



Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions

Part 1:

What do we want most? Dr. Steven Harper examines Doctrine and Covenants 18 the infinite math equation that explains the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Part 2:

Dr. Harper continues to explore Doctrine and Covenants 18, the worth of souls, and the love of Jesus Christ.

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Biographical Information:

Steven C. Harper is a covenant son of God who strives to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. His primary work is to teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that help students develop resilient faith in, and become lifelong disciples of, the Savior.

He is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University, editor in chief of BYU Studies, and executive editor of The Wilford Woodruff Papers. From 2012 to 2018 he was the managing historian and a general editor of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. From 2002-2012 he was a volume editor of The Joseph Smith Papers.

Professor Harper is married to sculptor Jennifer Sebring. They graduated from BYU in 1994, she in art education and he in history. He earned an MA in American history from Utah State University, where his thesis analyzed determinants of conversion to the restored gospel in the 1830s. He published chapters of his thesis as articles in the *Journal of Mormon History* and *Religion and American Culture* that were awarded by the Mormon History Association with the T. Edgar Lyon Award for best article of the year and the Juanita Brooks Award for best graduate student paper. He earned a PhD in early American history from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he was Lawrence Henry Gipson Dissertation Fellow.

Professor Harper joined the religion and history faculties at BYU Hawaii in 2000 and the Church history and doctrine faculty at BYU in 2002. He taught at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 2011-

2012. He is the recipient of research awards including a Gest Fellowship from Haverford College's Quaker Collection, a Mayers Fellowship from the Huntington Library, and the Eliza R. Snow Fellowship from Brigham Young University.

Professor Harper's is the author of books including *Promised Land* (Lehigh University Press, 2006), *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Deseret, 2008, winner of the Harvey B. and Susan Easton Black Award), *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Deseret, 2012), *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2019, winner of the Harvey B. and Susan Easton Black Award and the Smith-Petit Best Book Award), *Let's Talk About the Law of Consecration* (Deseret, 2022), and *Wrestling with the Restoration* (Deseret, 2024). He has published dozens of articles and is currently working on a study of The Doctrine and Covenants to be published in the Guides to Sacred Texts series by Oxford University Press.

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Hank Smith (0:00 - 0:03)

Coming up in this episode on FollowHIM.

Dr. Steven Harper (0:03 - 0:25)

One of the most memorable and transformative experiences of my life happened one day when my companion and I were in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. For some reason, I don't remember or understand, and I haven't documented, we were called on to visit a woman who was in really deep despair.

Hank Smith (0:30 - 0:50)

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith.

I am your host. I am here with my co-host, John Bytheway. And John, I'm going to read this to you.

It is perfect. The worth of a co-host is great in the sight of the host. So, John, thank you for being such a great co-host.

I think your worth is right up there by rubies.

John Bytheway (0:51 - 0:57)

I'm sure that the worth of a great co-host is great. And sadly, you've got me, but here we are.

Hank Smith (0:57 - 1:18)

Yeah, well, you are the host of heaven, John. All right, John, we are joined today by our good friend, Dr. Steve Harper. We are in section 18 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

We get to take it all by itself. One single section today. John, when you think of section 18, you've studied this one before.

What comes to mind? Steve, we're going to ask you the same question.

John Bytheway (1:18 - 1:57)

The one verse that I remember from so many missionary prep lessons was, if your joy should be great

with one soul that you brought unto Christ, how great should be your joy if you should bring many. And that's the one I remember. But there's so much more here.

And, Hank, I have to tell you, a few hours ago, I got so excited that we were going to have Steve Harper on here because my single favorite go-to for backstory on the Doctrine and Covenants sections is making sense of the Doctrine and Covenants by Dr. Steven Harper. Who are we, Hank, that we get to sit with one of the great experts on this period in church history and on the Doctrine and Covenants? So I'm really excited to learn today.

Hank Smith (1:58 - 2:03)

What a blessing. Steve, as you've been looking at section 18 to get ready, what comes to mind? What have you been thinking about?

Dr. Steven Harper (2:03 - 2:29)

I can't think of this section without thinking of one of the most formative experiences of my life, one of the most memorable experiences of my mission, which I'll talk about, but it has to do with remembering that the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. It's certainly one of my top 140 sections in the Doctrine and Covenants. So probably top five, truth be told.

Hank Smith (2:29 - 4:07)

Wow. When you and I were talking about coming on this year, you went to section 18, which kind of surprised me because you are a first vision expert. John, I'm convinced that when Steve goes to the spirit world, Joseph Smith is going to want to learn about the first vision from Steve.

He's going to say, now exactly what did I say then? And you'll be like, well, you actually used this word. Well, Steve, we are grateful that you'd take your time to be with us.

When I think of experts of the Doctrine and Covenants, Steve Harper comes to mind. Section 18, let me read from the Come, Follow Me manual. Says this. "There are many different ways to try to measure a person's worth. Talent, education, wealth, and physical appearance can all affect how we evaluate each other and ourselves.

2:54

But in God's eyes, our worth is a much simpler matter, and it is stated clearly in Doctrine and Covenants 18: 'Remember, the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.'

This simple truth explains so much of what God does and why he does it. Why did he instruct Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to establish the Church of Jesus Christ in our day? Because the worth of souls is great.

Why does he command all men everywhere to repent and send apostles to preach repentance? Because the worth of souls is great. And why did Jesus Christ suffer death in the flesh and the pain of all men?

3:49

Because the worth of souls is great. If even one of these souls chooses to accept the Savior's gift, he rejoices for great is his joy in the soul that repented." Man, just bringing all that languages from section 18, what a beautiful opener.

Steve, with that, do we need to do some background? How do you want to approach section 18?

Dr. Steven Harper (4:10 - 5:12)

Let's do some background. I'm so excited to talk about this section.

This is spectacular. Let's go all the way back to the explanatory introduction. I know you guys have already touched on this, but I just want to remind everybody out there that there's this terrific line in the explanatory introduction of the Doctrine and Covenants.

It comes right at the top of the second page, and it says, "These sacred revelations were received in answer to prayer in times of need, and they came out of real-life situations involving real people." Just like us, when we have a crisis or a dilemma or some real need, we're more inclined, at least I am, to go to God in prayer, to be more willing to seek answers, more willing to believe that God could help me or hope. Certainly that is true for almost all these sections in the Doctrine and Covenants, they come because people have problems or dilemmas or a crisis.

Hank Smith (5:14 - 5:25)

Steve, it seems that in the last, I don't know, 10, 20 years, we talk about faith crises, but I like what you said, this is where the revelation came, faith crises, that's the first vision.

Dr. Steven Harper (5:27 - 7:10)

Yeah, faith crises is nothing new. That's not unique to us. There's a really important book by William James, a professor at Harvard back around the turn of the 20th century called *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and in that book, he says the most common thing in the world to have a religious crisis.

Who hasn't had some variation on that? We don't want to make light of that, and we also don't want to act as if it's something brand new and that there's no way to cope with it and the sky is falling and we might as well quit right now. These people in the Doctrine and Covenants who are the recipients of these revelations, they all had their own struggles with faith and belief, and especially with trying to do what the Lord had instructed them to do.

6:21

It's a serious challenge to know, let's say you're Oliver Cowdery and you are the main recipient of at least the bulk of section 18 of the Doctrine and Covenants, you know exactly what the Lord wants you to do. It's hard to do it, it's hard to live up to it. And that creates a struggle itself, its own kind of trouble.

Why don't we study the Doctrine and Covenants more intensively than we do? I am way too distracted by Elder Maxwell used to call the thick of thin things. It just seems odd to me, but normal and natural that I give short shrift to the words of the Son of God himself.

I want to stop doing that. I'm glad that we're having this talk today so we can stop doing that and help others.

Hank Smith (7:11 - 7:26)

Yeah, try to repent of that. I think the Lord might say, you spend a lot of time on ESPN. I'm just looking for miracles.

Yeah, the thick of thin things. What a statement.

John Bytheway (7:26 - 7:37)

Another way I've heard it put is giving first-class attention to second or third-class things. You've got to

give first-class attention to first-class things. I'm feeling scolded and motivated by the Spirit at the same time.

Dr. Steven Harper (7:38 - 14:59)

Yeah, me too. That's good. None of us want just more guilt.

The Lord's not trying to make us feel ashamed. Rather, it's an invitation. So many of these sections start with hearken.

Hearken to the voice of God or listen to the voice of Jesus Christ. Give ear to his words, section 45 says. What an invitation that is.

I think we maybe sort of need to be shocked out of our complacency because we're used to it. Yeah, yeah, Jesus has spoken again in the last dispensation. Yeah, yeah.

8:15

But for heaven's sake, the Son of God back from the dead has appeared in this dispensation and spoken, chosen servants, called them, commissioned them, and given his words to them, as section one put it. And section one gives us a pretty intense rationale. The Lord there says, knowing the calamities that were coming upon the people, I called on my servant, Joseph Smith, and gave him commandments and others, and I renewed the everlasting covenant so that we could solve all these problems that are caused by the coming calamities.

The problems that we have in the world today are solved by making and keeping the covenants that are renewed and restored by the revelations the Lord gave to Joseph Smith. There's this whole series of what we might term priesthood problems that the Lord reveals to Joseph Smith. Some people have some inkling of them, but they don't necessarily really know what they are.

9:20

So, for example, we might look at Roger Williams, way back a couple hundred years before Joseph Smith. Roger Williams is a Baptist, Puritan, and he recognizes, hey, there's no apostles. He decides to leave his fellow Baptists because he says, I know we were baptized by immersion for the remission of our sins, but nobody

baptizing anybody on earth today has any authority or commission to do so.

We don't have an apostle, and we haven't had one for a long time. I'm going to find or wait for new apostles. So, that's what I mean by a priesthood problem.

How did the revelations of the restoration resolve those problems? Well, Doctrine and Covenants 27 says, the Lord speaking to Joseph Smith, remember, by Peter, James, and John, whom I've sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you, this revelation we're talking about today, section 18, says that Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer have been called and commissioned with that same commission as Paul, mine apostle. Wow.

10:24

That's the resolution to a serious priesthood problem. The problem being Jesus called and commissioned apostles and sent them forth to carry his gospel to the ends of the earth and baptize everybody in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, here's another one.

You guys know this one. Joseph is 17 years old. Joseph is simply praying for forgiveness again.

He says in his earliest autobiography that after the first vision, I was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me, but after many days I fell again into transgression, which brought a wound upon my soul, he says, and he knows what to do. He kneels again, prays for forgiveness, and an angel comes and appears in his bedroom and says, Joseph, my name is Moroni. I've been set from the presence of God.

11:16

I'm supposed to tell you you're forgiven. Now, listen, God has work for you to do. You guys had a great pair of episodes on this not long ago, where one of the most important things Joseph learns there is that unless Elijah is sent to restore priesthood, and in the Old Testament version, it's not specifically priesthood, but when Moroni tells Joseph Smith what Elijah is bringing, he explicitly says priesthood, behold, I will reveal unto you, Joseph, not just ancient Israel, as Malachi's version says, but to you, Joseph, as Moroni

delivers it in the last dispensation, I will reveal the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet, and he will renew the covenant promises that were made anciently to the fathers, to their descendants. And if that doesn't happen, the whole earth will be utterly wasted at his coming.

That's a priesthood problem. Joseph, if you don't get priesthood from Elijah and put it to work before the Lord's second coming, the whole purpose this planet was created for is null and void, right? Imagine Moroni slapping him on the back and saying, now get out there, Joseph, and save the world.

No pressure. Let's go. God has work for you to do.

Save the world. Bunch of others too. We haven't got this far in the book.

12:34

Well, section 38 says, you go to Ohio, I'll give you an endowment of power. And that endowment comes, and it's preliminary to an even bigger and better endowment, and section 84 tells us that, yeah, the endowment of God's power comes through the ordinances of Melchizedek priesthood, and without that power, nobody regains God's presence and is able to abide there. So, you need that power.

You need that endowment of power. Everybody who wants to live in God's presence needs that endowment of power. The revelations tell us that that's a problem.

Section 84 does. And then by May 1842, Joseph has restored that endowment. By September 1843, he's given it to not a huge number of people, but sisters and brothers who will then be commissioned to be what we would think of as the first temple ordinance workers of this dispensation.

13:30

And after Joseph's death, they endow thousands of saints with that set of power, all those ordinances. So, the first priesthood problem to be revealed to Joseph in section 2 is actually the last one that gets resolved, and that's the restoration of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage that binds families together. So, Elijah comes 13 years after the revelation in Joseph's bedroom, and he commissions Joseph Smith with those

priesthood keys that are powerful enough to seal families, powerful enough to fulfill the mission for which the planet was created.

So, when they kill him in June 1844, they might think they're thwarting the work, but the priesthood problems have been solved. The restoration is well underway. And this might be one reason why President Nelson is inviting us to rejoice in the dispensation of priesthood keys and not forget.

And like you've said, it's easy to be caught in the thick of thin things and spend our days with much lesser worthy or important things on our minds or in our hearts than the words of Jesus Christ and the restoration of these revelations that resolve the priesthood problems that stand between us and the presence of God.

John Bytheway (15:00 - 16:15)

This is great. I've been blessed so much already. Hank, you've heard me say this before.

It's our story is so, what's the word, audacious? The Lord has come back. He opened the curtain, and then an angel Moroni walked through, and then John the Baptist, and then Peter, James, and John, and then Moses, and Elijah, and the sealing powers.

I had never thought of this before the way you said it, Steve. This was a priesthood problem. It reminded me of an old little poem I memorized when John Wesley laid his hands on the head of Thomas Coke and I guess ordained him or something.

And his brother, Charles Wesley, who wrote lyrics for some of our hymns. How easily are bishops made. Yeah.

“How easily are bishops made at man's or woman's whim. Wesley, his hands on Coke hath laid, but who laid hands on him” composed that little priesthood problem poem. What a great story.

The first vision is followed by a succession of these beings who had purpose and brought priesthood back. I love the way you put that.

Dr. Steven Harper (16:15 - 18:40)

These ultimate of all problems are resolved by the new and everlasting covenant, which is what the Lord told us in section one. The new and everlasting covenant is broken. That's a serious, serious problem.

That's why I called on Joseph Smith. I foresaw the terrible, awful, permanent consequences that are coming if we don't get this reversed. So, I renewed the everlasting covenant through Joseph Smith, the prophet.

And he defines the everlasting covenant a couple of times in the Doctrine and Covenants as the fullness of my gospel. Think of what we call the oath and covenant of the priesthood.

16:54

It's all about receiving. God is dispensing this stuff in its fullness. The question is, are you and I receiving it?

How do you receive it? Well, that's a great question to ask the Doctrine and Covenants. I might want to read every section super attentively and ask, what do I need to do to receive the light, life, law, power, truth, glory, intelligence that is flowing from the presence of God and filling the immensity of space?

When I know the answer to that question, I all of a sudden stop resenting law. Man, if I resent the law of God, I just don't understand it. I don't get what he's saying.

17:40

The more I understand the law, the more I want, which might help me appreciate and understand the endowment of power in the temple even better. We might say that section 18 is an early installment in this giant restoration, line on line, precept on precept of God's fullness, the fullness of his glory. What's the fullness of?

It's of glory, it's of intelligence, it's of law, of light, of life, of truth, of power. What are you endowed with? You are endowed with power, God's power, or in other words, God's law, or God's life, or God's intelligence, or God's, you get the idea.

So, are we ready to get into the nitty-gritty?

Hank Smith (18:36 - 18:46)

Steve, it frustrates me that the Lord won't make me do this. Just pick me up, grab my face, and make me learn. But he seems to be so set on me choosing.

Dr. Steven Harper (18:48 - 25:58)

Yeah, he's frustrating that way. I often tell him where he's falling short in that regard in my prayers, and I explain to him that he needs to be more coercive with my children. They need to be force-fed the endowment of power and glory, and most of the time he just listens to that, and that's all.

But one time I was offering that prayer, and quite a pointed rebuke came back from the Lord, power of the Holy Spirit, and it was to the effect, don't you think I know what I'm doing? I was praying about one of my children, and the answer to this prayer was, don't you think I love this child more than you can possibly fathom? Don't you think I know how best to help them?

19:41

So, I am grateful, Hank, for a loving and long-suffering God who doesn't force me to receive His light, life, glory, fullness, intelligence, a fullness of this stuff, but who dispenses it in its fullness. This is what Joseph Smith is talking about when he writes from Liberty Jail. You could more easily put forth your puny arm and stop the Missouri River than you could try to stop God from dispensing this stuff in its fullness upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints.

It can't be done. You can't stop God from pouring down His intelligence, life, light, glory, power for any who are willing to receive it, any who want it. This is really the ultimate question, isn't it?

What do you want? That question will resonate with folks who've received the endowment in the house of the Lord. Essentially, the ultimate question is, what is it that you want most?

What do you want? Our Father in Heaven is asking us that question. We maybe answer by not answering, or maybe I answer by spending all my surplus hours not paying attention to His words.

Or in other ways, right? We answer Him every minute of every day, and He's asking us, what do you want? I

think He's also asking us the question from the shore of the Sea of Galilee post-resurrection.

21:19 You guys have both stood on that spot and thought about those words in John 21. Peter, do you love me? I think all of us are being asked that question by the Savior.

And of course, as you know, if the answer is yes, there's an implication. There's an obligation. I do love you.

21:38 Well then, feed the sheep. Do you really? Yeah.

Well then, there's an obligation implied if we love God. If we love God, we love God's children. If we love God's children, we feed them.

We help them. I think God's asking us those two great questions. Do you love me?

And then the other one is, I love you, and I'm giving you whatever it is you want. We might think that everybody wants everything God has to offer, but that's simply not true. It is not true.

We don't. Or we would take Him up on His dispensing fullness. What we like to do a lot is we like to tell Him what are the terms and conditions on which we will take His fullness from Him.

You guys ever play this game, or is it just me? It may be me. Perhaps.

It seems culturally maybe growing stronger. Maybe that's just an impression. But it seems to me like we are in an attitude, generally speaking, of telling God how the universe should be.

22:51 He's our wish fulfiller, and that's a misunderstanding of how the universe works and our relationship to God. He is dispensing fullness, but it comes to us on very specific terms and conditions called the New and Everlasting Covenant. We're invited to make and keep that covenant.

It's not a set of terms and conditions that we can't keep. We sometimes have talked about it that way. We sometimes thought about it or presented it as if it's like you have to bake enough loaves of bread for the neighbors and earn enough merit badges and enough baptisms for the dead so that God will finally accept you.

And as you guys have both taught brilliantly and wonderfully well throughout the world, those are not the terms and conditions of the New and Everlasting Covenant. The terms are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not even faith in myself, faith in Him. Could Jesus save me from sin and death?

23:55

Yes, I believe He could. Well, then act like He could by repenting. The next condition is, then let Him know you want Him to.

Let Him know you want Him to take your sins and save you from death. And make that known by repenting. Section 18 is about taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ as the culmination of our effort to have faith in Him, repent of our sins, and then formalize that, signify that relationship by covenanting with God.

When we covenant with God, we take upon ourselves the name of Christ, we become Christ's. In our family, we've started using an equation to help us with this. I'm terrible at equations.

Hank Smith 24:43

That's why you became a historian, right?

Dr. Steven Harper

Yeah, for sure. Think about this equation, I plus Christ equal infinity.

And I like to think of the plus sign in that equation as the covenant, the covenant of baptism, the New and Everlasting Covenant. Just as soon as I make that covenant, or just as soon as I add myself to Christ, I get all of Christ. I get His infinite grace, His infinite power.

I may be a massive deficit. Let's say I'm negative half a billion. Steve equals negative half a billion plus Jesus Christ's infinite atonement equals infinite.

You guys do the math. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's infinite. I hope so.

Not bad, huh? But what if I was really bad and I was negative one billion, or two billion, or one hundred billion? How does it come out then?

No difference. Isn't that something? That's the New and Everlasting Covenant in the equation.

That's really what section 18 is teaching us. It's that truth.

John Bytheway (26:00 - 26:31)

Hank, this is why I was so excited for this. I already want to rewind and listen to the whole thing over again. That was really, really powerful.

I remember one of my professors, Joseph Fielding McConkie, saying the Book of Mormon was like Gospel 101. It was the doctrine of Christ that you've just gone through beautifully. Then the Doctrine and Covenants is like graduate school, he said.

And that's kind of what you've laid out for us right there, because this is going to be more. This is the New and Everlasting Covenant.

Hank Smith (26:32 - 27:19)

Steve won't want me to say this, John, but how many notes have you seen him look at with every section of the Doctrine and Covenants he's been quoting?

John Bytheway

I know.

Hank Smith

He's got nothing in front of him.

He doesn't love that kind of praise. Second, Steve, when you talked about the Lord saying, I saw the calamities coming, I want to help you through this.

I started to question, what is the calamity that section 18 may resolve? And one for me, dealing so often with young adults and youth, is the calamity of no self-worth. I don't know who I am.

I don't know why I'm here. I don't know if I matter. In section 18, I think the Lord may be saying, at least in my mind, I can help you with that.

Dr. Steven Harper (27:19 - 32:57)

Yeah, much more frequent even than a crisis of faith is a crisis of worth. I mean, this is not new. It's not just barely that people have started to wonder, am I of any worth to anyone, especially to God?

Man, it's acute, isn't it? I don't know anybody who doesn't struggle with that in some way, in some measure. And for many people, it is hard, very difficult.

And the truths revealed by Jesus in section 18 are the antidote to this. I can't wait to talk about that. This revelation, as we've said, is through Joseph Smith, but it's a revelation to Oliver.

28:04

And then it's an odd revelation in the fact that partway through, it becomes a revelation to the Twelve Apostles, who are not called yet and will not be called for almost six more years. It's a fascinating text. It deserves our careful attention.

It's in the same time and place, generally speaking, that the Book of Mormon is finishing in Fayette, New York, the Book of Mormon translation, as we might say, and that David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Oliver Cowdery are going to become the three witnesses. And in this revelation, section 18, Oliver has a concern. He's worried.

The Lord has said in section 5 that he will establish his church. He said that in section 10 more insistently, the Book of Mormon is wrapping up. The establishment of the church seems like the next thing that will be done.

And Oliver would like to know, what do I do next? How do we prepare for that? Do we need a creed?

Do we need a handbook of instructions? What does our church believe? What's distinctive?

What's the same as with the rest of Christianity? And this is the thing which my servant, Oliver Cowdery, has desired to know of me. That's verse 1.

29:25

That question or set of questions, that's what's on Oliver's mind. That's his prayer. That's what he wants to know.

And it's because of this thing that the Lord is going to give him these words. This might seem like a revelation directly to Oliver. It is in some senses.

This revelation comes from the Lord through Joseph Smith. The words come out of Joseph Smith's mouth. If you didn't know that, there's nothing in the revelation that would give it away.

29:59

This is one of many like this. And this is one of the reasons why Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, and David Whitmer, and David's mom and dad, and David's siblings, and Emma, and Joseph's parents, and his brothers and sisters, and the Partridges, and the Whitneys, it's one of the reasons why these people are absolutely convinced that he is a revelator. I hope everybody out there remembers that the people who know Joseph Smith best believe him most.

That is demonstrable. That is fact. You can call them names.

You can give explanations for why this, why that. You can fulfill Moroni's prophecy that Joseph's name will be known for good and evil everywhere in the world. And you can be part of the concerted effort ongoing to fulfill his name for evil, or to know his name for evil.

30:56

But what you cannot deny with any credibility is that these people who knew Joseph Smith a whole lot better than you or I do, or the critics do, believed him. They believed him enough to follow him wherever he went. They believed him enough to do whatever his revelations told them to do.

It frustrates me when people bury their head in the sand about that massive mountain of evidence that is on record for us of people who know Joseph Smith well. They believe him. They believe these revelations.

Professor Bushman has made this point so beautifully in so many ways. But every section in this book almost has a good story to it and good records behind it showing that the people who were the recipients of these revelations believed them and followed them, often at immense personal sacrifice. So, let's just put

an exclamation mark on the point that Oliver says, Joseph, I need to know by revelation what the Lord wants done.

31:59

Have a desire to know how to prepare for the organization of the church, and the Lord answers that desire. Now, behold, because of the thing which you, my servant Oliver Cowdery, have desired to know of me, I give unto you these words. It's really important to know the question that evoked the revelation, or we won't understand the revelation as well as we could.

32:30

Joseph taught this principle by saying, if you want to understand a New Testament parable, then make sure you understand the question that Jesus is addressing when he gives the parable. That same principle goes for these revelations. Making Sense of Doctrine and Covenants tries to tell that front story.

There's a new book. The reason I would hold it up here is because we're not selling these. It's free online on BYU Studies.

You can get a PDF of it for free.

Hank Smith

What's it called, Steve?

Dr. Steven Harper

Doctrine and Covenants Contexts. This is the same stuff that Scripture Central has on their website for free.

Hank Smith

Is this one different than the one on the Gospel Library?

John Bytheway (32:58 - 33:01)

Yeah, is this different than Revelations in Context?

Dr. Steven Harper (33:02 - 34:21)

Yes, which is also spectacular. Revelations in Context is excellent. That's a series of essays where one or more, sometimes a constellation of related revelations will be described by a very well-informed historian.

I did a couple of those, but I mean other people. So, Revelations in Context tells the story of the revelations in that way. It's terrific.

Like you said, it's in the Gospel Library app. It's free online for everybody who can get there. So, this is different.

A similar title, but Doctrine and Covenants Contexts. It's a lot like what's in Making Sense, but it's distilled. It's a little faster paced.

It's updated. I have in mind to try to get people oriented to the question that brought forth the section and the personalities that are being discussed and addressed in the section without spending half a lifetime because, of course, we've got to get back to the thick of thin things before too long, if you're like me. You're taking valuable time that I could be watching a game.

34:06

You can buy a copy of BYU Studies. They'll print one for you, print on demand. But that's just to cover the cost of the printing.

And if you just want the PDF for free, it's there. And it's elsewhere, too. Audio versions, too, on podcast platforms.

John Bytheway (34:21 - 34:23)

Wow, that's great.

Hank Smith (34:23 - 34:26)

So, we can know each question that prompt the section.

John Bytheway (34:26 - 34:28)

That drew it out.

Dr. Steven Harper (34:29 - 34:48)

Insofar as we know them, the historical records sometimes are not sufficient to let us know. Some of the most mind-blowing revelations, we don't have a whole lot of context for. Doctrine & Covenants 93 is my goodness. And we just really don't know what prompted that.

Hank Smith (34:48 - 34:55)

I think Joseph said about that one, this afternoon, I received the following. Wait, what? Why?

Dr. Steven Harper (34:56 - 36:27)

It's amazing. Indeed. But insofar as we know them, we've got how to get quickly up to speed on what the real-life situation is and the real-life people that are being addressed.

What are the problems, crises, dilemmas that evoke these revelations? Man, people are going to want to

know what I call Emma's dilemmas. Because the section 25 is super cool.

It is way more cool when you know what she knows. When you do sort of throw away lines that might seem insignificant, like go with him at the time of his going. When you know what Emma knows, all of a sudden that little line from D&C 25 and others are huge.

35:40

They're momentous. We won't give away the end of that story yet, but folks are going to want to know the questions that go in. The revelations are a little bit like just having one half of an email exchange or just listening on one end of a phone conversation.

If you had the whole email exchange or the whole phone conversation, you could understand the part that you have better. It's valuable to know the context because it enables you to understand the text. We sometimes do a dangerous thing, in my opinion.

We sometimes try to apply the Scriptures to us here now before we know what they meant to them there then, and we can make errors when we do that. If we did that exclusively, I would just pick out the parts and say, lie a little.

John Bytheway (36:29 - 36:31)

Take advantage of one's neighbor.

Dr. Steven Harper (36:33 - 36:54)

There's no harm in this. It's a dangerous thing to know too little about the Scriptural text and context to the point that we might misinterpret it. It's valuable to learn everything we can.

Then we'll be better interpreters and better appliers of what the revelations give us.

Hank Smith (36:55 - 37:04)

So much more depth when you know the background you've really gotten into it. Now you can apply something much more than a couple of phrases here and there.

Dr. Steven Harper (37:06 - 37:48)

Sometimes myself or my kids or my students will complain that the Scriptures can be boring. I think the problem is we're boring. I think the problem is that we maybe just haven't worked hard enough or imagined.

Our imagination maybe needs to be stretched because the Scriptures are endlessly fascinating, and the people in them are very interesting and applicable to ourselves, and we may just not be taking them seriously enough. Once we do, and these stories of the revelations that address these stories, they're compelling. The Scriptures aren't boring. You're boring.

Hank Smith (37:48 - 37:59)

A message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So Steve, with that, should we jump in then and find out what Oliver wanted?

Dr. Steven Harper (38:00 - 38:38)

You bet. So Oliver wants to do the very best job he can at being ready to do whatever his job is in the Savior's coming church. He knows from earlier revelations that the Savior's church is coming.

The Book of Mormon is just about to go to press. When it comes off the press, we're going to establish the Church of Jesus Christ once again on the earth. So the Lord says in verse 2, which let's point out that Oliver has got an ongoing question about knowing.

What do I know? How do I know? John, did you ever write a book about that?

Or how can I know that I know or something like that?

John Bytheway (38:38 - 38:39)

I can't remember.

Hank Smith (38:41 - 38:43)

That was a good book, John. That was a good book.

Dr. Steven Harper (38:43 - 39:01)

But behold, verse 2 says, I have manifested unto you that the things which you have written are true, wherefore you know that they are true. So that's the first premise of the Lord's answer to Oliver Cowdery. Now, we might say, what do you mean the things which he has written?

This means the Book of Mormon manuscript.

John Bytheway (39:02 - 39:04)

Yeah, you wrote that. You took the dictation.

Dr. Steven Harper (39:05 - 40:45)

And this is a historical fact. About 30% of that manuscript exists, and it is almost entirely in Oliver Cowdery's handwriting. Oliver Cowdery wrote the Book of Mormon.

That's what he testified that he did. After 10 years outside the church, he came back. He met the saints, camped on the Missouri River, and they invited him to speak.

And he said, look, Solomon Spaulding didn't write that book. Sidney Rigdon didn't write that book. I wrote the book.

I wrote the Book of Mormon, as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God. It's a historical fact. It's a demonstrable fact that Oliver Cowdery wrote the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

39:48

Here, the Lord says, and as you did, I testified to you by my Spirit in many instances that what you were writing is true. One of the things we need to learn how to do is to follow the Lord's rationale through a revelation. We need to read slowly enough that we can watch him build his case.

Almost all sections of the Doctrine and Covenants have an internal rationale to them, and it's the Lord's. If we want to know the Lord's mind, then we pay real close attention so we can hear him build his case. So, the very first premise is, Oliver, you know that the Book of Mormon manuscript is true.

The second premise is in verse 3, the if connects them. If you know that those things you've written are true, then I'm giving you a commandment that you rely upon the things that you've written.

Hank Smith (40:45 - 40:54)

So good. I shouldn't laugh at that, but he's like, yeah, he says, remember that entire 500-page book I gave you? Let's rely on that.

Dr. Steven Harper (40:55 - 42:46)

Just to see Oliver's growth here, we might remember back to section 6, 7, 8, 9. Remember those first few days Oliver met Joseph where he's like, I've already had pretty powerful spiritual experiences telling me that you're the dude. But now that I listen to you misplace modifiers and make bad jokes, are you really, really?

In section 6, the Lord says, yeah, he really is, and he proves it by giving Oliver a revelation through Joseph and answering questions and concerns on Oliver's mind that Joseph doesn't even know about. So Oliver comes out of receiving section 6 through the Lord with an even stronger witness of Joseph as prophet. Now he's got the Book of Mormon manuscript, and he's never going to be able to deny this witness.

41:49

This is a powerful witness. So rely on that witness. Rely on the Book of Mormon manuscript that you've written.

For in them, do you see the logic in verse 4 or the rationale? I guess I don't want to call it logic because I don't want to act like the Lord is following the rules of formal logic. He doesn't have to, and he doesn't always.

But there is a rationale. There's a case that's being made. So rely on the Book of Mormon manuscript because in it is everything you need to know about the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock.

It's a similar phrase that the Lord used with Hyrum back in section 11. I'm curious what you guys make of that. My church, my gospel, my rock.

I don't know quite what to do with that. Are those different things? Are those three ways of referring to the same thing?

What are we talking about there? My church, my gospel, my rock.

John Bytheway (42:46 - 43:17)

I was thinking about Moroni who was like, well, I'm not dead, so maybe I'll write a few more things, and eventually writes Moroni 6. Here's how we ran the church as far as meetings and what we did. The gospel is the whole Book of Mormon.

Well, what do we do? Well, we gather. I mean, so in a way that seems like a different thing to me.

I love that he's saying, you've written it already. You know, go back and see what is the nature of the church and the worship like?

Dr. Steven Harper (43:18 - 43:28) Yeah, that's insightful, isn't it? I hadn't thought about that, but a bunch of the Book of Moroni is what do we say when we baptize someone? What do we say when we bless sacrament? Who's invited to meetings?

John Bytheway (43:29 - 43:31) Even membership councils are in there, you know?

Hank Smith (43:33 - 44:10) My mind went automatically to Matthew 16. Jesus asks his apostles, what are people saying about me? Some say you're a great prophet.

Nobody's saying you are the Christ. Peter answers, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responds with, blessed are you, Simon, upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

That's Matthew 16:18. That sounds very similar to Doctrine and Covenants 18:4-5. So I don't know if the Lord likes cross-references, but perhaps that's where he's sending us.

Dr. Steven Harper (44:11 - 48:55) I think he delights in them. He uses them so often. Sometimes they're echoes, and sometimes they're precise quotes, but they're everywhere.

They're all over the place. He seems to speak Scripture, doesn't he? Yeah, and he likes to lace them together.

I will sometimes think I know the Scriptures pretty well, and then I'll be reading around in the Old Testament every once in a while or the New Testament. I'll read something, I'll think, that's in the Doctrine and Covenants. I wonder if he's like, glad you got on to that. Good job. Good job, Steve. Like I'm a preschooler.

Notice words like “for” at the beginning of verse 4, and the word “wherefore” at the beginning of verse 5. Those are connective tissue words that link the premises of the rationale. So this is where he's still building his case for why Oliver should rely on the Book of Manuscript to prepare a new document that will be like the very first issue of the church's general handbook of instructions.

- 45:17 For wherefore, verse 5 says, if you shall build up my church upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. This is the completion of the case. This is the end of the first section of the Revelation, and the purpose of it has been to answer Oliver's question, what's my source material for preparing a new manual for the church?
- 45:44 It's the Book of Mormon manuscript, and the Lord has explained why. Why? You know it's true.
- Why? Because it has everything in it you need to form my church, and if you'll do it that way, if you'll rely on the truth, that's everything you need, then the gates of hell won't prevail against my church, if you do it that way. It's an important thing to learn to listen to the Lord, make his own case in his own way.
- You guys will remember that in section 1, he told us, search these commandments, search these sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, because in them, every promise and every prophecy that's in them will all be fulfilled. So, we want to pay super special attention to the prophecies and the promises that are in them, because they're going to be fulfilled. Some of them already have been, some of them will yet be, and we especially want to pay attention to what I call the contingent promises.
- 46:41 These are the ones that hang on whether someone chooses to act in a particular way or not. You can both think of section 58 of the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord says, look, I told you to do this thing and you didn't, and then the promised blessing didn't come to pass, and now you're blaming me. Don't blame me, blame yourselves.
- That's not my fault when I make a contingent promise and you don't do the if. So, here, notice we have an if in verse 5. If you build up my church on my foundation, my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.
- Well, we don't have that promise if we don't do the if. This is a useful exercise for patriarchal blessings. In just about every patriarchal blessing I've ever seen or heard or read, there are contingent promises.

If this, then that. Sometimes they're implied, not explicit. Sometimes they're explicit.

We don't have the guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled if we don't fulfill the obligations or requirements. That's quite an important thing for us to understand. We sometimes think God is to blame for something going unfulfilled when it might not be God at all.

48:00

We want to pay close attention to the prophecies and the promises. They will all be fulfilled. I'm positive about that.

Verse 5, then, gives us this outlook or this sort of forecast. Oliver, behold, the first word is almost inviting Oliver to see what God sees. Look, Oliver, the world is ripening in iniquity, and it has to be that the children of men get stirred up to repentance.

All of them, Gentiles, House of Israel, all of them. Wherefore, so wherefore is a word that is going to build on that premise. Because of that, Oliver, since you've been baptized at the hands of my servant Joseph Smith Jr., according to that which I have commanded him, he has fulfilled the thing that I commanded him. Now, verse 8, now marvel not that I have called Joseph to mine own purpose. It's almost like we're digressing or a bit of an aside.

Hank Smith (48:55 - 49:11)

So he said in verse 6, the world is ripening in iniquity. I want everyone, Gentiles and the House of Israel, to repent. So I did this.

But as he goes through his so I did this, he's kind of teaching Oliver a couple of things that maybe he's having issue with.

Dr. Steven Harper (49:13 - 50:05)

Right. Excellent. Good job, Hank.

So we can almost hear what's going on in Oliver's brain. Yeah, you mean Joseph Smith? This guy who still doesn't use perfect grammar.

He still can't spell very well. Yeah, that's the one the Lord says. Don't marvel that I've called him to my own purpose.

Which purpose is known in me. I know why I called Joseph Smith Jr. And Oliver's got to imagine from time to time. Wow, Lord, don't you think it would have been better to put me in the first Elder spot?

No, says the Lord. Yeah, you're a better speller. You're a better writer.

You're better at a lot of things. I did make you the first preacher, or I will, as of section 21. You are the first preacher, but Joseph Smith is the first Elder.

So Oliver, I want you to remember.

Hank Smith (50:06 - 50:14)

It's a Nicodemus moment where the Lord reads Nicodemus's mind. He says, you're still stuck on that born again issue, aren't you? Feels like that here.

Dr. Steven Harper (50:15 - 52:28)

Excellent connection there, Hank. Thank you. Which purpose is known in me.

The Lord doesn't even say, I'm not necessarily going to tell you all the reasons why I picked Joseph Smith and not you or someone else. And then another wherefore in the second line on page 29, verse 8. Wherefore, if he, Joseph Smith, shall be diligent in keeping my commandments, he shall be blessed unto eternal life.

His name is Joseph. There's a contingent promise that if he's faithful, he'll have eternal life. In verse 9.

Now, Oliver, I'm speaking to you. We're not talking about Joseph anymore. Quit worrying about him.

I'm talking to you and David by the way of commandment. Behold, I command everyone everywhere to repent. We have a rationale for this already.

51:05

As you noticed, Hank, back in verse 6, the wickedness is ramping up. Repentance needs to ramp up in response. So, I'm commissioning you and I'm commanding everyone to repent.

Oliver and David, I'm giving you that same calling that I gave Paul, my apostle. And then the commandment in verse 10. This is what we led off with.

This is the best known verse in the Revelation. What we want to do is make sure everybody listening knows that it's embedded in this bigger text. It's great to remember this verse.

If all you remember about section 18, remember that the worth of every soul is great in the sight of God. But even better if you remember the larger text in which that verse is embedded. We already can see that there's a pretext to it.

There's a reason why the Lord is saying this now in this way. There's a reason why He's calling new apostles. There's a reason why He's commissioning them to tell the world to repent.

The world is ripening in iniquity. Now we're going to get into the rationale for telling people to repent. And it is the coolest rationale anywhere in the scriptures, in my opinion, what I can find.

Hank Smith (52:29 - 52:49)

Let me make sure I'm following you here. Verse 6, the world is ripening in iniquity. I want everyone to repent.

Side note to Oliver, then a side note to Joseph. Okay, back to Oliver, back to this repentance idea. I am calling on you, I'm calling on David to preach repentance. Now here's why. Is that right?

Dr. Steven Harper (52:51 - 53:02)

That was brilliant. Well done, sir.

You could teach my class anytime. You got it. Meaning I would like to be your student and you can teach my students anytime.

Hank Smith (53:02 - 53:14)

So Steve, when you said love, verse 10, but love it in its context means, why was it given? Because the Lord is saying, why do I want people to repent? Why do I want you to tell people to repent?

Dr. Steven Harper (53:14 - 1:07:43)

Yeah, exactly right. I wish I had learned this earlier in my life. I learned it in the mission field, and I hope

you'll let me tell you the story of the day I learned the lesson.

For now, when I was a teenager, if you said repentance, if you said free association, I say repentance and you tell me, I would have always associated repentance with negative words or thoughts. Repentance is bad. If you have to repent, you're bad.

Repentance is hard. Repentance is unpleasant. If I could give one gift to my younger self or to my children or to the world, it would be to discover the joy of daily repentance.

You heard that anywhere recently? That's President Nelson. The rationale for that is this very section.

54:01

My Doctrine and Covenants students, I have them annotate their Doctrine and Covenants, including color coded. What colors you pick don't matter, but I have them pick a color and I have them highlight every commandment in the same color. Anytime the Lord tells anyone to do something, this semester we're using green for that.

So, I'm saying this because I want everybody to notice that the first word in verse 10 is a commandment. It's a commandment to remember. You and I should remember something, and the thing we should remember is that the worth of souls is great.

But not just that the worth of souls is great, we should remember that the worth of souls is great in God's sight. Hank, earlier you said the worth of souls is measured in a lot of ways. Shohei Ohtani hits a home run once every 14 times he tries.

54:59

His soul is worth a lot more than mine is by the measure of how well you're compensated if you can do that. That's super impressive. But that's not what we're talking about here.

It has nothing to do with the sight of God. So, what's the soul worth in the sight of God? We're going to read on, and the answer is the worth of a soul is the exact

equivalent of one infinite atonement of the only begotten Son of God.

And if it's okay, I want to tell you how I learned that truth. Once upon a time, a long time ago, this has got to be 30 plus years ago now, I was serving in the Canada-Winnipeg mission. I loved it.

One of the most memorable and transformative experiences of my life happened one day when my companion and I were in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. For some reason, I don't remember or understand, and I haven't documented, we were called on to visit a woman who was in really deep despair, and neither one of us had any idea how to help a person in deep despair. We were out of our depth, way out of our league.

56:22

She needed the Lord's help desperately, and all he had to work with was a couple of punks. The cool thing, as you know, is he can make a lot out of a couple of punks in a desperate situation. But it was one of those days where I learned the truth of what we taught as we taught.

I did not know it before. I could not have prepared this lesson, nor my companion. We didn't know what we were doing.

Somehow, we got to section 18 of the Doctrine and Covenants. I don't remember having prior knowledge of what it said. Maybe it was that verse 10.

Maybe there was enough of a remembrance of a seminary mastery that the Holy Ghost could latch onto that maybe and remind my companion and I, remember the worth of souls is great. I brought my missionary scriptures today because the physical object is sacred to me because it was there that day. This was the source text that the Savior used to give his message to this precious daughter of his on this day.

57:36

And the message was, remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Well, that's lovely. As an abstraction, this sister would have granted that premise and still not have felt any better.

It was sort of the line of questioning that came after that the Lord pursued through her, and it was almost like he was inviting her to think about the implications of that verse. We've already been noticing that the words *for* and *wherefore* are pieces of connective tissue. The word *for* at the beginning of verse 11 is connecting the fact that souls are of great worth in God's sight with a reason why they are.

58:25

Behold, the Lord wants us to envision this, to see it as if from his sight. In the sight of God, souls are of great worth. Behold that sight.

Look from my eyes for a second. The Lord your Redeemer. You guys both know that the Temple Recommend questions recently had a little tweak to them.

A few years ago, it was something like, do you have a testimony of Jesus Christ and of his role as the Savior and Redeemer? And now the question is, do you have a testimony of the atonement of Christ and of his role as your Savior and Redeemer? That's what the Lord is inviting us to behold.

Behold, the Lord your Redeemer. He suffered death in the flesh. Notice the repetition.

I'm going to read it. You tell me what words are repeated. Behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh.

Wherefore, he suffered the pain of all that all might repent and come unto him. What repetition did you hear? Suffered and all.

God suffered. This sister we were visiting, I don't remember her doing this, but she might, like so many people throughout history and in our own time, in our own lives, she could have evoked the classic theological problem of suffering. If God loves me and if God could prevent, is powerful enough to prevent my suffering, why do I suffer?

1:00:05

Well, that problem has embedded in it an assumption that we often don't recognize, and the assumption is that God's love is best manifest by preventing

suffering. He never said that. That's not part of the plan.

In fact, Christianity is based on the idea that God suffers. God condescends to suffer more than anyone. And the most unjust suffering ever, the most intense, the most infinitely expansive, and the most unjust suffering ever in the history of the universe was done by the only perfect being to ever walk on this earth.

1:00:49

Christianity is not in any way based on the idea that God prevents suffering because he loves us. Christianity is based on the idea that God definitely loves us. So much that he gave his only begotten son, and that's what we're being invited to envision here.

God, your Redeemer, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death. He suffered the pain of all so that all might repent. It's really important that we catch that reason for Jesus' suffering.

He suffered the pain of everyone so that everyone could repent. Now, if I start listening to this, all of a sudden my teenage immaturity and my understanding of repentance starts to diminish. This good and wonderful sister is listening to a couple of Elders read these verses, and then she's sometimes reading with us, reading the words herself.

1:01:46

And the power of the Holy Spirit made these words sink deep into her, and they became super personal to her. The Savior taught her that she was the one for whom the Lord her Redeemer suffered. He suffered her pains.

He knew what she was enduring right then, and he did it so that she could repent and come unto him. This is a rationale for the suffering Savior. The Savior doesn't suffer for punishment.

He suffers to bring us to him. He suffers so we can repent. All of a sudden, repentance becomes a great blessing, and the further we read in this revelation, the more it is.

So, I remember this super sacred line of thought that we shared with this sister and she shared with us. I

remember that we asked her something like, what do you think would happen if only one of God's children needed that Redeemer? What would happen?

Would Jesus still have suffered the pain of all so that that one person could repent and come unto him? And she knew by the power of the Spirit that the answer to that question was yes. And then the question was, well, what if that was you?

1:03:10

What if it was just you? And she knew by the power of the Holy Spirit that her Heavenly Father's answer to that was, yeah, I would have still sent him. And the Savior's answer to that is, oh yeah, I would have still come.

Here am I. Send me. She needs me.

Nobody but me can do it. I'll go. He loves us so much that He performed that sacrifice for every single one of us, and He would do it again, and He would do it if it was only that sister in Saskatoon who needed His sacrifice, and it would be worth it, every bit worth it.

That's the rationale of section 18. I think of this passage of Scripture as the most understated description of the Savior's atonement anywhere. It contrasts wonderfully with the next section, section 19, where he's going to be emphatic when he talks to Martin Harris, and we could talk about reasons for that and why that's a perfectly suited revelation to that person that day.

But in this one, notice it's as if the Lord is being modest. Notice even that He transitions into the third-person voice. You notice that?

We get I, I, I, and then we transition when we get to verse 10. Remember, the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. How great?

1:04:43

Well, the Lord, your Redeemer, He suffered. He suffered everything so that anyone and everyone, and even just one, could repent if they wanted to and come unto Him. Notice that the next verses build on that.

Verse 12, He has risen again from the dead. And then there's a reason, there's a rationale. Why did He rise from the dead?

So that He could bring everyone unto Him on the condition of repentance. He gives us the opportunity to choose for ourselves. We don't have to repent.

We don't have to have faith in Him. Why not just draw everyone to Him on no condition whatsoever? Well, because that would be universalism or Calvinism or some variation on it.

It would be one of the variations on soteriology or a doctrine of salvation in which we have no say, no choice. It would be God doing all the decision-making. God doesn't do all the decision-making.

1:05:49

He lets us choose. He doesn't save anybody who doesn't want to be saved. He doesn't make anyone repent who doesn't want to repent.

We might say, well, everybody will want to repent. No. The fact of the matter is, I often don't want to repent.

And I know this stuff, and I've been through this very beautiful, beautiful experience. Jesus has suffered this so that we just could repent if we wanted to. Think about that.

He did it, and it's done, and it required an infinite, eternal sacrifice. And that's not even with any guarantee that any of us are going to take advantage of it. That's just on the hope, divine hope, I grant that.

But there's no coercion. But we will love Him, and we will repent when we get a grasp on how He first loved us. We will want to come unto Him on conditions of repentance when we realize that it brings immense joy.

Look at verse 13. Great is His joy in the soul that repents. This is a juxtaposition of suffering and joy, isn't it?

He suffered. He suffered, verse 10 says. And what's the fruit of the suffering?

Well, the suffering was so that just one could repent. So, what happens when one repents? All that suffering is repaid with immense joy.

The joy that comes to Christ when we repent compensates for the suffering, the infinite, eternal sacrifice. So, here is the very best of all reasons to repent. Why repent?

Because it brings Jesus joy when I repent. It brings Jesus great joy when I repent. He bought me the opportunity to repent.

Hank Smith (1:07:45 - 1:07:48)

Coming up in part two of this episode.

Dr. Steven Harper (1:07:49 - 1:08:27)

This is during the period while Oliver's disaffected. He's kind of frustrated. He feels like he's been disrespected, not given as much credit as he deserves.

And in the letter, he says, yeah, you're right. I have been oversensitive on these points, but you would too if you had stood in the presence of Peter with our beloved brother Joseph and received the holy priesthood. That's Oliver Cowdery saying, Jesus picked Joseph and he sent Peter to put his hands on my head and Joseph's head.

I'm an apostle, or at least I was.



The Worth of Souls is Great PART 2



GUEST: STEVEN C. HARPER

- John Bytheway: 00:00 Keep listening for part two with Dr. Steve Harper, Doctrine and Covenants section 18.
- Hank Smith: 00:07 You can take that to Mosiah 15, where Abinadi is teaching about the atonement of Jesus Christ. When his soul is making an offering for sin, he will see his seed. That's his motivation.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:23 This is why. How's that for joy in your posterity, parents know the immense joy that comes when they sacrifice and when their children are the beneficiaries of that sacrifice. That there's nothing like that joy. You guys have felt it, tasted it. There's nothing like it. Well, here we're learning that that's akin maybe in a tiny foretaste, but that is akin to what Christ experiences. When we repent, it brings him immense joy because we get back into the Father's presence on conditions of repentance and then we formalize this faith and repentance cycle, faith in Christ. We believe he can save us repentance to signal to him that we want him to save us. We formalize that by making a covenant and of course that is gonna be the subject that we turn to next. In the revelation we're gonna learn that we take upon ourselves the name of Christ and then that is gonna be repeated a dozen times in the back half of this revelation.
- 01:30 And the Lord is gonna tell the apostles when they're called, your job is to tell the whole world to repent. You're called with the same calling as Paul, my apostle. Tell everyone to repent. Tell them the reason to repent because it brings immense joy to Christ. And when you go and tell everyone to repent, your joy will be great. If just one soul repents, your joy will be great. Here's something I noticed on my most recent reading of this revelation that I had not noticed before. It was delightful to notice it. I had

assumed like you guys have, I've read this hundreds of times and I have heard in my head the rationale going something like this. If it so be that you should cry, labor all your days in crying repentance to this people and you only bring one soul to me, great will be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father.

02:25 And now if your joy will be great with one soul, you bring in the kingdom of my Father, then it'll be exponentially greater if you bring many souls to me. So what's wrong with my reading? My assumption is not what it says.

Hank Smith: Yeah, I You missed a couple words.

Dr. Steven Harper: It says the exact same words about receiving joy in the kingdom of the Father with one soul as with many souls. I'm kinda locked into this mindset where if one is good, 10 is better. I don't know how your mission experiences were, but that's how we thought about it. In my days, I'm ashamed to say this, we even reduced souls to baptisms. That's what we said. How many baptisms did you have? Oh, what a tragedy. To talk like that. How many souls did you help come to Christ is a better question and we can probably even do better if we don't think of it quantitatively.

03:25 This revelation I thought was talking quantitatively. It's not, let me read it again. 15 and 16, if it so be, here's the rationale because of what we just read about what Christ is and who Christ is and what Christ does in his suffering to bring people to him on conditions of repentance. He experiences great joy in any soul. The repentance. So we are called to cry repentance, and if it so be that we should do that all our days and only one soul repented, we would have great joy with them in the kingdom of God. And if that crying repentance should result in many souls being brought, we would have great joy with them in the kingdom of God, there's not an increase of joy. There's not a, if one soul is good, 10 souls is better. If one baptism is good, a hundred baptisms is a better mission.

04:32 I wish I had noticed that earlier in my life. We live in a culture that commodifies things, including people, God does not, or at least not in the same way we do. We

commodify people by saying, if you can hit a home run once every 14 times you try, you're worth a lot. God does not do that. I've sometimes resorted to a gimmick to try to make this point. You guys wanna play my game with me? You don't have to say this out loud. If you want to, it's fine, but there might be negative consequences. But make a list in your head of souls that are worth more in God's sight than yours. It easily becomes a heuristic. Heuristic is a fancy term for when we answer a complicated question with a simpler question. So we could do a variation on that here by thinking that the question is, well, who earns more than I do? Well, I could make a long list of people on that, but that's not the question. The commandment is, remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. So in God's sight, whose souls are worth more than yours? John got any names you wanna put out there?

- John Bytheway: 06:00 How can you answer that? Because it sounds like every soul is of great worth.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 06:08 Yeah. Even a sister in great despair on the Canadian prairies.
- John Bytheway: 06:14 Yeah,
- Dr. Steven Harper: 06:16 Even the forgotten, the oppressed, the people sold into slavery, the people ravaged. The people massacred at the mill on Shoal Creek, Hans Mill, even them, especially them. Okay, Hank, tricky question. What about less? Can you make a list of people whose souls are worth less in God's sight than yours is?
- Hank Smith: 06:44 I know I sometimes behave that way, but no.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 06:47 Yeah, me too. I'm right with you there. I sometimes act as if some souls were of less worth to God than me. That's disobeying verse 10. When I'm doing that, I am failing to remember that the worth of souls, every single soul is great in the sight of God. Okay, you guys know what Doctrine & Covenants 88 verse 15 says about a soul. What's a soul? The spirit and the body is the soul. Let's do a variation to our game. The body is an important part of the soul. Could you make a list of people whose bodies are worth more to God than yours is? Again, my mind defaults

to bodies that are in better shape than mine, or I could make a long list of that. That's not the question. And the inverse is, could we make a list of people whose bodies are worth less to God than us?

07:52 There are a lot of people who are sure that their body is not very worthy in the sight of God. Their body is of infinite worth. Their body is glorious, godly, redeemed, beloved, it is of great worth in God's sight so much that the Lord, their redeemer suffered death in the flesh. He suffered their pain. He knows what it's like to have a body that they don't feel like they love or is beloved or a body that doesn't work the way they wish it did or want it to or will one day. He knows all that. He's been there, done that. He is the redeemer of that soul. Every single one of them. Those souls are of immense worth, of infinite worth in the sight of God. And my soul is not worth more than theirs and my soul is not worth less than theirs in my heavenly Father's sight.

08:57 I will be better off if I behave myself every minute of every day as if every person, whoever lived or lives now or will live is of infinite worth in my heavenly Father's sight. And if I remember the worth of souls, including their bodies is of great worth and I'll stop exploiting bodies the way we're so programmed to do and I'll stop exploiting souls and I'll stop belittling anybody or speaking of people as if they're not of ultimate eternal worth. It will change my entire outlook on myself and everyone else. If I will do the simple commandment in verse 10. Remember, the worth of souls is great in God's sight. That's why this revelation means so much to me. I'm not even close to having perfected it, but it has changed my life to try even just to try at verse 10 and then to repent when I fail at it. Because when I repent, it brings Christ joy and then to tell other people about the great joy they can experience and that Christ will experience when they repent. This changes what repentance means to me and helps me discover the joy of daily repentance as President Nelson taught us all to do. That's the gospel, that's the rock, that's salvation. Verse 17 says.

Hank Smith: 10:35 What a great connection from section 88. Don't you think, John? Remember the worth of souls, bodies, and spirits is

great in the sight of God. What a fantastic lesson to those listening. And maybe all three of us who have ever insulted our own bodies or others to hear the Lord say, no, no, no, no, no. Don't, don't do that.

John Bytheway: 10:59

I thought about the man next to the pool of Bethesda. For how long had he been there in that condition? Maybe not at the pool, but in that condition 38 years and the Lord found him. And when I've been there, I love to read a statement of President Packer about those who care for those who have bodies that don't work, who are still waiting for the stirring of the water and have been doing so for a lifetime. That's a beautiful way to think of it and I think it will bless a lot of people to think of it that way. Thank you Steve.

Dr. Steven Harper: 11:41

That's how Jesus is. That's how he thinks. He has this sight and in his sight. Every single soul is of infinite worth. It's why it's so infuriating to him and frustrating when we treat each other badly because in his sight, if we could just see as he sees that is the worst kind of thing to treat each other badly, our souls, every single one of them is of infinite worth. Why exploit each other? Why belittle each other? Why hurt each other? Spirit or body, soul, mind, any way emotionally abusive, any kind is unacceptable. This is why pornography is such a destructive force. I don't want people to misunderstand. I know pornography use is pervasive and difficult and there are all kinds of reasons. I'm not trying to get on anyone's case or make anybody ashamed about that. One thing that could help us overcome pornography in another way of saying it is to do verse 10.

12:51

Remember that a soul including the souls I'm exploiting if I'm using or making pornography, remember that those souls, remember their worth and then maybe I could find the resolve to change my behavior if I remembered how much each one of those souls cost and what they're worth and who they are, especially in the sight of their creative, spectacular, heavenly parents who made the ultimate sacrifice for those souls. Even those Truman Madsen in his imitable wonderful, powerful way. He gave this terrific talk on campus at BYU years ago, the Savior, the Sacrament and Self-worth. And he said, I'm not gonna get this

perfectly right, but to paraphrase pretty well, he said something like, if souls are of worth or valued in direct proportion to the sacrifice of our redeemer, then we know that in the sight of God, your soul, even yours and my soul, even mine is of infinite worth. That's a truth that can change a life. That's a truth that could change the world.

Hank Smith: 14:11 I think we just experienced what Elder Packer said. True doctrine can change behavior, true doctrine. And verse 10 is true doctrine that can literally change your behavior. You'll see the world differently. I have a quick historical question for you. I hate to throw us in a different direction, but I just wanted to ask real quick. You've taught me about Calvinism and Arminianism that's so prevalent in 1829 and what is the worth of human souls in the 1830s, 1820s, 1830s? Because from what I've heard, what I've gathered is God does not love human beings. What did you teach us before that? He's hanging them over the

John Bytheway: 14:55 The flame like a spider.

Dr. Steven Harper: 14:58 Yeah. So you're evoking the 1741 discourse by the Reverend Jonathan Edwards. Sinners in the hands of an angry God delivered at Enfield, Connecticut. If Reverend Edwards was here, he'd say, guys, you're misunderstanding me. Don't mistake. I was speaking about God's mercy. I was explaining that every one of us deserved to be in the hottest hell for the longest duration possible. And the fact that we're not right now, the fact that God is sparing us from a well deserved hell fire right now is evidence of his love and of his mercy. It was true that in the sermon Reverend Edwards said, God abhors you. There's something to that we could find in the restored scriptures. God saying, I'm coming in my vengeance and fury to trample the wicked and spill their blood on my garments. So we don't want to misrepresent him, but it is true that the restored gospel has a better version of who we are to God than the Unrestored Gospel does. In the Unrestored gospel, which I love, by the Unrestored gospel, I'm throwing a blanket over the rest of Christianity.

16:10 I love it. I just love the restored gospel version better. And one major reason why is because of what is often called

classical theism. Lots of fantastic scholars have been to BYU and have taught us about their versions of Christianity and so forth. We learn a lot from them. One I'm thinking of in particular explained classical theism. This is the basic idea of God that is general to all of what is often called traditional Christianity. Well, in this version, God is everything. We're not. God is not like us and we are not like God. We can't become like God. We're not in any way really the children of God. True the scriptures might say that, but it's, it's in some sort of figurative relationship and this version of God has no body parts or passions. This version of God is not material, wouldn't appear in a grove of trees, wouldn't wrap you in his arms when you get back into his presence.

17:20 That's a part of what you're asking Hank that is the God of unrestored Christianity. So what God restores through Joseph Smith is those creeds that say that they're abominable to me. I know we've been soft pedaling that sometimes lately, like we're a little embarrassed that Joseph quotes Jesus in the sacred grove of saying their creeds are an abomination. I don't think Jesus meant to say, I hate all people everywhere, or I hate all people who are not members of the church. That's not what he means, but he meant I don't like the creeds because they give a completely mistaken identity to God and Christ. They say we're immutable, that we're incapable of any kind of change. You can't grow up to become like your heavenly parents and you don't have heavenly parents. By the way, that's not part of the unrestored version. You know, you're not a literal daughter of heavenly parents or a son of heavenly parents.

18:28 And Christ is not the son, the literal son of God in that same sense that the restored version of the gospel teaches us. So that's what's really at stake. Hank, I don't mean to be overly general, but that's the difference is that the creedal version of Christianity is based on Greek philosophical ideas that are used to then interpret what the New Testament means about God. Whereas Joseph Smith doesn't use those creeds as his interpretive lens and he gives us therefore the New Testament and the restored scriptures in ways that have us thinking of God much more literally as our father and Christ as our elder brother who

is our Savior and Redeemer. And this changes everything. Everything changes when we have that different understanding. Again, Truman Madsen taught this so powerfully. I wish everybody in our audience was old enough to have heard and learned from Professor Madsen.

19:39 He was a Harvard educated philosopher who had this unbelievably powerful way of teaching relative numb skulls like myself. The deepest theology there is by telling terrific stories. He did theology by stories and this is one of them. I heard him tell this one at the Yale Divinity School. He was the featured speaker at this really historic conference. It was the first time that anywhere as prestigious as something like the Yale Divinity School was having a conference about the restored gospel. Previously the restored gospel was an afterthought of anything in American religion, but now it was on the scene. And so they invited Professor Madsen to speak and he told this story of a conversation he had, which was characteristic of him with two Jesuit scholars. So two Catholic priests who were very fine scholars, very well educated and as usual he had cultivated with them a mutually respectful relationship.

20:44 He wanted to understand them and they wanted to understand him because they all loved God and each other. And he told this story of a conversation with him where they were saying, Truman, we love you, we respect you, but we just can't quite figure out how it is that you think of God in this way that you do like he's your father and like his whole work is to make you like him as if you could be God. And Professor Madsen said, Latter-day Saints find it hard to think of God in any other way. What is God if not a father who wants his children to grow up to be like him? This is what section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants says. It's the one that if the Doctrine & Covenants is is grad school, Section 76 is like that second year seminar where you realize now I'm really into grad school.

21:44 Right? And section 76 is just unpalatable to traditional Christianity. Alright, verse 95 Doctrine & Covenants section 76. God makes the heirs of exaltation equal with him in

power and in might and in dominion. So that idea of us being exalted, us becoming like our heavenly parents is repugnant to unrestored Christianity. And it is the crown of restored Christianity. It is what the Doctrine and Covenants culminates in and adds to the restoration. So Professor Madsen is talking to his Jesuit buddies and they're explaining that just seems blasphemous to us. That seems to put yourself on a par with God. We can't fathom a God whose job is to make a universe full of people as great as him or as equal to him. And Professor Madsen's point was, what does a father do? What do heavenly parents do? They raise their children to be as joyful, powerful, happy as possible. And that's by becoming like them. This really gets to the heart of the difference Hank, between the various versions of Unrestored Christianity at the time of Joseph Smith and the restored version. Yeah, these people are worth saving. Indeed

Hank Smith: 23:13 They are. Absolutely. Why go call repentance. Why spend your time doing that? Because these people, I love them, they're worth saving.

John Bytheway: 23:24 I don't know where CS Lewis would fall in all of this, but you guys are familiar with his statement about the fact that we're living among possible gods and goddesses.

Hank Smith: 23:34 I actually have it right in front of me. I brought it for today. "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the doles, most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature, which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

Dr. Steven Harper: 23:58 Cool insight, huh? Mere Christianity. There's a lot of beautiful truth in Mere Christianity. As CS Lewis described it, what I've always wished I had the power to do, which you better not try to write a sequel to CS Lewis if you're not as brilliant a writer. And mine, I'm never gonna do it, but somebody ought to write the book Restored Christianity. He wrote Mere Christianity as a way of saying this is what all of us have in common. This is what the whole Christian world has in common and it's really beautiful, mere but beautiful, powerful. And I would just

love to say I accept all of the mere and I would like to add the restored layers on it and I think you'll find it just even better.

Hank Smith: 24:49 When I was in college, I remember my undergrad, I had one economics teacher who drilled in us over and over what is the worth of an item? What someone is willing to pay for it and then we do it the next day. What is the worth of an item? What someone is willing to pay for it. I don't think he knew that he was influencing my theology. Section 18, what is the worth of a soul? What God was willing to pay for it.

Dr. Steven Harper: 25:20 And that was one only begotten son. The econ profs sometimes emphasize not just willing but able. You can be willing to pay. I'd pay a million dollars for some things, but I'm not able. So God is not only willing to pay an infinite atonement for each soul he's able to do. It makes you think of that line out of Doctrine & Covenants 60, 64, somewhere in there where the Lord says, I am able to make you holy. That's another one of those radical understatements from the Doctrine & Covenants about the nature of Christ.

Hank Smith: 26:06 Steve, we've had you here for a couple of hours and we have covered these first 16 verses and they deserve that kind of time and study. Let's make sure we cover, you know, the rest of the section. So walk us through this second half.

Dr. Steven Harper: 26:21 Alright, happy to do so. We noted earlier that if you made a word cloud out of Doctrine & Covenants 18, some of the more prominent words would be Redeemer, joy, repent and name. I think name would be the most dominant one. And of course the name that is meant here that we're gonna encounter very frequently, beginning in verse 18, is the name of Jesus Christ. There's something significant. The next premise we might say in this case that the Lord is making for the worth of souls and the value of repentance is the name of Christ. Once a soul has faith in Christ and repents, then the next thing is to take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, which then just sort of regularizes and formalizes that ongoing relationship. You have faith in

me, you repent, you signal that you want me to cover your sins and redeem you from sin and death.

27:23 I become yours and you become mine. We share my name. If you are in my name, if you are in me, you are perfect. You're not perfect. Six months after you've stopped sinning, you're perfect. The moment you sincerely make a covenant with God to take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ because you just added yourself to Christ. And we talked earlier about that and Latter-day Saints have got to stop denying this truth. It is a rejection of Christianity and especially the restored version of it to diminish what Christ is capable of doing. Remember, I am able to make you holy. He says me, yeah, you me, you could make me holy. Yeah, it's done. All that remains to be seen is if you are willing to have faith in me and repent of your sins and formalize it by a covenant. But the hard part is done.

28:21 As you guys know, Professor Robinson, Steve Robinson taught us all to believe him when he says that, not just believe in the abstraction that it is possible, but believe him when he says he could save even me. We will not be really accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ until we believe that we are perfect in Christ. The very moment we take upon ourselves his name, we become his. It's like we are the same being we become His. Ask the Father in my name and faith, believing in you shall receive Verse 20, contend against no church. They be the church of the devil. Verse 21 is really where I wanted to go. Take upon you the name of Christ, speak the truth in soberness. Verse 22, as many as repent and are baptized in my name, which is Jesus Christ and endure in that covenant are saved.

29:15 Behold Jesus Christ. Verse 23 is the name given of the Father. There is no other name whereby man can be saved. The name of Christ everyone verse 24 says, must take upon them the name given of the Father. Sometimes we protest that in our culture today. We don't want limits. We don't want somebody telling us what to do. The Gen Zs and others are especially like this. I don't want anybody telling me what to do. Well okay, that's fine. But don't think of it as God forcing you to this end. He's simply sharing with you the truth that if you would like to come

back into his presence, the only way to get there given your inherent sinfulness and mortality is to take upon yourself the name of someone and the power of someone who has conquered sin and mortality. If you wanna be restored to God's presence, there's one way to get there.

30:15 There's only one road that goes there. And the way is Jesus Christ. It's frustrating to me when we encounter that spirit in us among us that nobody should tell me what to do. I'm gonna do whatever. Every road leads to Rome. No, there's one way to return to the presence of God and Jesus is the way, he's the truth. He's the life. You don't have to pick it. You and I don't have to have faith in that truth. We don't have to repent as a result of that truth, but it is true and Jesus is the way and his name is the only name under heaven whereby we can be saved. Therefore, if you want to take upon yourself that name, that's the gist of the second half. Second two thirds of section 18. And then we have here the Lord saying, and this Oliver and David, this is what I want you to tell the apostles.

31:13 I want you to search them out. It's your job to find the 12 apostles. You'll know them because they will desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart. Apostles will get this, they'll understand this importance of the name of Christ and they'll do it wholeheartedly. Fullheartedly, not halfheartedly. And then the Lord speaks to the 12 in the first person directly to them beginning at verse 31. It's really quite remarkable. And they're not gonna be called for another, it'll be almost six years. This is June, 1829. It'll be February, 1835. So deliver this message when you find them. When Oliver commissioned them, he used this text and he told them, ever since that revelation was given to me, I've been looking for you guys. I've been on the search just as the Lord commanded me. Think about that group. The oldest one is 35, the youngest one's probably 21.

32:15 They're sincere, but they're nothing like the apostles we're used to that are seasoned and experienced. Those guys had to have that seasoning and experience in the yoke, in the mantle and it, it was a bumpy ride. But this text informed them and it informs the apostles today. They still know this backwards and forwards. I remember as you

probably do this terrific talk by Elder Ballard, M. Russell Ballard years ago, right? Was it just last weekend, or was it 20 years ago? Where he invited us to remember the one. If we understood the worth of souls the same way the Lord does, we would never treat anyone he said with disrespect or contempt. These aren't his exact words, but he was evoking this revelation and the rationale in it and reminding us to remember that the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. For great unto him is the one. I remember that line from Elder Ballard.

- John Bytheway: 33:23 Two things. First, I wanna get both of your opinion on verse 20. There's something that I feel like we can maybe extrapolate from that contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil. In other words, when we say only true church, the easy implication is that everything else therefore is false.
- Hank Smith: 33:47 Yeah. That doesn't seem to be the indication here.
- John Bytheway: 33:50 Right? And I love what Steve is saying about this restored version of Christianity and how much we love and share with unrestored Christianity. When I see contend against no church, save it be the church of the Devil, I feel like, oh, there are churches that are not the church of the devil. And I don't know if we're using the word church as in organization. I don't know. I'd love your comment on that.
- Hank Smith: 34:18 Yeah, John, I think you go back to what Nephi's vision where he says, I see two churches only.
- John Bytheway: 34:24 That one kicks up a little bit of dust. It's Church of the Lamb of God and the Church of the Devil. And if you're not in this one, you're in that one.
- Hank Smith: 34:31 And then earlier in the Doctrine & Covenants, I don't think we talked about this, the Lord says in Section 10, this is my doctrine, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me the same is my church.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 34:45 Yeah. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 34:45 That's pretty big. I can see the Lord saying, we're gonna cry repentance, so we don't have time to go fighting with

other churches. That's not where you're gonna spend your time. The worth of souls is great. Cry repentance, stay on mission almost.

Dr. Steven Harper: 35:03 Right? That's a really good way to think of it. I think that's what it means. Stay on mission. What's the mission? Every single soul is of infinite worth. Make sure they know that. Make sure they know that the way for them to get all the way back home is to have faith in Christ, repent of their sins and take upon them the name of Christ and endure in that covenant. That's your mission. Don't go contending against people and get lost in the weeds or off track.

Hank Smith: 35:33 Occasionally I get to teach mission prep in my stake. I'll tell the students, when you argue with someone and you go back and forth, you might win that, but you still lose. Nobody walks away going, that was very uplifting. That drew me closer to the Lord. So part of that, John, is in my mind, easy. The Lord saying that's fruitless.

Dr. Steven Harper: 35:55 I think we ought to remind ourselves, as you guys have just reminded me in the last few minutes of cross-references or intertextual things we should be mindful of. In other words, when Oliver Cowdery is hearing this from the Lord, he is also privy to Doctrine & Covenants 10, he knows what the Lord has said there about my church in Doctrine & Covenants 10. The Lord does something absolutely fascinating. When Doctrine & Covenants 18 is revealed, we're still almost a year from the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth. Well, Doctrine & Covenants 10 has come along and in it, the Lord has said my church about half a dozen times, and every time he's referring to Christianity, to traditional Christianity, that's my church. And he talks about it affectionately. That's my church. And he says, I'm not doing all this stuff to undermine my church. I love my church.

36:55 I'm doing this to save my church. The restoration is the salvation of Christianity. And he says, anybody who is building up their own church, those are the ones that I'm opposing, but I'm not opposing Christians and Christianity, generally speaking. So that's an important distinction coming out of 10, that's what the Lord means by church and the restored church of Jesus Christ is gonna be sort of

the way he's gonna go about that work. But we would mistake and misunderstand the Lord if we thought that he's organizing the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth to once and for all crush all Protestant and Catholic denominations and Orthodox and so forth. That's not the point. We need to be aware of that when we see verse 20 contend against no church, save it be the Church of the Devil. And then as you guys mentioned, this also reminds us that the Lord has just told Oliver, rely on the stuff that's written, rely on the Book of Mormon manuscript.

37:58 And as you both know, and as Oliver knew well the Book of Mormon manuscript has this apocalyptic vision in it where Nephi sees that there are only two churches. There's the Church of God and the Church of the Devil. And because we typically are not very well versed in apocalyptic, in the genre of apocalyptic writing, it's hard. It's very difficult for modern people and people who therefore don't know apocalyptic ways of thinking to understand that Oliver might have known it or understood it better. To put it simply, we like to think literally and really historically, the Restored Church was organized on April 6th, 1830. And Presbyterianism comes from these people in Scotland in these years and whatever else, John Calvin in Geneva in the 16th century. And apocalyptic doesn't do that. Apocalyptic is like the writing of John, the revelation at the end of the Bible where we deal in these great big sweeping categories, Zion and Babylon, good and evil, the Church of the Lamb and the Church of the Devil.

39:10 And Steve Robinson who did understand apocalyptic well. He taught us to stop thinking of this in historical terms and start thinking of it as great big types or things that are true throughout all time, divided into two categories for simple understanding. He famously said, look, in thinking about it, apocalyptically, your membership could be in the church of Jesus Christ and you could still belong to the Church of the Devil. It has a whole lot more to do with who you are in relation to Christ than exactly where your membership records are or where you live in time and space and what church you belong to. So that's a long way of saying that. Oliver would've heard verse 20, with both Nephi's apocalyptic vision in his head, meaning there's two churches only one's the church of God and one's the

church of the Devil. And he would've read it with Doctrine & Covenants 10 in his head, which talks about my church, the Savior's church meaning Christianity, unrestored Christianity, and how the restoration of the church is going to be the salt, the leaven of Christianity generally. So if we wanna understand this revelation the way Oliver did, then we need to know those texts and think about them the way Oliver would. Now how, with that in mind, I'm still not positive what I'm supposed to do with verse 20, I'm still not sure which way or ways I should handle that.

Hank Smith: 40:50

How am I supposed to contend with the church of the devil? Show it to me. I'll go to battle.

John Bytheway: 40:55

Later on. The Book of Mormon, I believe it's Nephi too, says he that fights against Zion. That is the whore of all the earth and Zion is the pure in heart. And there's pure in heart all over the world. The other thing I loved, Steve, that you have emphasized about taking upon us the name of Christ, I've been intrigued with the idea of being willing versus being able. How we are always called willing, but God is able, you know, and we can have our heart, right? So we're willing, but he is able to do his work. I hope that when we hear in the sacrament prayer that we're willing to take upon us the name of Christ, that we're thrilled, we're honored. What an opportunity, who else's name would you rather put upon yourself? Who has the power to do what he can do? I love the idea and I feel like I want to say I'm not only willing, I'm thrilled, I'm honored. I'm blessed to take upon me the name of Christ. And I'm even more thrilled that I get to come back here next week and try again.

Hank Smith: 42:00

I sure wish I was able. Yeah.

John Bytheway: 42:02

Yeah. I wish I was able, but I'm gonna be willing.

Hank Smith: 42:06

That's exactly my thought, John, is when Steve was pointing out that name, I thought, you know, when you take on someone's name, it's very familial. It's marriage, it's children, it's grandparents. What have you done with my name? Mm-hmm.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:19 Yeah. Relational signifies a relationship. And in this case, the relationship is a covenant. It's between us and the father and the father's promise to us is if you want to come back to my presence, I'll make that possible. And the way I'll make that possible is I'll give you my only begotten son. You, if you are willing, he's able. And if you guys get together in a covenant, if you take upon yourself his name, he'll bring you back here to my presence. And that's what I want. That's what he wants. The only remaining question is for all of us to ask as an answer is, is that what we want when we go to the most sacred place on the planet in the most sacred setting, and the Lord, as it were, puts the question to us. That's what the question is. What do you want? Do you want to come back into my presence? I sure do. Good. Because I've got an endowment of powerful covenants that will make that happen. If you're willing, I'm able to bring you back into my presence.

Hank Smith: 43:33 So Steve, we've got David and Oliver, and we know Martin Harris is gonna be part of this search committee to find the 12. Then how does the Lord finish

Dr. Steven Harper: 43:44 After verse 36? So between verses 31 and 36, he's commissioning the apostles. He is telling them their job description and their marching orders.

Hank Smith: The future apostles, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: Yes. Future apostles. Right. Almost six years later that they're gonna be called. That was cool. He called the search committee Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris. Never thought of it that way, but that's exactly what they are. The word the Lord gives them is search. Search out these apostles. So he shifts back to Oliver and David at verse 37. He's speaking in the first person, voice of the Savior. Again, search out these 12 who have the desires that I've spoken of. You'll know them by watching them manifest their desires.

John Bytheway: 44:26 And Steve, that's what you just said. What do you want? I love when I saw that, I thought, yeah, what do they want? You'll know them by their desires.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 44:34 Indeed. When you've found them, show them, Section 18, the Lord says, in verse 40, and you'll fall down and worship the Father in my name and preach this to the world. Tell the world, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. If you summed up everything we've learned so far in verse section, you could do it with verse 41, Oliver, what are you supposed to do? You're supposed to preach to the whole world. And this is what you tell them. Repent, be baptized. Take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ. And then verse 42 starts with one of those rationale words. For. It tells us the reason why Oliver is supposed to preach, repent, be baptized, and take upon the name of Christ. The reason for that is everybody has to repent and be baptized. Everybody, men, women, and children who are accountable, anybody who has been able to choose to act contrary to the will of God needs to be invited.
- 45:36 That if they would change their mind and heart, if they would, in other words, repent, if they would decide to turn around and and choose the will of God and formalize that by covenant, then they need to be baptized. They need to show that in the way God has revealed, the Lord says repentance. Another time in verse 44 and I, Jesus Christ, verse 47, your Lord, your God, and your Redeemer, by the power of my spirit have spoken it. Again, if we had a word cloud, the biggest words would be Redeemer, joy, Jesus Christ, repent, name and the name, every time we talk about that, the name is Jesus Christ. And we'd notice that this is two apostles about what apostles do. Apostles tell everyone everywhere to repent. And they explain why they should repent. Apostles take upon them the name of Jesus Christ and they go tell everyone else how they can take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ.
- 46:53 They represent the name of Christ in all the world. Just a beautiful text. It changed my life as a punk missionary. It changed the life of one woman who I've never seen since, but who on that day knew as powerfully as you can know anything, that she was a beloved daughter of God who had a Savior who made an infinite sacrifice and would do it again just for her. And they would do it at any cost and all costs. It was a really beautiful thing to present, to watch God do that in the life of one of his precious daughters. One soul who in his sight is of infinite, infinite worth.

Thanks for letting me talk about this one with you fellas. It's been a great privilege.

Hank Smith: 47:48 I can see many listeners out there saying, just verse 10, the worth of souls is great in the sight of God, the family that you're going home to, the children, you're going home to the spouse that you're gonna see soon, that will change the way you interact with them this very day.

John Bytheway: 48:09 Your ward members, your neighborhood, your friends, your enemies. I love that. When Enos started to pray, he first prayed for himself and then his heart expanded and he prayed for his brethren. And then his heart expanded and he prayed for his enemies. And I think that realization was coming to him of who everybody is. You know, and hey, if my brethren don't survive, can you bless the records that the Lamanites will get them one day because their souls are precious, which is what Alma before he went to the Rameumptom, oh Lord, their souls are precious and many of them are our brethren, right?

Hank Smith: 48:51 I bet Steve can finish this one. Joseph Smith, someone filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world. Anxious to bless the whole human race. Been thinking about that one a lot lately.

Dr. Steven Harper: 49:08 Hmm.

Hank Smith: 49:10 Steve, since we have you here, let me ask you just a quick question I think our listeners would be interested in. There's voices out there who will tell you Joseph Smith was a fraud conman and almost every other evil thing possible here we have someone who has spent their career, you don't look this old, but it's, it's getting up there in the decades. You've read his words, you've looked at the original documents, I don't know how many, I mean, you worked for the Joseph Smith papers for how many years PhD in history. And this is what you've dedicated your life to, is knowing the prophet Joseph Smith, at least knowing everything he wrote, everything he said, everything people said about him. So if I'm hearing those voices telling me that Joseph Smith is, you know, one of the biggest cons in the history of the world and I'm being

taken, and yet here I have someone who has studied literally years, what would you want me to know? The listener?

Dr. Steven Harper: 50:10

Well, one of the first things that comes to mind is that's a fulfilled prophecy of Joseph Smith. I mean, the fact that this kid who nobody would know, remember that in his own history, he said, I'm an obscure boy. And when Josiah Quincy comes to see him, and Charles Adams, right? These big names from Boston, they come all the way out the Mississippi River to check out this guy Joseph Smith. And when Quincy writes about that years later, he said he had the homeliest of all human names. He had manure on his boots. Why is he somebody that we would go a thousand miles to see? And Quincy does a pretty good job of answering that ultimately without buying into Joseph's answer where he says, Joseph kind of smiles at him and says, you forget I'm a prophet of God. So the answer is that Joseph Smith reveals Jesus Christ.

51:14

The reason to study Joseph Smith is because he was picked by Jesus to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ. If not, then none of us care or know who Joseph Smith is. There are a hundred other people named Joseph Smith in New York at the time. None of us know or care a lick about them. And they may have been morally superior to Joseph. They might have been more literate. They might have been more charitable by nature, more whatever. But what they aren't is handpicked by Jesus to translate his book and to receive his revelations and to deliver them to us. You can come up with all sorts of reasons and you can cherry pick your evidence. You could even find things from Oliver Cowdery to say Joseph Smith was a nasty, dirty, filthy person. What you're doing there is you're selecting bits of evidence instead of the totality.

52:19

And Hank that was generous of you to say, how long I've been doing this and how much I've done it. Well, what that has given me is a pretty good sense for the totality of the evidence. When you look at the totality of the evidence, you're not among those people who dismiss him so easily. Another way of saying that is the people who are grinding axes against Joseph, they're selecting bits of evidence. They're not telling you the totality. They're not

telling you that the historical record is really compelling. That the people who knew him best believed him most, including Oliver Cowdery, who spent a decade outside of the church disaffected from Joseph and the whole time affirmed. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. He translated it by the power of God. I wrote it. Oh yeah. He knows Christ. Oliver wrote a frustrated letter to Phineas Young, Brigham's brother Phineas was the epitome of a ministering brother. Oliver, you wanna come back to church with me this weekend?

53:25 Oliver, do you wanna play church basketball with me? Oliver is just always loving him regardless of what he did and whatever stuff he was saying. Oliver writes Phineas this letter that Oliver doesn't expect will go public or anything else. It's not calculating it for public consumption. And this is during the period while Oliver's disaffected and he's kind of frustrated. He feels like he's been disrespected, not given as much credit as he deserves. And in the letter he says, yeah, you're right. I have been oversensitive on these points. But you would too if you had stood in the presence of Peter with our beloved brother Joseph and received the holy priesthood. That's Oliver Cowdery saying Jesus picked Joseph and he sent Peter to put his hands on my head and Joseph's head, I'm an apostle. Or at least I was. I mean that's the kind of evidence that mounts up. And when you spend your life studying it, you can't go five minutes and pretend it doesn't exist. And even if all you have is the Book of Mormon, I don't know how people go a day and pretend the Book of Mormon doesn't have some claim on them. It is true. And therefore I need to make and keep covenants. That's my short answer. I could do a whole semester, but that's the brief answer.

Hank Smith: 54:54 I quote you often Steve saying, look, Joseph Smith, the farmer. That's not my interest. My interest is Joseph Smith, the prophet.

Dr. Steven Harper: 55:03 Yeah. And there again, only because Jesus is revealed to us through Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith doesn't save me. He doesn't do anything for me except point me to Christ and be the conduit through which Christ restores the new and Everlasting Covenant. Once had a colleague who introduced me to a bunch of students. This colleague

studied the Bible brilliantly. They said, I'm a Jesus guy and Professor Harper, he's a Joseph Smith guy. And I thought, I get what you're saying, but I consider myself a disciple of Jesus Christ through and through beginning to end. And the book that has the highest concentration of Jesus words in the densest clusters is the Doctrine and Covenants. I've been studying it for 30 years and I'm not gonna quit, John. This is a good job.

- John Bytheway: 56:04 Hank. I was excited knowing Steve was coming and it was even better than I imagined. The people who knew him best, believed him most. I love that. I'll never forget it.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 56:15 Thank you brethren.
- Hank Smith: 56:16 Yeah I love it. Oliver starts out with what do you want me to do? How can I be most ready? And I think we all get that answer. If you're wondering, what do you want me to do? How can I be most ready? Section 18.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 56:29 Hmm.
- Hank Smith: 56:29 It's brilliant how the Lord can speak to one and speak to all at the same time. Isn't that something? Well, Steve, thanks for being here. Steve wouldn't want me to say this, but you can head over to Amazon, just type in Steven Harper. You'll see quite a few books on there. We want to thank Dr. Steve Harper for being with us. We wanna thank Jennifer Harper for letting us borrow him. We love you Steve. We hope anyone listening who wants to leave a message for Steve, come on to YouTube and leave us a message there. You can go to our website, followhim.co. There's a place to send us a message there. We will make sure we pass those all on. To Steve and Jennifer. We want to thank our executive producer Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors David and Verla Sorensen. And every episode we remember our founder Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We're gonna be in section 19 on followHIM. Today's show notes and transcripts are on our website. Followhim.co. That's followhim.co. Of course, none of this could happen without our production team. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilson, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Amelia Kabwika, and Annabelle Sorensen.

HUMANS OR HELICOPTERS?



- Hank Smith: 00:03 Hello everyone. Welcome to FollowHIM Favorites. This is where John and I share a single story to go with each week's lesson. John, one section of the Doctrine & Covenants this week, section 18. I know you have a great story for this. In fact, I've heard it before. Hit it.
- John Bytheway: 00:17 Hank. There's so many things you could draw from section 18, but I'm gonna focus on verse 10. The worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Now, Hank, I don't know how old you were in April of 1975. Okay,
- Hank Smith: 00:30 You know, I could have been a million years old. I don't remember. Uh, yeah. How old was your spirit? How old was my spirit at that point? Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 00:38 So what was going on was the fall of Saigon in the Vietnam War, but they were trying to evacuate the South Vietnamese out of Saigon. The communists were coming and it was gonna be really, really bad. So you can find pictures of people climbing on top of the embassy to get in helicopters to get out of there, there's an aircraft carrier called the USS Midway. The deck of this thing was filled with helicopters evacuating people. April, I think it was 29th or 30th of '75, there is a South Vietnamese major who gets into a little Cessna 01 bird dogs. Basically like a little Cessna 172 doesn't know where to go and heads out to sea, but he finally, he finds the Midway, he flies over it. He waggles his wings, he tries the radio. Nothing works. I'll just read from history.net. The pilot dropped three paper notes from the plane.
- 01:31 They blew over the side before the ship's crew could snatch them. On the next pass, he stuffed a fourth note into his pistols leather holster to weigh it down. And sailors rushed to grab the little package. After it hit the deck, they read a scribbled message written on a crumpled chart of South Vietnam and there are some misspellings with this guy's Vietnamese, can you move the helicopter to the other side? I can land on your runway. I can fly for one hour more. We have enough time to

move. Please rescue me. Major Wong wife and five child, they didn't know. They thought, let him ditch the plane next to the ship and we'll get him. But he had five children stuffed in this little Cessna. Hank, I gave a talk years ago about my first solo, and I talked about my shoulder touching one end of the plane, my other shoulder touching my flight instructor's shoulder.

02:27 Her shoulder touching they're cramped. He's got five kids in there, and a wife and a wife, and the wife is holding a newborn, basically. Please rescue me. And Captain Larry Chambers has only been the skipper for four or five weeks. To make room they literally pushed helicopters off the side of the ship. Why? Because the worth of souls is what? It's worth it. It's great. And he's like, we've gotta do this. We've gotta rescue this. He's never landed on a carrier. He's got a Cessna that's a tail dragger. Instead of having, they call it tricycle landing gear, where the nose gear is in front of you and like a tricycle, you know, the nose gear and two more. This one is dragging the tail is, that's where the gear is. Go like this. So it's a whole different thing. He's trying to land on a carrier. The whole crew runs over, they're cheering and this major gets out. His wife's holding a baby, these little kids. And Larry Chambers, the skipper thought, I'm going to get court marshaled. Because he had to move helicopters off the deck to make room for these.

Hank Smith: 03:40 I pushed a \$50 million helicopter off the side

John Bytheway: 03:43 Pushing these Hueys in the water. I'm like, wait, can I have one? But I love the story because he said, I felt my grandma, Larry Chamber said, talking to me, my conscience talking to me saying, you're gonna have to live with this decision for years. What are you gonna do? And they rescued that little family because the worth of souls is great. So I love that story.

Hank Smith: 04:04 He might say, I'm gonna lose my commission. I'm gonna lose my job. But it's worth it.

John Bytheway: 04:07 What's more important, humans or helicopters?

Hank Smith: 04:10 What a classic story. The worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Wow. That's awesome. We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called FollowHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. In fact, our guest, Dr. Steve Harper, is going to do something with that verse 10 that is really gonna blow your mind. It's special. Yes. So we hope you'll join us over there and then come back next week, we'll do another followHIM favorite.