

# EPISODE 25 • PART I

Dr. S. Michael Wilcox



*D&C 64-66*

Hank Smith:	<u>00:00:01</u>	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their <i>Come, Follow Me</i> study.. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:00:09</u>	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:00:10</u>	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:00:11</u>	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:00:13</u>	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:00:15</u>	As together, we followHIM.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:00:20</u>	Hello to our favorite listeners. This is Hank Smith, I am here with my splendid cohost, John Bytheway. Hi, John.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:00:29</u>	Hi, Hank.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:00:30</u>	You can come to our website, <a href="http://followhim.co">followhim.co</a> and you can get notes, you can get the transcription of the interview, you can get sources, all that you need there. Of course we'd love for you to rate and review the podcast, that always helps us and tell your friends about it. John, I'm excited every week for followHIM, but this particular week I have a little bit of extra giddiness for who is joining us this week.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:01:00</u>	Yeah, me too. We've got with this Brother S. Michael Wilcox and, well, I'll read his bio and then I'm going to add an addendum, but Brother S. Michael Wilcox received his PhD from the University of Colorado and taught for many years at the LDS Institute of Religion, adjacent to the University of Utah. He has spoken to packed crowds at BYU Education Week, has hosted tours to the Holy Land and the Church History sites. He served in a variety of callings including as Bishop and a Counselor in a Stake Presidency. He's written many articles and books including <i>House of Glory</i> , <i>Sunset</i> , <i>10 Great Souls I Want to Meet in Heaven</i> , and <i>Finding Hope</i> .

John Bytheway:	<u>00:01:42</u>	He and his late wife, Laurie, are the parents of five children. And he's written so many others. I love one called <i>Don't Leap with the Sheep</i> . I love the way Brother Wilcox just doesn't teach the scriptures but teaches what the scriptures teach and he has helped me so much. I loved going to Timeout for Women, not so I could talk, so that I could listen to Brother Wilcox's talks. And thank you for your influence on me personally and on so many and welcome to followHIM today.
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:02:12</u>	Well, thank you. I'm really happy to be here.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:02:14</u>	I can't think of anyone who has had as much of an impact on my own teaching. I guess teenagers would say we're fangirling, John?
John Bytheway:	<u>00:02:25</u>	Yeah.
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:02:25</u>	I remember what I told you. It took the father seven words to introduce the Savior.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:02:29</u>	And it took us-
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:02:32</u>	I feel bad when it takes more than seven to introduce me.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:02:35</u>	And it took us a little bit more.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:02:37</u>	Yeah.
John Bytheway:	<u>00:02:38</u>	I prefer, "Here's Johnny," for me.
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:02:40</u>	That's where we go.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:02:42</u>	All right. Well, let's jump into our week's lesson, Brother Wilcox. We're studying Sections 64 through 66 of the Doctrine and Covenants. They're all received in September and October of 1831. Joseph Smith and many other missionaries have returned from a long journey to Missouri. Let's back up as far as you want to of, give the background to what's been happening to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries that leads up to this September 11th section, Section 64.
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:03:16</u>	Well, they've been... I mean, there's not a tremendous amount of historical background that I think you need. We'll do a little bit, but I don't want to go way back as another historical thing for verse one, in particular. The idea of Zion is the dominant feature all through this period of Church History here. They want to build Zion, I'm sure in your previous ones they've talked

about that. Joseph has been out to Missouri for the first time, it's rather a shock to his cultural system. The Missourians are not quite like Boston or New England or even Kirtland and so it is a bit of a shock.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:03:53 And they walked, Ezra Booth is mentioned in Section 64, a little a sideline about that that I get a kick out probably because I was raised on a ranch, the idea of walking and all that way. If you're in England or you're going to take a stroll with words worth great, but this is American and in America we ride horses. And Ezra Booth in particular was not too happy with the fact that he had to walk. Now, they probably walk so they could preach the gospel, but he's a little bit peeved and he's going to... A part of the background of seeking occasion against Joseph is maybe for something as simple and inconsequential as having to walk instead of riding a horse.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:04:41 So he's back in Kirtland now after the Missouri trip. They've dedicated the land, they've dedicated the temple, they're back in Kirtland. He's going to repick up retranslation of the Bible. That's basically Section 64. 66, we're going to be introduced to William Earl McLellan who is going to be one of the early Twelve Apostles. He's not going to have a long history in the Church who become disaffected in Missouri and wander around for a while and never return. But there are some things that are said to him also. That's the immediate context of it. I think there's a broader context we can look at when we start into verse one.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:05:30 Let me explain what these verses mean, and this is Joseph Smith saying, "I'm going to correct the Bible." Now, it's not enough that he is going to say, "By the way, I'm going to give you additional scripture. I'm going to go to the one you've already got and I'm going to amend it and change it." It's a tremendous thing, but I think the most important element of the retranslation of the Bible that he'll work on for a while for a number of years is that it will become the catalyst for other revelation, like Section 76, the most important example of that. Where we are taught in that in our own relevancy for our own lives that the scriptures are one of the major catalyst for personal or private revelation. And that's what's going to happen in Joseph Smith's life with he and Sidney Rigdon going through this.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:06:30 But for me, it is not so much some of the changes that he makes or clarifications that he adds, the Pearl of Great Price, Book of Moses is the beginning of that and then that is tremendous. It is just the audacity of this farm boy having the desire, the... Yeah, I don't know any other better word than an audacity to say, "Let

me fix this for you. Let me tell you what Jesus and Paul really meant." Okay?

- Hank Smith: 00:07:08 Yeah, we had Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat here and he basically said there is no historian who takes Joseph Smith seriously who would say he didn't believe he was a prophet.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:07:20 Right.
- Hank Smith: 00:07:21 Yeah. He did have the audacity like you're talking about, he believed in his calling. Yeah, he was.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:07:28 And he had the audacity to do a lot of other things too, but this is certainly one.
- John Bytheway: 00:07:33 He's a kid, we keep forgetting that.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:07:36 Yeah, early '20s. And some of
- John Bytheway: 00:07:37 And some of the guys that he's got surrounding him are a lot more educated than he is. And I just think of, well, how interesting for them to be teachers and as store owners and things to come around Joseph and then now, wait, where are you from and then to accept him as a prophet. I love what it must have taken for them to do that.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:07:59 Yeah. There was a lot of humility in some of them. William McLellin will be one who never quite gets to the point Brigham Young gets to, or Heber C. Kimball gets to. And a lot of times the most trouble with Joseph in the early days were those who thought they knew more. Pride is a very difficult thing to deal with. There is pride and wealth. I think pride in learning is a more dangerous one. If I had to pick what's the most dangerous pride, ironically maybe for some it would be pride in goodness, that we call self-righteousness. So probably easier to get rid of pride of wealth or pride of learning but pride in goodness can be a real, real challenge. And some of the early men will face that, they will face that.
- John Bytheway: 00:09:07 Thanks for that. That was very helpful. I think as Latter-day Saints we might not quite understand the relationship between the Restoration and the Joseph Smith Translation, we kind of keep them separated like they're two separate projects but they really are woven together.

Hank Smith:	<u>00:09:25</u>	I was thinking of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and his audaciousness in saying, "You've heard it said of old time, but I say..."
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:09:34</u>	Right. Yeah, He's correcting Moses.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:09:37</u>	Well, He's correcting... Who is this? And then to have it at the end, say he taught with authority and not as the scribes. And then to have the JST He taught with authority from God and not with authority from the scribes. And audacious is the word that I've seen used for Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and I hadn't thought, "Yeah, this is..." Here's Joseph Smith saying, "Let me fix that." And I could have rendered that a little plainer. Let me say it this way, but a prophet?
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:10:08</u>	He says that later on.
Hank Smith:	<u>00:10:10</u>	Yeah. Let's get into Section 64. What are some of the things that we see here that stand out to you?
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:10:19</u>	Let me give you just this since we started with a little bit of historical background. I would go all the way back to the First Vision. If you asked somebody, what is the very first command, counsel suggestion, whatever word you want to use of the Restoration and who gave it? And it's a two-word command, "Hear Him," given in the Sacred Grove by the Father Himself. And so I think it is that's such an important word and it's all through the Doctrine and Covenants. You see in many, many sections the whole Doctrine and Covenants begins with, "Hearken ye." Listen. So here it is in verse one, "Behold, thus sayeth the Lord, your God unto, O, ye elders of my church. Hearken, ye and hear and receive my will concerning you."
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:11:16</u>	Just as a side thought, you hear with your ears and he didn't say read. I'm just doing this as a suggestion to people. If they want to maybe do something very easy to get a little more out of their study, it is to take that maybe a little more literally. Normally we read and we engage our eyes on our mind, but when you hear you're engaging your ear. Now, I know I'm putting a little more into this and probably there but I sometimes say to students, scriptures originally were meant to be oral, to be read out loud, to be heard, you listened to it. And I say the tongue and the ear knows things that the eye and the mind doesn't know.
Dr. S. Michael ...:	<u>00:12:16</u>	When I read the Doctrine and Covenants, or any scripture, I try inasmuch as I can, to read it out loud. Or even in a whisper I like

to hear it, I like to hear the Lord's words sounding in my ear. The tongue will put tone in that the eyes don't see, and tone in scriptures is a very important thing. I love the idea of here actually hearing, engaging eyes, mind, tongue, ear. I'm much more likely to pick up little nuances that I might not get.

- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:12:53 Now, if I go back to the Sacred Grove, what was the context of that first "Hear Him?" And in that context, the reason I bring that up is that it fits Section 64 so perfectly . . . because of Section 64 among other things, but at least it's initial thing and it's . . . I think the most important thing has to do with forgiveness. So what is it that that 14-year-old boy wanted in the Sacred Grove that morning when he first heard the Father say, "Hear him." Give the initial command and counsel of the Restoration?"
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:13:28 We have to go to the 1832 and the 1835 Accounts, which I wish we had canonized right alongside the 1838. The 1838 is the most literarily perfect. But the 1832 and the 1835 tell us Joseph wanted mercy. He said, "I felt convicted of my sins. I mourned for my sins." That this is New England, this is Calvinistic territory. This is a guilt on people worse than Latter-day Saints put on themselves. And Joseph wants forgiveness and mercy. The reason he wants to know which church to join is so he can know how to be saved, and know how to get mercy.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:14:14 Now, if you put that into context, I love the boy in the Grove more than the man of Nauvoo, I just will tell you. It's the boy bewildered in the Grove wanting forgiveness that strikes me so deeply. And he's praying and here comes the Father and what does He say? "Joseph." Remember what does Joseph want? Forgiveness. "Joseph, this is my Beloved Son. Hear Him." And what are the very first words Jesus says to Joseph? "Joseph, my son, thy sin I've forgiven thee."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:15:01 I go to the Sacred Grove in my mind every day of my life and offer that same prayer, and all of us do in a sense. And every day of my life the restoration begins anew for me and all of us when the Father again comes into my soul and my mind and says, "Michael, this is my Beloved Son. Hear Him." And what do we hear Jesus say to us? "Michael, my son, John, my son, Hank, my son, thy sins I've forgiven thee." That is the greatest Hear Him of all Hear Hims. And we get it over and over again in the Doctrine and Covenants. In Section 64 it's like he's saying, "Remember what I taught you clear back in 1820 spring? Let me teach it here and I'm going to broaden it and widen it because I want you to do that with other people. "This is my will concerning you."

- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:16:10 That's the great hear him that I really love about this section and how it begins because we all need it and we need it every day. So I can go to the Doctrine and Covenants and learn Doctrine and Covenants. I can learn the ideas behind it, ordinances. I can look at history, but what I really want to pull out of every section is the voice behind the words. I want to know the Revealer. And the Doctrine and Covenants is a book about forgiveness. I call it the forgiving book of the Doctrine and Covenants. Everybody is getting forgiven all the time in this book. Constantly, they're being forgiven. And Section 64 is what we do.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:17:12 And so he starts out, verse 2, "Verily I'm saying to you I will that ye should overcome the world." Now, notice what we're learning about the Revealer. It's Jesus and the Father I want to find in these sections. "I want you to overcome the world." I say, "I want to overcome it too, Lord." I will have compassion upon them." You. I wish for a compassionate God. "There are those among you who have sinned." And then look at that word, it's such a lovely word. We're going to see it again. "But verily, I say unto you. Truly ,I say unto you this once."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:17:57 Now, it's not that He's forgiving just once, it's once again. Okay, that's the idea. I'm going to tell you again, I've been telling you if you underline every time I say I don't condemn you and I forgive you in the Doctrine and Covenants you're going to see a lot of this theme. "I'm telling you once again, for mine own glory." What is His glory? His glory is His forgiving heart. "And for the salvation of your souls, I have forgiven you your sins."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:18:32 "I will be merciful unto you." Notice that. "I will have compassion, I have forgiven, I will be merciful." Those are the key ideas in those first verses. "I have given you the kingdom and the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, Jr." Poor Joseph, he's always on the receiving end of criticism and they're going to criticize him here. They haven't criticized him. Even simply as Ezra Booth saying, "I want to ride my horse to Missouri." There is some criticism. This is one of the finest places I know of to use as an answer to those who want to go back in Church History and find problems with Joseph Smith.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:19:25 Notice what he says in verse six. "There are those who have great words, for our modern world, sought occasion against him, without cause." Now, I like the without cause because the very next first word verse seven says, "Nevertheless, he has sinned." Okay, sinned. You saw it without cause I'll give you cause. He has sinned and then what's the next word? But know, I already saw that but for everybody else, okay? He's going to

give the example. "I forgive you your sins." I'll admit Joseph's not the most perfect, he's made mistakes. We all make mistakes. He has sinned but truly, verily I say unto you, I, the Lord forgive sins unto those who confess them before me." They admit.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:20:28 I go to the Father, I tell him I've done something wrong and ask forgiveness. Sometimes I say, "What do you have to do to be forgiven of your sins?" And especially in the Doctrine and Covenants class I'm going to usually get a doctrinal answer. "To be forgiven of your sins you have to repent." And I said, "That's a perfectly good doctrinal answer, but it's usually not the answer that the Revealer is going to give you, certainly not in the Doctrine of Covenants, certainly not in the New Testament." He's going to give you two other things and we get them both right here.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:21:09 Number one, what do I have to do to be forgiven of my sins? Ask, just ask, it's that simple. And the second thing, be willing to forgive others. There's a difference... I don't mean to monopolize everything here. There's a difference between the major problem humanity faces in Eastern religions and in Western religions. So if you go into the Eastern religion:, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, especially Buddhism--religions out of India. The problem with that religion has to solve, the problem it has to solve is suffering. That's the problem. Problem is human suffering. The answer to suffering is compassion--compassion, and selflessness. That's the answer. Part of it is I can't hurt, if I'm not thinking of me.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:22:12 The problem in Western religions, particularly Christianity but also in Islam and to a certain extent in Judaism, but certainly in Christianity the problem is sin not suffering. It's sin. Human weaknesses, we don't like the word sin anymore. We like weaknesses and mistakes and we've got other kinds of words for sin. And what is the solution to sin? Forgiveness, mercy, that's what Jesus came. That's His whole message: forgiveness and mercy. I will make you "at one." We use the word atonement. We probably use the word atonement too much. We're going to wear it out to where it doesn't mean as much anymore. Originally it meant the conclusion that Jesus was going to bring us to, we're going to be at one with the Father and each other.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:23:10 And he's concerned about us being "at one" with each other and not just with God. You'll see this in Section 64. So sin is the problem, forgiveness is the answer. But unfortunately in the world we live in, and particularly... I don't want to speak about anybody other's nation, I can speak about my own, but particularly in America the answer we are giving now to a

human weakness, failings, foibles, insensitivities and sin, the answer we give is outrage. Jesus tried not forgiveness, not mercy, not empathy, not compassion, but outrage.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:24:05 Now, there are some things that are done that we need to be outraged about, but the solution the Savior is always giving is forgiveness, understanding. So He asked the question in the New Testament. He refers to it, "My disciples in days of old," there's that phrase again, "Sought occasion." That's Isaiah's make a man an offender for a word, sought occasion. We live in a seeking-occasion world, unfortunately. And so we asked the question. I've been fascinated by the questions at Jesus lately and I assume that they're all directed to me. And one of them is, "Why beholdest thou the mote in thy brother's eye?" I answered Jesus saying, "It's there." And Jesus asked me a second question. The second question He asks is, "I know it's there, why are you looking at it?"

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:25:10 And the idea is that there are probably a lot of other things that you can look at. So what are they looking at at Joseph? Are they looking at this marvelous boy, this man, this human being who is going to give so much goodness and truth and beauty into the world but who's human like all of us? They're seeking occasion, they're looking for the moats in him. And you can always find them. And the Lord is saying, "Why are you doing that? Does that make you feel better about yourself to seek occasion in other people, to look at their failings and faults?" And I have these private conversations with God and I have to say, well, the Lord, to be honest, yeah, it does kind of make me feel better about myself to look at the moats in other people and to seek occasion against him or to make him an offender for a word.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:26:05 Another story in the New Testament, Mary comes to wash Jesus' feet before the last week of His life. And how has that act of devotion and sweetness reciprocated by everybody but Jesus? We read these words and some of them disciples, apostles, were moved with indignation. There's a phrase I can attach to my world, we live in a moved with indignation world. And they murmured against her. And so Jesus asks the question, "Why trouble, ye her? She's doing the best she can, she did what she could. She's done a good thing, why are you troubling her?"

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:27:03 And I just look at those, all those phrases. I love Section 64, it really makes me have to dig into my own life. Am I a "seeking occasion" against other people? Am I answering human weaknesses and failings and injustices with outrage or with forgiveness? Especially when they ask for it or apologize or admit it? Am I filled with indignation and murmuring against

people? I don't want to be part of the seeking occasion, moat-picking, murmuring, seeking indignation, outrage, and the world of my time. And I have to stop myself because it's so easy to get there whether we're talking political arenas, or my . . . you might even say, having things about this and something as simple as wearing a mask or not wearing a mask.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:28:10

Here is this revealer behind the Revealer that we're starting to understand something. "I forgave you," verses one through four. "Would you please forgive Joseph? We can find problems in his life." I have a rule, when I look at people in history. I can't always keep it as well as I can and it's not going to work for the Hitlers and Stalin's of life, but it's certainly going to work for the Founding Fathers or Joseph Smith. So I have a rule that I just try to apply. Just like everybody I have my problems with applying my own rules. Shakespeare once wrote, "I would rather preach 20 sermons than live one sermon I preach." I feel the same. But what I really try hard to keep this rule, which is, "Celebrate the good and forgive everything else," because that's what I want people to do with me. And since in the first few verses, that's what he did with everybody. He's going to do it later, specifically with Isaac Morley and Edward Partridge.

John Bytheway: 00:29:24

And like you said, Mike, it's going to be tough with some characters from history, right?

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:29:28

It is, yeah. I can't do it with Stalin and Hitler, I can't do it. There are some injustices and problems that rightly I suppose our sense of outrage would be there, but not the way we have it. The Buddhist said, "You can't end hatred by hatred. You can't end anger by anger. You can only, and hatred by love." That's the Savior, it's the spirit of Section 64 here. And so he says, "My disciples in days of old sought occasion against one another, and forgave not one another in their hearts." In their hearts that forgiveness is hard, especially deep hurts. And sometimes I have to go to the Lord and with 64 in my brain, especially when He's going to say, "You ought to forgive one another. He that forgiveth not his brother his trespass standeth condemned before the Lord. There remaineth the name, the greater sin."

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:30:34

It's as though I don't have enough sins. Now, if I can't forgive I got another one I got to try and repent for, so it's a challenge. I go to the Lord sometimes and say about some of the deep things. "Lord, I know what you want me to do. I know I want to forgive, I don't want to fill my soul with bitterness. I don't want to.." The word He's going to use later on is perish, we'll get to that in a second. "I don't want to perish because I can't forgive, because I'm obsessed with moat-picking and murmuring and

seeking occasion. I have a hurt. I'll give you what I can, I will forget. I will not feed it, I won't think about it. Because if I think about it hurts and I get angry."

- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:31:28 And He has always accepted that from me, always has He accepted that from me. Sometimes people say, "I can forgive but I won't forget." I say, "I think that's backwards. I think sometimes we say, "I can forget. I may not be able to forgive but I can forget and I can stop seeking occasion and trying to feed it." It's just such a beautiful place. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive that." A part of me says, "Well, how come you get to a different standard than I do?" But of you it is required to forgive all men. Now, part of me can say, "Well, that's because He's a perfect judge He knows what He's doing."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:32:16 I'm not sure that's how I want to read that 10th verse. I think I want to read it as maybe, "Lord, how come you're forgiving all these people, I don't think you should be forgiving all these people. "And I think that's the meaning of. "I, the Lord will forgive whom I will forgive." If I want to forgive Joseph I'll forgive him, can you do that too? I've forgiven him, What's your problem? And I think that's true today also when we look back in history and criticize him and pick out his faults, I just can hear the Lord say, "I forgave him. How come you... What's your problem? I forgive you, I forgive him, I forgive everybody."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:32:55 You want to say in your hearts, "Let God judge between me," put it in His hands and reward thee according to thy deeds. Now we don't want them... That could be a little bit. Well, Lord, he's done me wrong so you take care of him, I'm sure you can handle him better than I can. I remember a time that I had a disagreement with a brother in the Church over what Thoreau would call, "mosquito wings and nutshells" that get on the railroad tracks of our lives. What John Taylor called, "Baby toys."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:33:41 So, I apologized and I thought I had fixed it, but I hadn't and found out that other people had been told about the disagreement. It got bigger and bigger and the little mole hill of a mosquito wing became a great big 747. And I'm upset. And I'm lying in bed at night and the voice of the Lord comes and says, "Michael, help your brother get the anger out of his heart." And I said, "Lord, already apologized, he didn't accept it. He blew it up. He knows the scripture as well as I am, we're supposed to keep these things to ourselves, you're not supposed to spread it all over the world. Half an hour later I'm calling down, "Michael, help your brother get the anger out of his heart."

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:34:35 And after hearing that sometimes God has to tell me to do something more than once and after about the fifth or sixth time when I'm saying, "Lord, I already [inaudible] why don't you tell him to do that?" Help your brother get the anger out of his heart. So I got up, wrote a letter. And as soon as I picked that pen up and began to write, the softness came and I could write a sincere, deeply, deeply consoling, remove anger letter which won me my brother back.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:35:18 And so, even though I say, "It's between me and thee, the Lord," is going to always come back and say, "Are you leaving it to me? Okay, this is what I want you to do, we don't want contention. We want you to stop seeking the occasion. And I'm the great example Jesus is saying, "Because you just keep going through this Doctrine and Covenants you're going to see me forgiving everybody all the time." Then he does some specifics. He mentions Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley who were missionary companions who are supposed to go out to Missouri. They sought evil in their hearts. Here's another phrase to add, "To seek occasion against one another." They sought evil in there. They're looking for problems in other people.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:36:11 "I withheld my spirit. They condemn for evil the thing that... There was no evil. "Nevertheless," oh, I love his neverthelesses and his butts. Lots of wonderful butts and neverthelesses. Nevertheless, I have forgiven my servant Isaac Morley." Now I always say, "What about Ezra Booth?" Well, Ezra Booth wasn't very repentant. He wasn't asking for it and he's going to be part of the cause of the mob that'll tar Joseph Smith at Hiram shortly after this. He goes to Edward Partridge. He has sinned in verse 17, "Satan seeks to destroy his soul."

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:36:57 I would say, "How is Satan seeking to destroy his soul?" I would say in the context of 64 it is by getting him to seek occasion and seek evil and murmur and criticize and moat-pic. Because if he can get us to do that he will destroy what they're trying to build. What are they trying to build? Zion. What is Zion? One heart.

John Bytheway: 00:37:25 One mind.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:37:26 Yeah. That can't be one heart and one mind if I'm seeking occasion and looking for evil in other people and murmuring and being filled with indignation and responding with every problem with outrage. So he then forgives Ezra. I've gone on long enough-

Hank Smith: 00:37:42 No, no, no. This is wonderful. I want to ask you, if you see a little bit of Matthew 18 in this section so far with the parable of the

unforgiving servant, I remember it hit me when you said, "What do you do to seek forgiveness? Ask?" And in this parable, those of our listeners who can't remember it, it's a parable about a man who owes a lord, a debtor or someone who has given him a loan. He owes him 10,000 talents which is a...

- John Bytheway: 00:38:15 National debt number.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:38:17 Even the government, only the government owes more.
- Hank Smith: 00:38:22 Yeah. There's very few people that are in that much debt. He says, "Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all." The lord of the servant is moved with compassion, and forgave him the debt. Now, if you've stopped the parable right there it's a beautiful parable about incredible forgiveness of God. But the parable continues that this same servant went out, found one of his fellow servants that owed him 100 pence, which is, I think, a small amount comparatively to the 10,000 talents. The fellow servant falls down at his feet, says the exact same thing, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all." He would not, he cast him into prison. The Lord hears about it and he says, "You wicked servant." And this is the part I wanted to bring up because you said it, Mike. "I forgave thee all that debt because you asked."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:39:12 That's it, you asked.
- John Bytheway: 00:39:14 Because you asked.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:39:15 You asked.
- John Bytheway: 00:39:15 And then he says in verse 33, "Should you not have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? To me there's a little bit of that language here in Section 64. I was just wondering what you thought about that?"
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:39:30 Yeah. It's the same idea you get in that parable, that's a wonderful linkage. In the parable there are two things you have to do to be forgiven. You have to ask. "I forgave you, why? Because you asked. Shouldest thou not have had compassion?" It's another question, "Shouldest thou not have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" And Section 64 is saying the same thing. "I forgave you." I forgave you, first few verses. Joseph's got his problems like everybody. "And you're seeking occasion and you're not forgiving and you're not forgiving one another, my disciples of old did it. I know this is a

hard thing I'm asking of you." It's the big answer to Western religion, I came to give you.

- Hank Smith: 00:40:17 I always point out to my students that the very first time he calls him wicked is not when he owes, it's not when he can't pay, it's not any of that. The first time he calls him wicked is at the very end of the parable when he would not forgive, when he went after the other servant. Right?
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:40:35 Yeah. That's correct. Sometimes members of the Church wonder if they've been forgiven, that's a question a lot of people have, especially if you've done what Isaiah calls, "Crimson sins." Have I been forgiven? And I would just ask people two questions, "Have you asked for it?" Yes. "Sincerely asked for it?" Yes. You have been forgiven. Second, "Have you forgiven others? Is there anybody still in debt to you that you haven't removed the debt? "And if they say there is, "I can't think of anybody that still owes me something." And I said, "Then you walk away, you've been forgiven."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:41:30 We do the steps of repentance and forgiveness and we make it really complicated. And there are some things, and he is in Section 64, we didn't go to it. He doesn't say, "Somebody is not going to repent and you may have to do something church-wise for them either way." He says, "Commandment or revelation. Either you follow the handbook or I'll inspire you how to handle the particular situation." There are things that we do. We have confession and restitution. We do all the Rs, but I'm not sure I ever felt like forgiving somebody or repenting due to a lesson on the steps of repentance.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:42:14 I think the gospel is simple and I think Section 64 is trying to make it simple as He does in that parable. "You want to be forgiven?" "I do want to be forgiven." I want to hear him say, "Michael, thy sins I've forgiven thee. Then ask, just ask, and forgive others." And then you'll know in your heart, if I've asked and I've forgiven others I'm forgiven. Now, I still do it because I still do what I can for, to make up and I try not to do it again, but that's what the seven times 70 is for because I'm going to do it again and again and again, maybe.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:43:00 I also love the parable because we worship what I call a 10,000 talent-forgiving God. He can forgive 10,000 talent sins, and He can forgive them easily. You sense that even in Section 66, we're not there, we may never get there. But when he's talking to William McLellin and he says, "You're clean but not all." He says, "You've got some problems." And then the very next verse he says, "But you're still called and I want you to go out and preach.

And by the way, I hear you've had a little trouble with adultery, a desire, a temptation you had some problem with, but you're still called, you're still going to teach."

- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:43:50 I hate to call God a casual forgiver because sometimes we aren't casual forgivers and He does say, "There's a little justice here. You might have to take the membership of somebody away." You're not going to do it, He says because you don't forgive him or because you don't have compassion. But because I have to think of the reputation of the Church and the other members we can't have wolf among wolves on my sheep. He does have a little justice in there. But maybe casual forgiver isn't the right phrase. We worship a delightful forgiver, He likes to do it, He delights in it. Ironically, forgiveness blesses both the giver and the receiver. We certainly see that within ourselves. I think we see it with Jesus also. He likes to do it. It blesses Him to forgive.
- Hank Smith: 00:45:13 I had been listening to this section in my car and it was fun just on that first page because I'm still using pages, how many times I heard forgive, forgiveness, and mercy. And so I'm so glad we're talking about this. And it reminds me of, there's a scripture that I've always thought, look, Alma and Amulek are teaching the Zoramites that God will have a Son. And so over and over they're quoting Zenos and Zenock. You have been forgiven because of his Son and trying to tell them that their understanding of the nature of the Godhead is a little messed up.
- Hank Smith: 00:45:54 And then I read Alma 33:16 once and went, "Oh, don't miss that point because of the other point that's in here." And I'm not looking at it but I think I've got it pretty close. "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people because they will not understand thy mercies, which thou hast bestowed upon them, because of thy Son." And I thought, "Wow, don't miss that." It's not that they cannot but they will not understand. And as a Bishop what you just brought up, people that are worried and won't forgive themselves. "Have I been forgiven and can I forgive myself?" Oh, I just love that verse. "They will not understand thy mercies," and what a wonderful thing to take time and study here.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:43 Beautiful.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:46:43 Yeah. People in the Church sometimes... I know the kind very well, I can be one of myself, are what I call Pink People. Pink People. Isaiah says, "Though, your sins be scarlet I'll make them white as snow. If they be crimson, I'll make them white as wool." And I think sometimes we read it, "If you have scarlet sins or crimson sins, with a lot of repenting on your part and a lot of

atonement on my part I can make you a light shade of pink. I'm going to get you pink. You're never going to be quite as white as those snow people over there, they never did the big sins, but I'll get you pink." And I think that that is why I love the Doctrine and Covenants and how forgiving it is.

John Bytheway: 00:47:36

Wow, wow.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:47:37

I love the First Vision. I mean, Joseph didn't do any great sins but we worship a really forgiving God. And he tells Sydney Gilbert, if I get back just a little bit, let me finish this off. I'll shoot us to another spot here. In verse 18 and 19, "Now Sydney, you're going back out to Zion, so that which he has seen and heard may be made known unto my disciples. You tell him to go out and tell them what he just heard that they perish not and for this cause have I spoken the things. I've told you all this about me about you. I've given you these counsels so you don't perish. You don't perish in bitterness and recrimination against one another, in anger and seeking occasion and filled with indignation and outrage. You will be merciful."

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:48:54

Now again, I know that's hard. If I just jumped over to verse 32. Verse 32, "All things must come to pass in their time." Now, that's a specific reference here to obtaining an inheritance in the land of Zion. In a Church History perspective, if we're just looking at what this means, I'm going to apply it to myself but a lot of people wanted to go out to Zion right away. In fact, that's going to cause part of the problems in Missouri, that it was supposed to be controlled, you were called to go out. We don't want a whole lot out there all at once. It's, people are going to go out and antagonize the Missourians, there's going to be problems.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:49:39

He says in the section, "I want to have a strong hold here for at least five years and there'll be in Kirtland another five years. And then if you want to go out to Zion I'm going to hold you guilty." That's verse 22. So everybody can't go rushing out to Zion right now though a lot of them want to. Like I said that's going to cause some problems later on in Missouri. You're going to get your inheritance in time. So that's the background of it. But I want to take verse 32, and my inheritance, hopefully with my Father in Heaven sometime in a future world.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:50:19

And I get impatient with myself. Do you ever get impatient with yourself? I get impatient with myself. I can be frustrated with myself. I believe in a 10,000 talent-forgiving, white like snow, not pink God for everybody else but me. And so I can hear the Lord say, "As I am trying to build my character." I'm trying to be a

Christ-like person. I want to think and love, and pray and obey, and forgive and be kind just like Jesus. That's what I want. And He says, "Michael, what I want is your heart." He says that, verse 22. "I, the Lord, require the heart. What I want is your heart."

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:51:18 And I can see, and I hope everybody that's listening who's really trying, obedience isn't perfection, obedience is trying. I want your heart, I can see, I have your heart, Mike. And so I'm telling you, as you try to perfect yourself, as you try to be as merciful as I am, as you try to stop seeking occasion, all things must come to pass in their time. It takes time. "Wherefore be not weary." He's just so tender. "Be not weary in well-doing. You are laying the foundation of a great work." I know He's talking about Zion but I'm talking about me. I'm trying to talk about the great work of trying to make the soul of Michael Wilcox, just like the soul of Jesus of Nazareth.

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:52:21 It'll come in time, Mike. You'll get there. I know I've got your heart and out of small things proceedeth that which is great. You just do those little day by day acts of goodness and kindness that nobody is going to see, that nobody is going to celebrate, but I notice it because I am a God who watches small things. I'm a Small Things God. By that I mean I know sparrows fall and I know the little sparrows of your life. "Out of small things, proceedeth that which is great." And then you reiterate, "The Lord requires the heart and willing mind, and the willing, and obedient shall eat the good of the land, in these last days." Okay?

Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:53:20 I'm not a perfect person, far from it. But I want to be, and God knows He has my heart, that's one thing God knows. He's got my heart and my mind. So what do I get from Him? I get forgiveness, I get mercy. I get, don't give up, you're laying the foundation and you'll get there. We're going to get you there. He does that time and time again. "You are little children, you don't understand all that God has prepared. But be of good cheer, I'll lead you along." That's Section 78. All those little tender moments that you see in the Doctrine and Covenants from time to time when He just tries to help us. Just hold on here. And 64 He's dealing with one that's a big challenge for all of us. We got to stop seeking occasion.

John Bytheway: 00:54:22 I have a thought here from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. This is in the April, 2012 General Conference. He was actually talking about a different parable in the New Testament, The Laborers in the Vineyard. He says this parable like all parables is not really about laborers or wages any more than the others are about sheep and goats. This is a story about God's goodness, His patience

and forgiveness and the atonement of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is a story about generosity and compassion, it is a story about grace.

- John Bytheway: [00:54:57](#) And then I wanted you to hear this thought because it goes along with what you've said, Mike, about the delightful forgiver. It underscores the thought I heard many years ago that surely the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don't expect it and often feel they don't deserve it. That's just the thrill of being merciful.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: [00:55:24](#) I think one of the reasons we as members of the Church love listening to Elder Holland is there is a tenderness in that man's heart. He's an Apostle. An apostle has to give the message of the Savior: the good news, the gospel. And his heart for me is the message, just listening. There's such a tenderness in Elder Holland and in so many of them. An Apostle has to reflect what Jesus was, "What manner I want you to be." He says to the 12, "Even as I am," and that means just as forgiving.
- Hank Smith: [00:56:11](#) I think one of the things I love about verse 34, "The heart and a willing mind." And I one day just did a search on the word willing and was struck with how the Lord is able. And it doesn't say an able mind. We can be willing though. When in 2 Nephi it says, "I am able to do my work." And God is able, we are weak, but thou art able." it's that thing but we can be willing. And so those words give me some hope to keep trying and be willing. I love what you said, obedience isn't perfection, obedience is trying and I'm willing to keep trying. That word in the sacrament prayers has blessed me a lot. I'm going to keep being willing to do those things. And the Lord is so merciful He says, "Come back next week and we'll make this covenant again."
- John Bytheway: [00:57:11](#) You said that Latter-day Saints sometimes heap guilt upon themselves. Where do you think that comes from? Why do we do that? I've seen that in my own life, I've seen it in my family, so we heap the guilt upon ourselves. And you said Joseph Smith comes from a Calvinistic society which is even worse than that. Where does that come from?
- Dr. S. Michael ...: [00:57:32](#) Well, we set the bar high in our lives and wherever you have a high expectation of yourself and you don't meet it, and I have to remind myself that sometimes, that the great message of Christianity in the Savior's life was to learn to love the Father and to trust Him. But we do have that ingrained, somewhat that fear of sin has eclipsed our love of God, our ability to feel the love of God. I think another problem that has developed in

Christianity is that being right became more important than being good.

- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:58:27 And so we argue about all kinds of things. That throws us in Section 66 a little bit also when the Lord says to William Earl McLellin, "Reason with people." And all through the Doctrine and Covenants He's saying, "Don't revile, don't argue, don't listen at contention. This is not of me. It's not about always being right, it's about being good." There's something that comes from . . . out of Islam, out of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad that comfort me somewhat in this perfectionism guilt complex that a lot of Latter-day Saints have. He said, "Good deeds weigh 10 times more than bad deeds." And we say, "Why?" And the answer is because bad deeds, I can forgive and they're gone, but your good deeds are always there. I never forgive them, they're always there.
- Hank Smith: 00:59:33 I think my favorite Muhammad quote or Qur'an quote that gives me some hope is, "He deserves paradise who makes his companions laugh."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 00:59:45 Yeah. There's a lot in Islam that's really beautiful. There's a point in the Divine Comedy, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, this great masterpiece of Italian literature. When he's leaving Purgatory he takes his journey through Hell . . . Purgatory, and he's going into Paradise. And the last thing he does as he leaves Purgatory, now he's preparing to go into the presence of God. And there are two rivers he wades through and drinks from. The first river comes from Greek mythology, it's Lethe, which is the river of forgetfulness. And when he drinks from the River Lethe he forgets all his sins. All the negatives of his life, he forgets them.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 01:00:45 Then he goes to a river that Dante invents, it's called the river of Eunoe, not you know, but E-U-N-O-E, and it means "good memory or good mind," and he drinks from that one. And every good thing he ever did in his life, all the good, all the positives, he remembers. So now all sins, all negatives, all mistakes, forgotten, and all good remembered. He is prepared now to enter into the presence of God. There are times I pray... I sometimes feel poets know things that maybe even prophets don't know occasionally. There are times I pray, "Lord, please let Dante be right." I know it's in a poem. I know, but it's great literature. I long to drink from those rivers. We can't go moaning through all eternity remembering the mistakes of our past, sooner or later we get a drink out of that river.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: 01:02:07 One of the most tender things, and I'll hope I can tell it. When my wife was dying of cancer towards the end. Now, my wife was

a typical Latter-day Saint woman. And a response to your question, why is it that we carry so much guilt and perfectionism? She had it. And as she was dying she said to me one time, she looked up at me, bright eyes and a look of serenity and peace on her face. And she said, "For the first time I can remember. I don't feel any guilt, I don't feel any shame." I can't tell you what that meant for me. She's about to go into God's presence and a baptism of cleansing takes place at that veil. And she drinks from Dante's rivers and goes into God's presence. All the moats, all the beams, all the negatives, all the regrets gone.

- Dr. S. Michael ...: [01:03:27](#) There's a deep, deep, deep part of me that believes firmly that we're going to have something like that. The closest is Alma, the Younger, who says, "I could remember my..." Guys, if I could edit that, I'd love to save my sins no more. But I guess we need to remember some of our mistakes so we can learn from them. But he said, "I could remember my pains no more."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: [01:04:00](#) And I think if we... If I try and throw us back into Section 64, I think if we can understand the mercy and the love, the goodness of Jesus and our Father, now we become what He wants Zion to be. They're just starting out Zion. They want to create this city, New Jerusalem out in the wilderness. And so I go to verse 37. "I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill or in a high place to judge the nations." Now, that's a metaphor. That's "likes" in there, let's not take this too literally, this is a metaphoric language.
- Dr. S. Michael ...: [01:04:50](#) And judge in this case means "to minister to." Now, we're going to kill that word in the Church too. We're going to use that word so much there's not going to be any value anymore. It means to tend, to care for. People go up to see the judge because they're going to get justice and peace and goodness from him. It's not a harsh, our word judge, we tend to read harshly, "Zion isn't going to be harsh on the world, condemn the world." I want you to be up on that hill, on that high place to judge the nation." Skip a little bit. Verse 41, "I say unto you, Zion shall flourish and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her."
- Dr. S. Michael ...: [01:05:38](#) Well, what is the glory of the Lord? Well, He said earlier, "I forgive you." Remember, clear back in verse 3, "I forgive you for my own glory." And one of the greatest glories of the Lord is His mercy, His love, His compassion, His forgiving heart. "Zion shall flourish and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her. And she shall be an ensign under the people, and there shall come unto her, out of every nation, under heaven." Because what will they

find in that judge on the hill, in that city on the hill? They will find peace, and goodness, and love, and forgiveness, and mercy.

Hank Smith:

01:06:34

Please join us for Part II of this podcast.