 27:03 That's right. Exactly. And-

John Bytheway: 27:03 Maybe that word does not mean what you think it means, you know?

Dr. Brent Top: 27:06 Well, and one day is a thousand years to the Lord, oh man

John Bytheway: 27:12 But the point is, "Stand in holy places, be not moved."

Dr. Brent Top: 27:17 Right.

Hank Smith: 27:18 John, it probably wouldn't be very good of him to say, "Well, it's not anytime soon. So don't worry about it."

Dr. Brent Top: 27:25 But isn't that really what people are saying when they're saying, "Well, how much time have I got before I really get serious

Hank Smith: 27:36 The Lord doesn't leave that room. He doesn't leave that room

Dr. Brent Top: 27:38 And so that's why I always go back to Section 64 and I'll tell the students, "Well, I've told you nobody knows, but I know and the Lord tells you right here when he says, "Tomorrow I come cometh."

Hank Smith: 27:52 Tomorrow.

Dr. Brent Top: 27:52 Tomorrow I come cometh. And then he said, "For you, labor while it's called today."

Hank Smith: 27:59 So good.

Dr. Brent Top: 28:00 And today is today until the Second Coming. And then he comes tomorrow. My tomorrow may not be Hank's tomorrow. Hank's tomorrow may not be John's tomorrow. Or it may be that we're all caught up with the savior tomorrow. We don't know. But in the meantime, let's trust in the Lord and hold on for dear life.

Hank Smith: 28:24 We have today. I have a comment. I would love to hear what you think it, Brent, because I know you're a bridge builder with other faiths. This section is two members of the Church; that's the audience. I do see some very cool mentions of other faiths. First, he mentions the Jews. I have a couple of wonderful Jewish friends, as do both of you, because we spend a lot of time in Israel. And one of them, I bet you've met him, he's a Scottish man named Alan. You know Alan, don't you know, John?

John Bytheway: 28:52 Yes.

Hank Smith: 28:52 He speaks Hebrew with a Scottish accent. And it's really fun.

John Bytheway: 28:56 It's really something.

Hank Smith: 28:57 I remember one time I asked Alan, he said, "I'm an open book, ask me anything." And he's a very faithful Jew. And I said, "Tell me about Jesus. Alan, tell me about Jesus." And he said, "Oh Jesus, he's a great man, a great teacher. He's awesome." "Is he the Messiah?" "No, no. Jesus was not the Messiah." And I love that... He's a good man. Alan is a good man and he loves God. And I love here, the Savior, he is non-condemnatory to this reference to Zechariah, when he says, "These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends, I am he

who was lifted up by him, I am Jesus that was crucified." There's something inclusionary there that he doesn't say, "And now you're done. You're wiped out." He teaches them-

- John Bytheway: 29:47 Look at verse 54. "The heathen nations-
- Hank Smith: 29:50 Will be redeemed will be redeemed.
- John Bytheway: 29:52 ... will be redeemed will be redeemed."
- Hank Smith: 29:53 In verse 71, you were talking about Zion and he says, "And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations." To me, that seems very inclusionary of all faiths.
- Dr. Brent Top: 30:06 I think it's very perceptive to see that. In fact, in my inter-faith work and in my bridge building with those that are of other Christian denominations, as well as people that are not Christians, the group of religious educators from universities in Saudi Arabia, and the women wearing the burqas where you can only see your eyes, and yet as they would talk about their values and their faith and their goodness, and the way that they're raising their families, I'm involved in a very official way with a Jewish dialogue. And I am so inspired with holy envy of so many of the things that I learned. And then I'm involved in dialogues with Latter-day Saints and evangelicals that can be spirited at times, but I have holy envy for so many of their beliefs and their passion and their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Dr. Brent Top: 31:14 I have a group right now in my capacity as the Richard L. Evans Chair for Religious Understanding that we're discussing what constitutes Zion, and the prophet Joseph Smith clearly envisioned a Zion that was broader than just The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Now, we know the covenant and the covenant path, but I never refer to my interfaith dialogues with scriptural terms like heathen nations. That usually doesn't build bridges right out of the chute. But I think we see the promises of God truly are inclusionary. And it may very well be that many of us at the Second Coming will be surprised at who is caught up to meet the Messiah that maybe they didn't even recognize in mortality. I don't know.
- John Bytheway: 32:13 I have stopped saying something I used to say too often, just about the Book of Mormon, "Oh, when Jesus appeared to the Nephites." And I don't say that anymore because there were Lamanites. And he told them all, "All ye that are spared because you are more righteous than they." So I try to say now, "Well,

Jesus appeared to the righteous in the new world," and then he tells us what that cutoff was and the cutoff wasn't very high.

- Hank Smith: [32:38](#) That's good, John.
- John Bytheway: [32:38](#) It was like, "Those of you who didn't stone the prophets, you're the ones..." And then he tells them, "Will you please repent?" So it's not like they were perfect either. The bar was pretty low. "Those of you who haven't murdered anybody lately, will you repent now?" But anyway, I love that.
- Dr. Brent Top: [32:55](#) I hope that's still the bar, because I haven't stoned any prophets.
- Hank Smith: [33:01](#) That's true.
- John Bytheway: [33:02](#) I like that. And that he remembered the heathen nations. Wasn't another section we were just reading, "He will remember the heathen and all are likened God." They're remembered. They're loved. Will you explain that term, holy envy? I think I remember where it came from. Was it Krister-
- Dr. Brent Top: [33:20](#) It was Krister Stendahl, who was... he was a Bishop of Stockholm. He had been the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School. And when the Open House for the Stockholm Temple was taking place and there were so many protests against the Latter-day Saints as we see all the time that... Brigham Young taught that when Latter-day Saints are building a temple, the bells of hell will ring. And Brigham said, "I love that sound. Let the bells ring."
- John Bytheway: [33:53](#) Love to hear them ring.
- Dr. Brent Top: [33:54](#) I used to teach my missionaries, when I was Mission President, that the greater the opposition to your message, the more Satan is worried about you. If Satan isn't really tempting and opposing you-
- Hank Smith: [34:11](#) That's a problem.
- Dr. Brent Top: [34:12](#) ... that's a real problem that you've.
- John Bytheway: [34:13](#) What does that tell you?
- Dr. Brent Top: [34:15](#) Well, in any event, it was all of that turmoil with regards to the Stockholm Temple, and it was Krister Stendahl who came to the defense of the Church in a news conference, if I remember

right, or to the press and to the protestors when he gave the three rules of religious engagement. And he said, "You always compare your best with their best, not their worst against your best. You always let them tell their own message, not you tell their message." And then the third one was, "You have holy envy that other people have things that you would envy to have in your own worship, in your own practice." We can't go to the Holy Land without having holy envy, the devotion and faith and passion.

- Dr. Brent Top: 35:14 Or even back in the old days when I was able to even go into Sinai, and we don't get to go to Sinai, and climbing Mount Sinai thinking I was going to die. And my students were mocking me that I was huffing and puffing the last third of climbing up that mountain. And they said, "Come on, Brother Top, you're not as old as Moses was." And I had to remind them that Moses was caught up to the top. He didn't climb to the top. But then I get up to the top huffing and puffing, and here's a 70 plus-year-old Italian woman who is on a pilgrimage that has climbed that to show her love and devotion for her God.
- Dr. Brent Top: 36:00 You see it all around you when you use that phrase, "More righteous than me." I find that often, there are good and honorable and wonderful people that are going to be on the earth after the Savior's coming that haven't come on to the New and Everlasting Covenant. But that's all the more reason why I am going to learn from them, and hopefully in my love and friendship and bridge-building, they will desire to learn of me, which may or may not lead to them coming into the kingdom.
- Hank Smith: 36:39 Come to Zion. They'll see it. They'll see Zion. They'll say, "That's where I want to be."
- Dr. Brent Top: 36:44 Well, we see that with... I've hosted hundreds of religious leaders and scholars when I was dean, and they come on the campus of BYU and they say, "I feel something. I feel something." And it's really true, there is a spirit of the why or the spirit of the gospel. And then that spirit leaves them when the cart is going past the testing center.
- John Bytheway: 37:13 There's a void in that area. There's a-
- Dr. Brent Top: 37:16 Then the dark clouds envelop them.
- John Bytheway: 37:20 ... I'll bet Heber J. Grant would really like us to change the name of that building.

Dr. Brent Top: 37:24 Yeah. No kidding.

Hank Smith: 37:25 He's like, "Why did I get the Testing Center?"

John Bytheway: 37:26 Why did he have to associate this with...

Dr. Brent Top: 37:28 Why couldn't we at least name that building for Lucifer?

John Bytheway: 37:34 This is the Adversary Building.

Hank Smith: 37:38 That is great.

John Bytheway: 37:39 I'm glad you talked about Holy Envy, because I don't think a lot of people have heard that. And I think I saw a video of Krister Stendahl actually explaining that, and I thought that's a... So that it doesn't sound like an oxymoron, tell them what you mean. Thank you for doing that.

Dr. Brent Top: 37:53 Right.

Hank Smith: 37:53 Yeah, that was cool.

Dr. Brent Top: 37:53 Well, Krister Stendahl was also a dear friend of Truman Madsen. And so maybe what you've seen was Truman was innocent.

John Bytheway: 38:00 It was a Truman Madsen video, I think, and they showed him...

Dr. Brent Top: 38:06 He was a very dear friend of the church.

John Bytheway: 38:08 When I was in high school, he was a rock solid Presbyterian and close friend and kept *The For the Strength of Youth*, just like we did. And I had to look around and try to explain to him why there were Latter-day Saints that weren't keeping them. That helped me a lot through high school to have this just rock solid Presbyterian, and so I'm grateful for his influence.

Dr. Brent Top: 38:39 Well, let me share with you a similar experience, but maybe not as positive reflection on me, but my senior year in high school, and I know it's hard to believe now, but I was actually a basketball star, and I was a great athlete. And my kids say that the older I get, the greater I was in my memory. So in my Senior year there was one Junior that was on the starting five of my high school team with me, and I told how the Junior... I said, "As an underclassman, you have one job when you're on the floor, and that is you are to rebound and you are to pass me the ball." Those were the only two things that you do.

Dr. Brent Top: 39:27 And so we would banter back and forth. And he was not a member, and I don't think he was a believer in just about anything, but we had a prayer before one of our basketball games. I don't know whether we could even do that today, but in those days, all of our sporting activities, we had a prayer. And they called on Howell, my friend, who was on the starting five, was not a member of the Church in a predominantly LDS community, I think most everybody on the team was, and the coach said, "Howell, would you be willing to pray?" And he said, "Yeah." And he said, "Dear Lord, please bless the other team that they won't feel bad when we kill them. Amen."

Dr. Brent Top: 40:12 And we had been on a 10-game losing streak, and that night we went out and wiped out this team that was supposed to beat us. And so Howell became our designated prayer.

John Bytheway: 40:23 You got to pray every time.

Dr. Brent Top: 40:24 Unbeknownst to me, when I was on my mission, Howell had gotten involved in Seminary activities and become friends with a lot of the youth kids, joined the Church, went on a mission and after I'd come home from my mission and had married Wendy, lo and behold, he comes in and I see him first time since he was a Junior in high school. And I say, "Howell, [inaudible 00:40:49] so wonderful. I am so proud of you. I wish I would have been the one to share the gospel with you." And Howell said, "Well, Brent, to tell you the truth, I didn't know you were a member of the Church."

Dr. Brent Top: 41:02 Now, it hit me in that I was living the gospel, but I was passively living the gospel rather than actively living the gospel. And when you see in Section 45 there some things about the "light shining in darkness," I was just happy to go along, to get along. I wasn't doing anything bad. I was a good Latter-day Saint youth, but I was not letting the covenant shine brightly in my life and from my mouth.

John Bytheway: 41:44 That's a story of. Reminded me Elder Holland's talk about a prayer for the children where he said some of the adults are making their fate for their children too hard to detect.

Dr. Brent Top: 41:56 Right. Exactly right.

Hank Smith: 41:59 That really was. I have a good friend who is a Jehovah's Witness. I sometimes do corporate work, and I met him through some of my corporate speaking. And we meet up once or twice a year, we'll be at a corporate event, we'll go to lunch. And my

goodness, his faithfulness impresses me to know, and that's all he wants to do, is what he calls his ministry. And he says, "What are you doing? What are your goals?" And I'm going, "Well, I build the kingdom of Hank." And I said, "What are your goals?" And he said, "Oh, if I could, I'd just love to go full-time in ministry. Right now I only get..." I think he said, "I only get 30 hours a week because of my job to do my ministry." That to me was so impressive. And I thought, "This is a good, good man who loves God."

- Dr. Brent Top: [42:50](#) Yeah, that's holy envy.
- John Bytheway: [42:53](#) Evangelicals who just love Jesus and know the word.
- Hank Smith: [42:59](#) Well, let's go to our last question. Dr. Top, you're a historian, you're a gospel scholar. There's no doubt about that. You've been teaching the scriptures and Church History for, you don't look it, but it's been four and a half decades.
- Dr. Brent Top: [43:16](#) Yeah. I started when I was minus six. So I'm 39.
- Hank Smith: [43:20](#) You don't want to count all the pre-mortal teaching as well.
- Dr. Brent Top: [43:26](#) Exactly. That's right.
- Hank Smith: [43:26](#) You've been Dean of the Religion Department at BYU. I know you have rubbed shoulders with the General Authorities in that role. You've served as a bishop, you've served as Stake President, you've served in Mission President. I don't think we talked about that you were in Nauvoo, around Illinois, for three years. You know, as much as anyone, about the history of the Church, about Joseph Smith, about their highs and their lows, about their triumphs and their tragedies. And you are a faithful Latter-day Saint. I think our listeners, I personally, and I know John would, would love to hear your personal thoughts on Joseph Smith, on the Restoration of the gospel and what it has done for you as a husband and father and as a son of God.
- Dr. Brent Top: [44:17](#) Oh, thank you. First of all, it's debatable about the knowledge that I have, what you have introduced. I do not profess to be a historian, but I try my best to stay up on some things and to read the scriptures. But clearly, there are those that know tons more, but let me just share an experience that I had when I was serving as the associate dean to... Bob Millet was the Dean of Religion at that time. And some of your listeners and you guys are maybe even too young to remember, but the Southern Baptist Convention had their National or International

Convention in Salt Lake City. And President Hinckley was President of the Church and asked that we be good neighbors and really help them to feel the spirit of Salt Lake City and that we not engage in Bible bashes or other kinds of things.

- Dr. Brent Top: 45:20 And it was interesting that... I think the convention went quite well. At the end, Channel 2 in Salt Lake City, they had a reporter that had a news show and his name was Rod Decker. And Rod always would pit people against each other to get both sides of an issue. And it was always very, very interesting. And Rod was a very, very interesting and provocative reporter. And Rod had invited one of the participants of the Baptist Southern Convention on his show. And then they had invited Robert Millet, the Dean of Religious Education to BYU, to represent the Latter-day Saints. And it was set up to be somewhat of a debate. And so-
- John Bytheway: 46:15 In this corner?
- Dr. Brent Top: 46:16 ... Yeah, exactly. It wasn't quite that overt, but everybody knew what was going down. And so you had a very knowledgeable Baptist, a Pastor, and a very knowledgeable Religion Professor who happened to be the Dean of Religion at BYU and had happened to written a lot of books. Well, in that television half-hour program, and I say this with all due respect to my Baptist friend that was interviewed, that Bob ate his lunch. It was just amazing how Bob was able to do things.
- Dr. Brent Top: 46:55 Well, that aired on a Sunday night, the last night of the convention, and Monday morning Bob had received a phone call from another Baptist minister saying, "That other Baptist last night on that program did not represent us well. I need to talk to you and we need to discuss the issues that I have with Mormonism." We could use Mormon in those terms back in those days. And he said, "I'd like to talk with you. Have you got some time where I can pose my questions to you that didn't get asked last night?"
- Dr. Brent Top: 47:33 Well, we knew immediately where that was going. Bob walked down to my office as Associate Dean and said, "Would you be willing to sit in on this?" We spent four hours going over... There were amazing questions and discussions, and Bob knew this guy's literature better than he knew it. I think he was actually shocked that here were a couple of Mormons that actually knew a few things and were a little surprised, he was a little surprised by it. When we got all done and we'd had a very spirited, interesting discussion and it... Mostly my job was when Bob taught a really great point, I would say, "Yeah, that's right."

And that was about all I contributed to the discussion. Well, not quite.

Dr. Brent Top: 48:28 And when we got done, this wonderful Baptist Minister who had posed every difficult question that has come up over and over and over and over again, he looked at us and he looked around in the Dean's office and all of Bob's books, all around the walls and compared to my library, it's nothing. And the difference is Bob had read all those books and in my library, mostly they're there for show. But he said to us, he said, "I can't believe that you two believe, knowing you know all know." Now, look at that phrase again. "I can't believe you believe considering all you know."

Dr. Brent Top: 49:26 Now, I know he was discussing it in an intellectual academic sense. I put myself a little bit with Bob on that. Both of us know a few things, and both of us have studied a lot through the years. And the more that I study, the greater is my belief. The more that I study the Book of Mormon and study the Doctrine and Covenants, the more I am absolutely amazed at the words that come through the Prophet Joseph Smith that we have recorded in the standard works.

Dr. Brent Top: 50:08 Now, more than that, besides putting Moroni's Promise to the test, and I've had that confirmation over and over and over again, I have come to discover that most of the time, the people that have the questions and deep, deep doubts, and I have those in my own family, I understand that they're struggling, I understand the depth of their pain in trying to come to some resolution there. And maybe I don't fully comprehend where they are in their faith journey and their faith crises.

Dr. Brent Top: 50:48 I understand that I may not fully be where they're at, but I've also learned that most of the time, it's not about getting answers, because there are answers. Every question that has been posed to me through 45 years as a religious educator, every question that were posed to me as a Mission President. My missionaries thought, "Oh my gosh, we've got a Religion Professor. We're going to have him answer all of our investigators questions. And we will lead the Church in baptisms." And they would ask me to come and say, "We know, President, that if you would just answer this one question, our investigator would be baptized." Never once happened. And I could spend hours and hours with people. Mostly, it is not about the answers. Now, for some, it is.

Dr. Brent Top: 51:45 Mostly people will think, "Oh, the Church lied to me about this or that." And I'll say it, "No. I knew that. I read that." Maybe we

were running in different circles in some way, but the answers were there. Most of the time, it was really a struggle, and I like the word, a crisis of faith. It is not a crisis of knowledge, it is not a crisis of information; it's a crisis of faith. And at certain points in our lives, we may not have enough faith in Joseph Smith or the Restored Gospel or the Church, or we may have been treated badly by someone or had a bad experience by something.

Dr. Brent Top: 52:38 But for me, it still boils down to the faith; that I have had far more experiences that confirm my faith and strengthen my faith than those that challenge my faith, or even challenge my intellect in that regard. When I was Stake President, I used to say to the Bishops as we would train them, is that I would say, "Living the gospel of Jesus Christ is not hard, living with the consequences of not living the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is hard."

Dr. Brent Top: 53:21 I have in my own life, I have the spiritual witnesses that come by the power of the Holy Ghost that I have them again and again, and again, and they're burning in the bosom. I have those intellectual witnesses as I study the words of Joseph Smith, as I study the faith and devotion of those pioneers and subsequent prophets, yes, there are warts, yes, there were mistakes, but you cannot question faith and devotion. I have those intellectual witnesses and testimonies, but most of all, I have a witness that comes from the fruit of gospel living. The fruit is sweet. My life is better.

Dr. Brent Top: 54:09 I have a daughter that has left the Church and she made a very interesting observation. I don't think she intended it as a compliment or as a positive, but she made a very interesting statement. She said, "When I was in the Church, I felt like I had an anchor weighing me down of all the things that I thought I had to do." Now, that that said to me, I guess, as a dad, I didn't do a very good job of teaching her about the grace of Christ. And she felt that she could never, ever measure up. And so she said that she felt this anchor pulling her down. And that was the source of her crisis of faith.

Dr. Brent Top: 54:52 When she made the conscious effort with her husband to leave the Church, she then made an interesting observation and she said, "And now I feel like I don't have any anchor to anything." Now, that was profound. To be anchorless in this day and age is not only painful and problematic and difficult and dangerous. You got to have faith, as the song says, you got to have faith. For me, I press forward in faith. I have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I have faith in the truth claims of the Church and of the

Prophet Joseph Smith. I have faith because my life has so been so deeply and richly blessed.

- Dr. Brent Top: 55:50 Now, that same daughter in the midst of all this pandemic would never say to me or to my wife, because of that authority figure barrier there a little bit, but she said to her sister who then said to us that she said, "I wish I could have the faith that mom and dad have so that I can have the peace that mom and dad have." I bear testimony of that piece. And so I press forward in faith because with greater faith leads to greater confidence in the Lord and trust his promises, which leads to greater peace in life. I bear that testimony to you.
- Hank Smith: 56:48 Dr. Top, I don't know what to say other than we are so grateful. I know everyone listening right now is just saying, "I'm so grateful." I am so grateful for you.
- Dr. Brent Top: 57:00 Thank you.
- Hank Smith: 57:01 Your time, your knowledge and your testimony have been just... I just feel like I'm almost floating on my chair, John, how do you feel?
- John Bytheway: 57:13 Oh, wonderful. Couldn't be better. Thank you for your friendship and your kindness to both of us.
- Dr. Brent Top: 57:20 Well, I view you as dear friends. And while I love to tease you and say that I am responsible for your super stardom, I honor you for your efforts to build the kingdom and bring people to Christ.
- Hank Smith: 57:38 That's what we're about.
- Dr. Brent Top: 57:42 If we, like Alma, could sound the trump to all the earth, that would be my desire, too. I'll just have to do it in a different way now. I'll do my podcasts from a purple flamingo floaty on the pool of my house in St. George.
- Hank Smith: 58:02 Retirement is sweet. That's a beautiful idea. The next time we bring you on to the podcast, we'll be live from the poolside.
- Dr. Brent Top: 58:12 From the [inaudible 00:58:13] Utah pool, with my cold beverage on my pool floaty.
- John Bytheway: 58:20 It's a bring your own floaty party. We'll all be in the pool.
- Dr. Brent Top: 58:24 Exactly. Exactly right.

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| John Bytheway: | <u>58:24</u> | Solar powered electrical equipment. |
| Dr. Brent Top: | <u>58:27</u> | Exactly right. |
| Hank Smith: | <u>58:27</u> | Man, what a good day! What a good day we've had! We want to thank all of you for listening and joining us today. We're grateful for your support. We want to thank our producers, of course, Steve and Shannon Sorenson. We want to thank our production crew: David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Nielsen, Kyle Nelson, Will Stockton and Andrew Morton. We hope that you will join us soon on our next episode of FollowHIM. |