"Great Shall Be Their Reward and Eternal Shall Be Their Glory"

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

followHIM: 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 if heaven is more expansive and more inclusive than ever imagined? Dr. Spencer Fluhman dives into Doctrine and Covenants 76, exploring the revolutionary vision that defined eternity, challenged 19th-century norms, and reshaped the Saints' understanding of salvation.

Part 2:

Dr. Spencer Fluhman continues the conversation on Doctrine and Covenants 76, exploring the sweeping vision of Christ's redemptive word, the nuanced understanding of judgment and glory, and how this revelation defines salvation through the lens of grace and divine potential.

Timecodes:

Part 1 -

- 00:00 - Part 1 - Dr. Spencer Fluhman
- 06:16 followHIM history
- 09:45 *Come, Follow Me Manual*
- 11:12 The importance of The Vision
- 16:04 A monument to the redemptive word of Christ
- 19:19 Don't miss the confession of Jesus
- 20:26 A mini scandal
- 24:57 Universalism gets personal
- 30:36 Faith differences in Joseph's home
- 36:24 Faith reconciliation in the Smith home
- 39:23 The backdrop of Calvinism
- 42:08 John and Charles Wesley responds to Calvinism
- 45:32 A blistering call to repentance
- 48:35 What is the point of endless punishment
- 52:56 *Voices of the Restoration* with Gerrit Dirkmaat
- 55:37 Joseph rejoices to share revelatory and pastoral duties
- 1:00:09 "John Johnson Home Hidden Mysteries Revealed"
- 1:04:09 A profound beginning
- 1:07:25 Bible translation as revelatory insight
- 1:12:07 Wisdom functions to prioritize
- 1:16:16 - End of Part I - Dr. Spencer Fluhman

Part 2 -

- 00:00 - Part 2 - Dr. Spencer Fluhman
- 00:57 A relationship between two phrases
- 05:43 "Vessels of wrath"
- 09:22 The grand scope of Christ's work
- 11:12 A lion becomes a lamb
- 13:02 Joseph changes capital letters in a revelation
- 15:22 President Oaks' many talks on D&C 76:43
- 16:36 The Saints are slow to understand human potential
- 24:43 God's intention for the exalted
- 28:32 John is a chronic overthinker and a karate chop
- 33:31 We are profoundly Christian
- 39:55 The arithmetic of grace
- 42:47 The irony of being known to earn our way to heaven
- 44:35 How close do you want to be to God?
- 49:25 Accepting God's glory

- 53:17 God is a giver of good gifts
- 55:43 A temporary fire and brimstone metaphor
- 58:09 If we could build a time machine
- 1:02:16 God's slow work and long game
- 1:05:43 - End of Part 2 - Dr. Spencer Fluhman

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Biographical Information:

J. Spencer Fluhman is associate professor and chair of the history department at Brigham Young University. He graduated *summa cum laude* from BYU in Near Eastern Studies and received master's and doctoral degrees in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. At BYU, he has taught courses on US History, Utah History, Latter-day Saint history, and the history of American religion. He has won multiple teaching awards, including professor of the year in the history department and American Studies program. He is the author or editor of several books and articles on Latter-day Saint history and his writing and research have been awarded the Mormon History Association's best article and best first book awards. He was a fellow at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture from 2007-09, editor-in-chief of the *Mormon Studies Review* from 2013-2018, visiting professor of Religion at Claremont Graduate University in 2015, visiting distinguished professor of Mormon Studies at the University of California—Santa Barbara in 2020, executive director of BYU's Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship from 2016-23, and senior research associate at Pembroke College, University of Oxford, in 2023-24. He and his family live in Provo but are excited to return to England, where he will teach a course of British Sacred Space this summer at BYU's London Centre.

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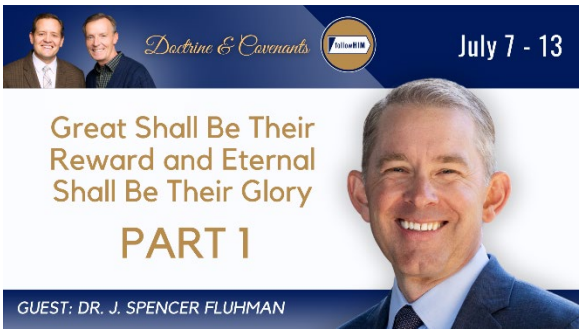


Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:00:03	Where the Calvinist Heaven was very small. The Calvinist Hell was very large. The vision perfectly inverts it. The Restoration Heaven is very big. Our Hell is vanishingly small. It's barely there.
Hank Smith:	00:00:30	Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name's Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my celestial co-host John Bytheway, whose glory is that of the sun, the glory of God, the highest of all whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of being typical. John, section 76, verse 70. My celestial cohost. Welcome.
John Bytheway:	00:00:52	I'm so bright. My mother calls me, son. Yeah, that's the The dad joke.
Hank Smith:	00:00:56	Yeah. You're so bright, John. I got to wear shades. John, we are joined today by Dr. Spencer Fluhman. Spencer, welcome.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:01:06	Glad to be with you both. This is great.
Hank Smith:	00:01:08	We're going to have a lot of fun. John, section 76, I don't know if we can overstate how important this section is in the history of the church. When you think of section 76, tell me what comes to mind.
John Bytheway:	00:01:21	When I was in high school, it was just another section in there, but the more I've learned about church history, this was huge. It was pivotal. I think it caused persecution. Hugh Nibley talks about, he called them the terrible questions. What it means is they're so hard to answer. Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where will I go when I die? What I love about the Restoration, this is some better answers about what happens when I die or what is my ultimate destiny than anything. That's why section 76 for me helps answer some of those terrible questions. A wonderful flood of light.

Hank Smith:	00:01:58	I love that. Spencer, as you've looked at section 76, I know you've studied it many times throughout your career. What are we looking forward to today?
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:02:08	I would say that what we're seeing here is one of the culminating gifts of the restoration. Joseph Smith's revelatory ministry. We get a vision of the big picture. There are lots of ways that the revelations are practical that help us day to day. Once in a while we glimpse the big, big picture. That's what this gives us.
Hank Smith:	00:02:31	Yeah. John, I'm like you. I didn't know. I don't think I understood, and the more I learn about church history, it gets bigger and bigger. Now, John, Spencer hasn't been on our show before. He's a long time friend of mine. 15 years. I've known Spencer really been an admirer of Dr. Fluhman. Do you know anything about him?
John Bytheway:	00:02:54	I sure do. I have a piece of paper that knows everything. Dr. J. Spencer Fluhman is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University. A former executive director of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, received a master's and doctoral degrees in history from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. His research takes up the question of religious identity and the intersection of religion and politics in the United States. His work has appeared in the New York Times, Journal of Religion and Society, journal of Mormon History, BYU studies quarterly. Now, here's what I loved. I read that he's currently at work on a biography of LDS Apostle James E. Talmage.
Hank Smith:	00:03:37	Wow.
John Bytheway:	00:03:38	I wanted to ask, do you have his golfing story in there?
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:03:43	It'll show up, I'm sure John. Yeah, absolutely.
John Bytheway:	00:03:48	If I remember the details right, he's invited to come and golf down at the Hugh Nibley Park in Salt Lake City. Heber J. Grant has already been recruited to golf down there. Elder Talmage comes down there to golf. They're like, put down your work and golf with us. They have him address the ball. Tell him how to do a good drive. Elder Talmage takes up his back swing, smacks the ball a couple hundred yards. There's stunned silence and they're all, that was amazing, and he goes, well, was that a good drive? Yeah, that was a great drive. That was beautiful. So I fulfilled my part of the bargain. Yeah, you, you tried. You hit a great drive

		and he says, okay, I'm going back to the temple. He never played again. Yeah, I'm out.
Hank Smith:	00:04:34	Wow.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:04:35	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:04:36	How long have you been working on that forever. What's the estimated time?
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:04:42	Well, I wish it were on a quicker pace. I started that project years ago then had an extended administrative position at the university. I'm just reengaging with the project after eight years, essentially away from it. I'd like to have it done in a few years. It's a big project. He was prolific. We have quite a bit more material from him as a very gifted writer, a a gifted apostolic thinker. As prolific as he was, there's a lot to do there. It's moving but slowly, hopefully it'll pick up here soon.
Hank Smith:	00:05:16	I'm looking forward to that now.
John Bytheway:	00:05:19	Yeah.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:05:19	Yeah me too. A serious focused, exceptionally hardworking Englishman scientist apostle. If you connect those words, you end up with a very focused man and he was, wow. He's unique in the trust that is placed in him before being a general authority to articulate church teaching in a really dramatic way that receives the perimeter of the church, and that's not the only time that happens to him where he's called upon to represent church teaching for both the saints and for a broader community. It's really quite, that's one of the things that's fascinating about him is that he's tasked with heavy responsibility before he is a general authority. Articles of Faith comes in 1899 and he's called as an apostle in 1911. There's quite a story there.
John Bytheway:	00:06:10	You're going to have a lot of people looking forward to that book. Now that we've talked about it.
Hank Smith:	00:06:16	Now, I hope our listeners will forgive a little bit of a personal moment here, but Spencer was critical to our beginnings of followHIM
John Bytheway:	00:06:24	As a podcast.

Hank Smith: 00:06:25 Yeah. As a podcast. Spencer, if you don't mind, let's reminisce for a second. I hope to not get emotional when I think of our founder, Steve Sorensen and Shannon, you were right there. You were right there in the beginnings.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:06:40 This is a very, very sweet memory for me. It is poignant for me too, because my life has been touched by the vision of Steve and Shannon for sure. I was there in Santa Barbara in 2020 as a visiting professor in the religious studies department at UCSB, where Steve was the young single adult bishop. We had a number of exchanges. He was so eager for me to interact with the young people in his ward and other scholars too, but this was a passion of his. He felt like there were resources that they needed that they hungered for. Here they are getting this really fine secular education at UCSB. He wanted a parallel to go along with that education where they could get their profound questions engaged and answer their questions of faith. They can engage as well. The problem that he discerned was he said, your students and the other students at BYU are so lucky to be able to engage these questions from spiritual perspectives, from religious perspectives in the household of faith.

00:07:52 It's harder for the students here. They don't have that all day long. They don't have every class that they have isn't lit up with gospel perspectives. At the time, I was working at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute on BYU campus. He said, there's got to be a way to amplify that for a bigger audience. Those were the wheels started turning and he said, my hunch is that the way to do this ultimately is going to be a podcast. He laid out his vision there in 2020, and I think he'd be thrilled with the listeners that come to have their own study of the scriptures amplified by scholars. I think he'd be thrilled.

Hank Smith: 00:08:30 I think he would too.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:08:31 Those first conversations really honored to be a part of those. That was great.

Hank Smith: 00:08:36 He called me in December. Brother Hank, I got an idea. Let's talk through this. John, Spencer's pretty crucial to you being part of the show. When Steve asked me if I wanted to be part of this, he said, what would it look like? I said, well, obviously want to have on as close as we can get to the church's expert on this particular topic, what it is we're talking about, but I think we need three people. The reason why I thought that is because of a show I listened to. Brent Top did a show called Past Impressions where he would interview experts on church history. As I listened to those, I noticed that when he would

have two people on with him, the dynamic, the energy change, when Steve said, what would this look like? I said, I think you need three people, and he said, well, who else would you get? I said, well, John and I, we do this sort of thing all the time just sitting in airports. This moment, having Spencer here today means a lot to me.

John Bytheway: 00:09:34 Absolutely. Thanks, man.

Hank Smith: 00:09:36 We'll just say to the Sorensen family right now, all three of us, our whole team, we love you.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:09:42 Amen to that. Yeah, no doubt. Thank you.

Hank Smith: 00:09:45 Let's jump in. Section 76. The title of this week's lesson is Great Shall Be Their Reward. Eternal Shall Be Their Glory. This is how the manual starts. What will happen to me after I die? Nearly everyone asks this question in some form or another. For centuries, many Christian traditions relying on biblical teachings have taught of heaven and hell of paradise for the righteous and torment for the wicked, but can the entire human family really be divided so strictly? In February of 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon wondered if there were more to know about the subject. There certainly was. While Joseph and Sidney were pondering these things, the Lord touched the eyes of their understandings and they were open. They received a revelation, so stunning, so expansive, so illuminating that the saints simply called it the vision. It threw open heaven's windows and gave God's children a mind stretching view of eternity. The vision revealed that heaven is grander and broader and more inclusive than most people had previously supposed. God is more merciful and just than we can comprehend, and God's children have an eternal destiny more glorious than we can imagine. Hmm. What a great opening for a marvelous flood of light, as John called it. Spencer, where do we need to start to understand this section 76? How important is it to the church?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:11:19 Yeah. My response is very, one of the lines you had there, Hank, was the saints called it the vision. It struck me when you said the words, it's not just the saints that called it the vision. The prophet did. It seems to have occupied a particular place in Joseph Smith's own reckoning with the revelatory experiences that he had on the earliest manuscript copy for Doctrine & Covenants section 76. It's simply titled The Vision. It's in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams. Well, I will say this, and this is not insignificant. Joseph Smith's handwriting appears on that manuscript copy. That is rare for the revelations. That is not his typical MO. His method is to dictate, to tinker with after

sometimes, but on the manuscript copy of Doctrine & Covenants section 76, it simply says, the vision Joseph Smith's fingerprints are all over it. There is a few of the verses that are in his own handwriting, which again, this is pretty unique for him.

00:12:30 To me, it's a metaphor in a way. It's not only title division. It's not only got Joseph Smith's handwriting on it, fingerprints on it. It's the first in the collection of the revelations. We call it the Kirtland Revelation book or manuscript revelation book too. If you could look at the Joseph Smith papers online, you can see the compilation there, but it's the first one. This is speculation on my part, but it's worth speculating on this point. He's told he's commanded in the revelation to write it. It may be that the Kirtland Revelation book itself is a result of that commandment to write the vision because it's the first one. It's not inconceivable that he goes and has that collection purchased so that he, they can record the vision. Now they certainly have a copy made before that. This starts the Kirtland Revelation book, and the other revelations follows.

00:13:34 It is preeminent in that original collection. Wow. It's something to pause on. Joseph Smith writes his own little gloss about the revelation when he's dictating his manuscript history in 1839. That's published serially in the Times and Seasons. It shows up actually right after the martyrdom, after he is killed. I'm going to read his gloss on it. He's dictating the story of the restoration to scribes in 1839. That takes various forms over time, but this is how it reads in times and seasons for the saints. This is him talking about the vision, Joseph Smith. Nothing could be more pleasing to the saints upon the order of the kingdom of the Lord than the light which burst upon the world through the foregoing vision. Every law, every commandment, every promise, every truth, and every point touching the destiny of man from Genesis to Revelation where the purity of either remains unsullied from the wisdom of men, goes to show the perfection of the theory and witnesses. The fact that the document is a transcript from the records of the eternal world. He keeps going, I'm going to keep quoting. He doesn't stop.

John Bytheway: 00:14:56 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:14:56 The sublimity of the ideas, the purity of the language, the scope for action, the continued duration for completion in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee. The rewards for faithfulness and the punishment for sins are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men that every honest man is constrained to exclaim it came from God. It's so good.

That's his gloss on the vision. Couple things grab me about that. One is that it'd be a weird thing to write if you wrote it, but he's writing it as one who's experienced it. Who himself marvels at it. That's what comes through there in that language is his own kind of marveling at what is contained there. I also take his cue that the effect of this is that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee.

00:16:04 I can share a little bit about how I've come to this if you'll allow it, but this vision is a monument to the redemptive work of Christ. It is a monument to the redemptive work of Jesus, the atonement of Christ towers over the vision and the vision towers over the revelations, and I say that as one who loves all of the revelations and have spent a career plumbing and assessing and weighing and trying my best to live to the revelations, but the vision is a towering position here. It's worthy of our wrestling with it, and the saints wrestled with it, I guess is I'm thinking about an approach to the vision. I'm thinking a little bit about a New Testament teacher I had many years ago who I love who shaped me so fundamentally at BYU. He was so good. He would talk about the worlds of scripture.

00:17:06 He would be quick to say he's borrowing from others, but for me, he gave me this way of approaching scripture, and for me it's really important for the vision. There's the world behind scripture. There's the context. There's the world behind the revelation. Then there's the world of the revelation, the world of the text, the words, the structure, how those connect, and then there's the world we bring to scripture. Those three worlds of scripture come together for me. That's how I've approached it as a learner and as a teacher, and that's how I think I'll nudge your listeners, is to think about the vision in terms of the world behind it, the world of the text and the world they bring to the text. You both confessed to having Doctrine and Covenants section 76 kind of a one among many. I've just given this argument that nah, no, it's a jewel in the crown.

00:18:04 My own confession is like yours. I did not sense that early on either as a learner and as a teacher. Incidentally, my own sense of Doctrine & Covenants section 76's significance has grown over time. I really wrestled as a young teacher with how much the saints wrestled with it, and I couldn't quite figure it out at first. Maybe the big story for me personally animating here is how the saints taught me how significant this actually is, how their struggle with it made it come alive for me, and I use struggle on purpose. John, you hinted rightly that this was polarizing. That's only clear when you start to excavate the mental and theological, the religious world that Joseph Smith

lived in that world. When you have that world in mind, the revelation starts to look a little different. That's what's happened to me over time. My own awakening to its real significance.

00:19:19 That's kind of where I'm headed as we're talking today, is how the world behind the text illuminates the text for us. If we finish today and we don't have in mind the confession of Jesus and a bowing of the knee before the majesty of his atoning redemptive work, we will have missed it. If we missed that, then we're going to have to rerecord the whole thing. We're going to have to start over and I'm going to have to retrace our stuff because that has to come through. That was Joseph Smith's sense of the vision. It's certainly become mine, and that's certainly what we all need to leave with. Does that sound like a fair way to map out where we're headed?

Hank Smith: 00:19:59 Yeah. I think if you had my heart rate over the last, you know, few minutes, it just steadily increasing. One, your excitement for it, and two, starting to sense the saints as you read their response, as you study their lives, they teach you how significant it is.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:20:19 I mean, it's nice to have historians around once in a while. I keep telling my kids this, there is a use. This is one of those situations where we actually, it's nice to have a historian around because it really can be illuminating. My puzzle as an early teacher was why was this such a struggle for folks to get their minds around? So I thought, okay, so heaven has layers. Alright. Why am I reading a little mini crisis? Among the church and their neighbors in the wake of the revelation given in February of 1832, by March, this is showing up in newspapers critical of the church as a scandal. In March of 1832, a newspaper, it's blasting the saints for heresy around the vision.

Hank Smith: 00:21:21 By March?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:21:22 Yeah, yeah, yeah. All of one month before. This is a little mini scandal, but it's a scandal inside. That's what grabbed me even more. The responses inside are interesting. One that grabs our attention most often you'll see in manuals, you'll see in commentaries is Brigham Young. Not everyone had this reaction, I would call the revelation polarizing because some people, Wilford Woodruff for instance, embraces it. For him this resonates. It makes sense. It affirms an instinct I didn't know I had. Brigham Young though voices for us, a really the interesting counter position. These are his words on it. This is from a sermon many years later. My traditions were such, he

says, that when the vision first came to me, it was directly contrary and opposed to my former education. I said, wait a little. I did not reject it but I could not understand it. He admits to us, I couldn't get my mind around it. I had to put it away. We've got evidence that it stirred up trouble in some of the branches of the church, such that there were, how to phrase it?

00:22:38 There were meetings. There were, there were conferences around the debates that came in the wake of it. What I'm going to lay out here for is are some contextual points. These are historical. If this isn't your thing, then you're like, my kids who glaze over after they can handle three minutes of this. If it gets to seven minutes and you can't do it, you're like my kids and a good, fair portion of my students. The saints belatedly, understand the heights that the vision points to in terms of the afterlife and salvation, what we call exaltation. In fact, exaltation is given here. This is the beginning of that story of exaltation. That means so much to the rest of church history. We organized all of the church's effort around this idea of exaltation. Doctrine & Covenants section 76 does not come in a vacuum. Revelations don't. Revelations are experienced in time, in space.

00:23:49 That's how we experience it. They don't come out of nothing. Revelations come out of the yearning, the experience, the deep need of human striving. We experience them that way. We articulate them that way. We understand them that way. We remember them that way. That's how Revelation works in this world. This vision comes in the midst of a theological crisis debate. Joseph Smith's world has been torn by the very questions that the vision responds to. I just played my hand right there. The revelation is responding to this world. It's a world that is about the greater New England world that Joseph Smith and his family before him have inhabited. It's a story about the theological crises of early America. It's a story about his own family. This story is big, but it gets really personal. It's really proximate for the Smiths as well, and that's why there's so much intrigue.

00:24:57 That's why it's a story that needs to be told. It's a story that can be summed up with a single word universalism. It's an ism. It's a movement in Joseph Smith's own time. It's got ancient roots. It's got European predecessors, but it's a full-blown American thing by the time of Joseph Smith's birth, and it exists in a world created by the Reformation, created by dominant strands of the Reformation in early America. For some of you, this is like dusting off those high school maybe bad memories of history. For some of you this, these are college points you have.

Remember the Reformation is this big unruly revolt against the unitary Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation plays a bigger role in the early American world of Joseph Smith than does Roman Catholicism in both in terms of numbers and influence, but certain strands of the Reformation play an even outsized role still.

00:26:10 The strand of the Reformation that plays a big role for the Joseph Smith story are followers of a theological forebearer, a French speaking reformer by the name of John Calvin. Calvin's ideas give rise to churches like the Congregationalist Church, the Presbyterian Church. These are the most influential churches of Joseph Smith's upbringing. This is the old guard of New England. New England was founded by English Protestants of a certain sort. The English would've called them the a hotter sort of Protestant, a more intense Protestant. They were a group within the Church of England that felt like the Church of England was still too Catholic. They wanted to move it in a more radical direction for the followers of John Calvin in New England. The point was God's sovereignty, his power, his omniscience, all those omnis for Calvin format all of theological reasoning and all of church life. For a God that knew everything and that was all powerful humans couldn't influence that God. That God was influenceable to be influenced would be to be limited. God couldn't be limited. He's not omniscient. He's not all powerful if he's influenced by humans.

00:27:52 For Calvinists like the Puritan forebearers in New England, salvation was a drama that one experienced but did not influence. Christ's gift was prearranged by God. It put God's majesty on display, but in that drama of salvation, you didn't have an active role. You had a passive role. It happens to you. It happens to you. The Puritans were obsessed with searching their souls, their lives for signs of God's mysterious grace and mystery. My goodness. Mystery shows up here in the vision. In the language of the vision, and that's not insignificant. Mystery was one of Calvin's great touchstone. God is beyond you. He is a mystery to you. He is so distant and overwhelmingly other to you that the proper approach to God is fear. It's awe. A-W-E awe for Calvin. That's the foundation of worship is awe. That's the foundation of godly life is that awe and fear of this mysterious, all powerful holy other.

00:29:13 Their reading of the Bible and the heaven that grows out of this theology is dualistic. It's heaven and hell. Like Hank, you read in the intro there, it's heaven and hell. Your hope was in Christ. It was a mystery how that came out in your life. You could experience God's grace. Tons of debates about what that

experience was, how you know it. Could you fall from that experience? Could you undo the work for strict Calvinists? No, because then you're influencing God. If you are elected by God, if in his wisdom before the world was you were chosen to salvation, what could you possibly do to undo that? You're going to undo what God...? It didn't compute. There was no way in which that could compute. You're already sensing, and your listeners are sensing, there is not a big space in here for human agency. In fact, there's no space for human agency. Human agency is a prideful myth. I'm trying to paint a picture for your listeners here of how this sense of the here and the afterlife, how that might have worked in lives, how that might have felt in lives, why itself would've sparked some controversy.

Hank Smith: 00:30:36 I've heard you say before that not only was the turmoil going on around Joseph Smith's community, but it was happening in his own home.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:30:44 Yeah, absolutely. What we get in his mother is we get a very saintly, very committed, very dutiful Christian believer, by the time of Joseph Smith's upbringing is attending a Presbyterian church. She is in some senses a traditional Christian in that broader New England sense in a church that had its roots in Scottish Calvinism. That's what you're getting in the Presbyterian church, Joseph Smith's paternal line, they are rowdy in this sense. They are theologically rowdy. His father, his uncle, and his paternal grandfather, Asael Joseph and Jesse Asael to his father Joseph, and then his uncle Jesse. They all in their adult lives tended toward a new revolt, an American revolt against that Calvinist orthodoxy. It was called Universalism. It pushed those Calvinist positions to one logical conclusion. If God is all powerful, all loving and patient, as we say he is, what possible point could he have in electing some? If my actions don't influence God, if I don't have a role of an active role in salvation, what possible reason could God have for electing some? In some ways, it turns Calvinism against itself and says, if he can elect some, why would a benevolent God not just elect all. Universal. Universal. Their universalism describes this movement, this revolt against what they perceive to be a stern, too mysterious, morally questionable decision of God in judgment. That's the question. Why would an all loving God create something then torment it for eternity?

00:33:10 What would be the point? This was the Universalist revolt. This created, I mean, the pamphlet war was significant out of this. The war is still raging when the vision comes in 1832. In fact, it's the next year that Universalism becomes its own church. This is the world of Joseph Smith. Hank. The way you teed us up here is

to show us that this is his own family. Here is in the words of his grandfather written in 1799. See if you can follow Grandpa has internalized the logic of the universalist against the traditional Calvinist of his upbringing. This is Joseph Smith's grandfather. It's his dad's dad. His dad's dad as collected and recorded by his mother in her reminiscences about their family that she publishes later.

John Bytheway: 00:34:07 Asael. Is that how you say it?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:34:09 Asael Smith. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:34:10 Asael Smith.

John Bytheway: 00:34:11 A-S-E-A-L I think.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:34:13 A-E-L. Yeah. Here he is. If you can believe that Christ came to save sinners and not the righteous Pharisees or self-righteous, that sinners must be saved by the righteousness of Christ alone without mixing any of their own righteousness with his. He's poking the Calvinist right in the eye here. This is me, not him. This is my editorial. He's poking him right in the eye. Quote, then you will see that he can as well save all as any, end quote. In 1797, Joseph Smith's father, Joseph Smith and his brother Jesse, both petitioned in Vermont to be exempted from their ecclesiastical taxes because they were members of the Tunbridge Universalist society. Dad and uncle are saying, we don't want to pay taxes to the local Congregationalist Calvinist church because we're Universalists. This is where dad's at. His dad, Joseph Smith, Sr. for the most part, before the restoration, tended to keep organized churches at arms length.

00:35:19 For awhile he attends a Methodist church with Lucy Mack, but his dad and his brother aren't thrilled that he is capitulating. He quits going, it's enough, and you can read between the lines in Lucy Mack Smith's account that it's a real struggle for her that he's not attending. He's not attending church. He's keeping traditional church at arm's length. He's got these universalistic ideas. I know that her pastors were and her minister were not thrilled with those ideas. We can read all this pamphlet war. What we end up with Joseph Smith is an interesting both cultural and familial tension. He writes about war of word, tumult of opinions, who is right and who is wrong. I am tempted as a historian to read that a little bit idle biographically. There is not religious peace in his own home. Mom and dad are coming at this in different from different angles. There's no question. One of the sweet things here to note, I guess at the end of this

little contextual point is that the restoration reconciled this divide within the Smith home.

00:36:41 That's maybe a metaphor for the vision itself. because the metaphor holds together what we might take as contrary. It holds them together and it keeps justice and mercy in play. It keeps Christ's atoning work and human agency in play. It steers a course between those extremes and holds them together. I mean, that's what the restoration did for the family certainly. That's what the vision does for the restoration theologically. It's a long-ish contextual point, but it's not insignificant. That's why the early Saints struggled. What it ends up doing, John and Hank, is this where the Calvinist heaven was very small. The Calvinist hell was very large. The vision perfectly inverts it. The Restoration Heaven is very big. Our hell is vanishingly small. It's barely there. We're not quite universalists. It's not like there's this huge influx of universalists into the restoration. The vision isn't just universalism.

00:38:02 There are significant distinctions, but it is universalistic in the lowercase U sense in that the heaven is very big. It is turned inside out. The traditional Christian orthodoxy of Joseph Smith's world flipped it on its head. That's why it was so hard to digest for the early saints. It was perfectly inside out. It was the perfectly opposite of what they were used to. Everything I had been taught to that point. That's it. Brigham didn't lie. He was telling us, this is not what I was raised on. The Saints really had to grapple with the implications. I think we're still grappling. That's one of my invitations to your listeners. If the Early Saints wrestled, ooh, let's wrestle too a little bit with this. Right? This is good. This is great. Let's see what the implications are here and rejoice in them.

John Bytheway: 00:38:59 The idea of predestination, I don't think we've used that word yet, but that was part of it. We believe in a foreordination of possibilities, but we have room for free will in there. Somehow free will takes away God's sovereignty in some people's minds because God's already determined what's going to happen to you. That's predestination. That was the backdrop they came from.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:39:23 It is That is the backdrop. Yeah. The idea that God had in his own wisdom elected some to salvation for us, that's incomprehensible. Traditional, strict Calvinists are not always easy to find. Modern Christianity has wrestled with these ideas along with us. These have proven to be very difficult ideas. One of the things that Calvinists believed that this did for them was explain the human condition for them. They looked around and

they saw most humans didn't care for God or didn't follow his commandments, for them, their sense of God's election and the fall, it was kind of born out in the world around them. I've got a great Calvinist friend. We've talked through these things for so many hours we've lost track, but he said, the fall is the only Christian doctrine with empirical proof in the world. You can see it.

John Bytheway: 00:40:28 Look around.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:40:29 We can prove that Christian point. That one's not hard to prove is the fall. In a way, predestination protected God's sovereignty. It explained the world around why do so few people seem to follow God at all. Most people don't care. Early American Congregationalists and Presbyterians and Baptists. Those tended to be the ones who are most Calvinists. Interestingly though, I will say this, another little fun contextualizing point in understanding Joseph Smith a little bit as mom and some of the kids are heading off to Presbyterian church. Joseph Smith is not. He is most comfortable with the Methodists. That's the only Protestant church in Joseph Smith's world. That gave significant space to the notion of human free will.

Hank Smith: 00:41:23 Inches him towards where he's going to end up.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:41:27 Yeah. Or is this his instinct? Is this his affinity? We don't have Joseph Smith's interior world from those early years, but he does resonate there. That's interesting. That's an interesting understanding. Like the teenage Joseph Smith, he's willing to go on his own to Methodist meetings rather than go with mom. He's not just sitting it out with dad either. It gives us some insight into his own seeking.

Hank Smith: 00:41:57 I think that this point of Methodism is pretty important. How all of a sudden did these Methodists come on the scene when you had the old guard in New England? Where did these Methodists come from? They're not universalists.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:42:08 They're not. Yeah. John and Charles Wesley and a group of like-minded folks at Oxford and England start the movement. It's a response to Calvinism that makes space for human will. The idea that we can respond to God's call and freely do it, we can influence our salvation. Yeah. Of responding to that call of God and share the idea that salvation comes with God's initiative, not my initiative. That God's calling Calvin's point is, if you're called, then you can't say no. His grace is irresistible. This is a Calvinist point. For Wesley it's no, no, no. It is resistible. Just because you've experienced God's redemptive work in your life

doesn't mean you can't turn your back on him. The Wesleyans have this powerful sense that, yeah, you're not passive in this story of salvation. You're active. You're active in it. It really is this movement in broader Reformation history, this Methodist movement, but it's fantastically successful in the early United States and it fits well with the kind of frontiersy, pull yourself up, work your way into the wilder-. That strain of American energy and work, it fits well with that. The Methodist grow exponentially in the age of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith, and everybody else is drawn to this.

00:43:48 Counter to that more traditional version of the Reformation. I hope these contextual points have helped us begin to see how significant the revelation was in terms of the questions that all of these saints had on their minds coming in from the various Christian traditions they had. One of the shocks to the system was that the Book of Mormon hadn't presented this.

Hank Smith: 00:44:18 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:44:18 Mm-hmm

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:44:19 And here we are a couple of years into the formal restoration at the institutional church level. The saints who had been gathered, had been gathered often by the Book of Mormon, by the message of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, but the Book of Mormon hadn't exactly challenged the biblical dualism that they had for the afterlife. A heaven and hell sense. That's one of the shocks to the system. If we're careful readers of the Doctrine and Covenants though, there is a little bit of a preparatory hint of where things are heading at the time. The Book of Mormon is published in one of the revelations, this is Doctrine & Covenant section 19, we've already been there in the Come, Follow Me curriculum, but I want to back up and take stock for a minute of the way in which a definitely more subtle challenge to what the saints had been accustomed to and a traditional American Christian biblical framework.

00:45:32 It's a challenge nonetheless. Doctrine & Covenants section 19. It includes one of the sharpest calls to repentance ever. The fact that this blistering call to repentance is actually prefaced by a little, I use that phrase on purpose. The traditional framework for understanding is challenged subtly and not so subtly in Doctrine & Covenants section 19, I'm going to read a little bit because it's a revelatory forerunner to what we get in the vision. Starting in verse three, retaining all power even to the destroying of Satan and his works at the end of the world and the last great day of judgment. The idea of judgment looms

large with the vision. Of course, a similar theme here, I shall pass upon the inhabitants thereof, judging every man according to his works and the deeds which he has done, and surely every man must repent or suffer for I the Lord am endless. Therefore, I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass. Woes will go forth. Then there's this caveat, strangely in verse six and seven. Nevertheless, it's not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment.

00:46:50 When I read it to my students in pause, they're like, now wait a minute. What does that actually mean? And again, it is written eternal damnation. Therefore, it's more expressed in other scriptures that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men. Almost saying, I'm using this language to get your attention. It's more expressed, but I'm, I'm getting your attention, then in verse eight. I'll explain this mystery. Verse 10 tells us the mystery, I am endless and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for endless is my name. Eternal punishment. It's God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment. What grows out of this is endless and eternal as descriptions of the source of punishment, but not its duration. We end up with a temporary suffering of the wicked from Doctrine & Covenants 19. We don't have a lot of evidence that the saints were rattled by Doctrine & Covenants, but looking back, there is a line here, Doctrine & Covenants 19 does prepare the saints for the vision in that it does limit the sufferings described. It's not that they won't end, it's that they're from God in that sense. They're endless in that sense. They're eternal, but the sufferings do have an end. That's an interesting additional textual forerunner for what we get in the vision.

Hank Smith: 00:48:29 As far as you know, is that new in Christianity, was that not taught about hell?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:48:35 This was a minority position. It's ancient. It goes ancient for sure. We get folks like Origen, Clement of Alexandria. These are pillars of the ancient church. The question for them was what would God's point be in endless punishment? They put forward this question. It was question more than anything. Is hell better conceived of as remedial or even redemptive than punitive? Does that make sense?

Hank Smith: 00:49:12 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:49:13 It's a discipline, but meant to do something, but that it might be temporary. This is an old idea in Christianity, but it's not a dominant idea. It is in no way a dominant idea. Some of your

listeners are already probably anticipating some of the traditionalist responses to universalism or the limiting of hell and so on. That is, oh well, does this sap human initiative though? You have to be careful with this idea.

Hank Smith: 00:49:42 Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:49:44 It's too easy. Is it too easy? Does it sand away God's justice in some way? This is the nature of the pamphlet war of Joseph Smith's own upbringing. These volleys back and forth about God's love and God's justice and God's punishment versus God's benevolence. This is how it goes, but I, I guess in one sense, I'm pointing to the fact that these ideas, they're in the air and they have been. They pop up. I'm really grateful that we get that language of Doctrine & Covenants 19 though, because it really challenges the preconceptions that these biblically immersed early, Latter-day saints came with. That then brings to the vision itself.

John Bytheway: 00:50:29 I've said it before that Section 19 is one of my favorites because of some of the things it has distinction about. I didn't say it was the punishment would have no end. I said it was endless punishment because endless is my name. What you just expressed there, he kind of has this only explanation that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men because maybe if you think of it as endless, it works on your heart a little bit more. Eternal life is not just a duration, it's a quality of life. When we say immortality and eternal life, they're not the same thing. Immortality means you'll never die, but eternal life is a quality of life because eternal is his name and it's life. God lives. One of the things that I love in the Book of Mormon, is that Alma the younger, in his awesome Alma 36 chapter on repentance, says that he was racked with eternal torment for three days, and I'm like, well, how do you have eternal torment for three days?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:51:29 Bingo. Yeah, there you go. That's it, John.

John Bytheway: 00:51:31 That's another little hint right there. That's of this is a type of punishment, not a duration because he only had, I've had eternal punishment for three days.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:51:42 Yeah, well played. Maybe also, it's worth noting that the call of Doctrine & Covenants 19 is that I have spared you suffering if you'll accept my gift. That's Christ's plea there. It's not like he tones down the language of suffering. He says, how sore you know not, how hard to bear you know not. Language doesn't get at this, but the point, the redemptive point of the whole

thing is I'm asking you to repent because I God have suffered these things for all, if you'll repent, it's like, please see the rescue that I'm offering from the effects of all of our human wreckage. Christ is rescue for all of that. If we'll see it, and that's what the energy and the call to repent is all about in that section 19. It's going to be repeated here in 76, but John, I love your points there. That wordplay with endless and eternal. You're right. We've got other instances here where that wordplay is significant. It's pointing to some bigger realities. For sure.

Hank Smith: 00:52:56 Most of our listeners know, John, we're going to have a dozen or so episodes called Voices of the Restoration with Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat. There is one of those lessons with section 76 if you want a lot more history. If you've loved what Dr. Fluhman has done so far, which I have, come over there and grab that episode, that's going to be out this week as well, where we get a lot of history of Ohio and Ezra Booth, and the Johnsons, everything that led up to there, but Spencer, if you could give us a little bit of February, 1832, what's happening in Ohio?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:53:33 This gives us an opportunity to talk about the nature of revelation. We've got missionaries coming in and out. We've got meetings punctuating this late winter period. There's a couple of reminiscent accounts of this particular experience that points to a reality about revelation that we probably need to be reminded of periodically. Sometimes I at least imagined early on Joseph Smith wrestling with things on his own, secreting himself away to find some solitude and then presenting revelations to the church. It's not what happens here and it's typically not what happens. These are public experiences and this is made powerfully evident by the vision. There are probably a dozen men in the room. One of the men there described it for us in a couple of reminiscent accounts. There were decades after, but it's as good as we've got. We don't have a lot of folks who describe it at the time.

00:54:32 He said that he felt the vision but didn't see it. It's an interesting way that he talked about it, that he could feel the power of the experience. It went on for multiple hours according to him, but it was public in that sense, but it was also public in a different sense, and that is that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon experienced the vision together. They were somewhat conversational according to these reminiscent accounts that they would ask each other. Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Essentially my paraphrase, but are you seeing what I'm seeing? And the other would say, yes. They would describe then what they had seen together. The sharing of the revelatory burden is

worthy of a sermon or two. Oh, I love it. It's important. In fact, when the revelation's copied into the compilation that's taken to Missouri for publishing, John Whitmer copies it down as the vision to Joseph and Sidney.

00:55:37 I've always loved that. It's a reminder no one felt this more keenly than Joseph Smith. His ministry in some ways was solitary and at some points lonely, but he rejoiced in councils and presidencies and the sharing of the revelatory and pastoral burden. No one rejoiced certainly like he did. We also have the unforgettable little almost throwaway line, except that none of us can throw it away because it's too wonderful and a little bit playful is that Sidney doesn't hold up very well through the multi-hour revelatory experience is sapped by it according to one of these reminiscent accounts. Joseph Smith with what I expect to be a bit of a twinkle in his eyes says, Brother Sidney's not as used to it as I am. Essentially, the beautiful comment on the spiritual rigors of this experience that Joseph Smith had become more used to by this point, by his own account.

John Bytheway: 00:56:46 Spencer, I'm glad you emphasized that. After the first vision, so many of these revelation experiences were shared visions in the Kirtland Temple with Oliver Cowdery. It wasn't just one guy leading people. It was, no I saw it too. Then the witnesses, that's such an important thing to remember. I don't know if it's helpful to draw a graph of different types of revelation. You can have everything to a warm feeling or that was a heartwarming story, to some inspiration, to I actually had words come to me or then to having a revelation dictated, I guess at the top of it is a vision. We saw things and we heard things. I love this one that somebody could feel something was happening, but for Joseph and Sidney, no, we saw it and we heard it. We were conversing. You see what I see, I see the same. Write it down for me. I have a clarity of thought. If I feel like I have the Spirit, all of us are different levels of revelation. It's an interesting thing to point out. This was up there. They saw and heard things with some of the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. It wasn't always a vision. It was a dictation. The Lord's telling me this.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:58:10 Yeah, your comment is so helpful. When I don't experience the Spirit like I'm hearing described where maybe I'm not one who's a visionary, I'm not seeing things. We all have varied, diverse gifts. That diversity is God ordained. It is on purpose. God has made us indispensable to each other in that I need you. You need me. Those gifts are different. They're parceled out on purpose. We see that enacted in the Doctrine and Covenants. We see it embodied in Joseph Smith. We get different modes of divine encounter, I'll call it with Joseph Smith. We get different

types of revelatory experiences. I think that's on purpose. I think we should be watching. There's not one way to experience the Spirit. There's not one way to experience revelation. It may change over time in us. You and I might have two or three that we can barely give utterance to that is so profound, but we might have more ordinary versions of revelation that we're used to. I think that's important for our listeners, for all of us to recognize and remember that diversity is on purpose. It makes us important to each other. God is condescending in the sense that he's working with us across cultures, across time and space in all sorts of different ways, all sorts of different paths that we've taken. He adapts to us in that sense. He condescends in that sense. The varied revelatory experience. They teach a powerful lesson to us. I think you're onto something there.

Hank Smith: 01:00:09 I just mentioned that we have our voices of the restoration episode, which goes into the things we talked about with Geritt. John, what's happening in Kirtland? Who are the Johnsons? You know, why is Joseph Smith living out at the John Johnson home? It's a day's travel away from Kirtland and Hiram, Ohio, so you can get all of that there. One other tool I'd love to offer our listeners, come over to our website, followHIM.co. followHIM.co. We'll put a link to this there, on the church's website is a virtual tour of the John Johnson home. It's called John Johnson Home Hidden Mysteries Revealed. What you'll see is two sister missionaries walk you through this John Johnson home and what's special about this one for us here at followHIM is that one of those missionaries is Sister Juliette Sorensen, who we all know the youngest daughter of Steve and Shannon. She just does a spectacular job. I think it was filmed about in 2021. We hope everyone will come over to the show notes and you'll watch Juliette and her companion walk you through this neat little convergence of circumstances here that she's going to give the tour this weekend that Spencer's here.

John Bytheway: 01:01:22 Some of our listeners might remember, Elsa Johnson was the one who they're sitting with what Ezra Booth and John Johnson, are their healings today? This is where that report is that Joseph healed her arm and this is her home. John Elsa Johnson.

Hank Smith: 01:01:40 It's a beautiful home.

John Bytheway: 01:01:42 Yeah, it's really nice. Even by today's standards. Yeah, it's very nice. Spacious.

Hank Smith: 01:01:48 Yeah. Spencer, do you feel like we're prepared to go into the verses now?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 01:01:53 We better get to the verses at some point. Yeah, that's, that's the risk of having a historian on. We spend so much time on context that we don't quite get enough to text. We've got the great opportunity now to do just that and to dive in. What we'll see in the section, those of your listeners who have been reading it carefully this week will notice that I've been calling it the vision. Joseph Smith again called it the vision. Others did as well, but it's actually several visions and you can, you can track the language and it's several visions, one after another and we'll highlight some things going through. There's a little bit of a preamble. In fact, there's even a preface that isn't printed in your copy. Maybe I'll read that for fun.

01:02:45 In the manuscript version, we get this, a little preface that doesn't make it. In a vision to Joseph and Sidney, February 16th, 1832, given in Portage County, Hiram Township, state of Ohio and North America, which they saw concerning the church of the Firstborn and concerning the economy of God and his vast creation throughout all eternity economy of God's. A great phrase there. That's an early American phrase that might miss us a little bit. We're thinking what interest rates or what economy here in this early American context is more like a government of God or God's system of governance or something. In other words, the preface that doesn't make it in is, again, it's big. This is God's economy. This is God's big vision. This is the big plan, but then what we get here, starting in verse one and going to verse 11 is a bit of a divine and preamble, I don't know what to call it. It's curious in terms of its voice, hard to know who's speaking at first. It becomes we, Joseph, Sidney in verse 11.

01:04:09 What comes before that is interesting because we get the voice of the Lord in verse five, but I don't know who verse one through four is, hear o heavens and give ear, O Earth and rejoice ye inhabitants thereof. For the Lord is God, and beside him there is no savior. It's beautiful and profound to start this way, is this Joseph, Sidney saying here? Is this the voice of God? It's rhetorically unclear and I don't really care ultimately because it's so beautiful for two reasons. One, we get rejoice right out of the gate. The vision is a cause to rejoice if we read it and at the end we feel burdened or unprepared or inadequate, we're missing the vision. We're in trees, not forest, and I'm guilty of that all the time and there's some of the stuff that's heavy in this. We get Satan in this section.

01:05:11 We get sons of perdition in this section. We get judgment in the, I suppose if we fixate on trees, we might miss that forest and the forest is a cause for rejoicing right out of the gate. Verse

one, why? Because the Lord is God and beside him there is no savior. This is maybe neither here nor there, but what this reminds me of more than anything is the shema Israel. Deuteronomy six here, oh, Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. It's a little mini catechism that Jews say twice a day, traditional Jews, say twice a day and liturgical worship. This summation, this is functionally equivalent there. This is our shema Israel. Hear oh heavens, rejoice. Why? Because the Lord is God and beside him there is no savior. It's really, really powerful. What we get then rolling out here is an invitation. That's for me what comes from verses one through 10 are kind of divine beckoning to come into visionary, understanding of his will and his mysteries.

01:06:26 I promise in verse five, I'm merciful and gracious to all those who fear me and delight to honor those who serve me, great will be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. In verse seven, I'll reveal all mysteries, hidden mysteries. Verse eight, even the wonders of eternity will I reveal unto them. It's this invitation into the very experience that Joseph and Sidney have. In a way it's going to be repeated at the end of the section, lest we miss this invitation into seeing God's economy is the big picture of what he's doing. That's what we're getting is this invitation and promise that ends in verse 10. By my spirit, I will enlighten them by my power. I'll make known unto them to the secrets of my will, and then we get that embodied and modeled for us by Joseph and Sidney. Starting in verse 11, we get a description of their experience and their testimony.

01:07:25 They're commanded to do it and they do it. Bear record, what they've seen and heard. They hint at the spark that led them to the experience. It was the translation of the Bible. Maybe this is a place to pause and say it's hard to understand the restoration if you're biblically illiterate because the questions the saints come with are biblical questions. Joseph Smith's language is biblical. He is in his own spiritual wrestle. Again, in the good sense with the Bible, the quote unquote Joseph Smith translation is this powerful engine of revelatory insight for Joseph Smith. If your listeners don't know a lot about the Joseph Smith translation, this is a little nudge to do it because it's hard to understand a lot of the Doctrine and Covenants without understanding this other project that he's doing. At the same time, this project, he and Sidney are grappling with a passage from John.

01:08:30 The passage relates to judgment. They come up against a question. It's a question that animated some of the very people that we cited before in the podcast here. These people who

had, how could God be just and blank. For them, reference to multiple judgments and multiple resurrections in John led them to this instinct that heaven must mean more than one thing. It can't be as simple as we've been led to believe this stark dualism of judgment saved or damned end of the story. It doesn't work. That heaven must be bigger and broader is their instinct as they meditate upon this verse 19, they've got a question, they're reading actively. They sit with their question and they're meditating on it as a beautiful kind of class on this, right? They come across something they don't understand. It doesn't make sense. Their instinct is, this can't be what I thought it was. This doesn't add up for me. That is not destructive tension for them. That is productive, revelatory tension for them. They meditate on it and in verse 19, the Lord touches the eyes of their understanding. They're enveloped in divine glory.

Hank Smith: 01:09:58 If you wanted to have a cross reference for that, that would be first Nephi 11 verse one. Nephi has his incredible vision. It begins with I desire to know the things that my father had seen, believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me. I sat pondering in my heart. I was caught away in the spirit of the Lord.

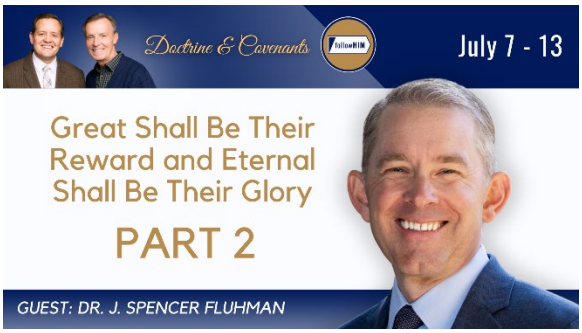
Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 01:10:18 And that's footnoted there. The intentionality that disciples have to muster for that space in our world, is unbelievable. The space for that is shrinking. A disciple's life. You have to go out of your way to create space, to meditate on spiritual things. For all of us, this is probably a little bit of a spur, a little bit of a nudge again, is to say, in all my running around like a crazy person to get done everything that is pressing on my time and on my attention, do I even have the space in my life to pause on that? That is not easy to come by. You have to make it. You have to create it. But yeah, a great spur here. It's a theological conundrum for them. How can this verse, how can this verse point to a stern judgment of heaven or hell, the way that they've been brought up?

Hank Smith: 01:11:27 Speaking on that, it seems to me my phone is going to decide if I'm going to go to Google or if I'm going to go to God with my questions. I can put my phone away. I can meditate and I can go to God, or I can go with maybe my first instinct, which is I've got all this information at my fingertips. John, your quote is in my ears, right? If you lack wisdom, ask God. If you lack information, ask Google.

John Bytheway: 01:11:56 Ask of Google, right?

Hank Smith:	01:11:57	Yeah.
John Bytheway:	01:11:58	Oh yeah, like where's the nearest Five Guys? I always say that's the most important question, but for wisdom, that's different.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	01:12:07	The wisdoms function to prioritize, to order, to rank information for us to sift information for us, wisdom risks being lost in the information tsunami that we're all a part of. See, that's my worry for my students is that information everywhere, information faster than any of us can track. But what's the mechanism that orders? ranks? curates? Spiritual lives are at risk here for us. It's a great place to kind of read these men as meditating on this problem of eternity. What a great, what a great thing. The answer is that they behold the Son of God. Verse 20. The answer is, they behold the glory of the Son at the right hand of the Father, receive of his fullness. We can only guess at what some of this means. They struggle with language to articulate. They see the angels and then bear that testimony that we've had ringing in our ears.
	01:13:14	Those of us who are Latter-day Saints and have been for a long time is one of the great articulations of Christian testimony in all of sacred history. To us. We hold these words dear that he lives, for we saw him on the right hand of God and heard the voice bearing record that he's the only begotten of the Father by him, through him and of him the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof, begotten sons and daughters unto God. Sublime. It's sublime language. We treasure it. We should treasure it. It's worthy of parsing in all sorts of ways. It's unforgettable in the catalog of Joseph Smith revelatory language. It's beautiful. It's an anchor to the vision for sure. It comes first, I think, in priority, on purpose. Their answer to the question of justice isn't an abstract principle, it's a being. It's a living being.
	01:14:14	It's glorified Jesus. I can imagine all sorts of abstract concepts or framing language that I would dive into and hear the answer to. Their question about justice and judgment. Is Jesus. So profound that that's the answer. It's a person, it's a divine being. We're going to pick that up again in a bit. That's not insignificant, that their question is, Hey, what's the deal with heaven and multiple resurrections? How does judgment work? How does judgment relate to heaven? We're given Jesus as the answer. Pretty beautiful.
Hank Smith:	01:14:56	Coming up in part two of this episode.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	01:14:59	That baptism point is addressed specifically in Joseph Smith's own anxiety, which is answered by a subsequent vision.
Hank Smith:	01:15:07	Yeah.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	01:15:08	Of family secured, redeemed unexpectedly. Unexpectedly. I mean, can we stop and celebrate the moments of unexpected redemptive work of God in the world? I thought this thing was broken, lost. I mean, what a beautiful moment.



John Bytheway: 00:00:01 Hey, everybody. Keep listening for part two with Dr. Spencer Fluhman. I'm contrasting with everything we've heard of some of the other traditions is that we have a God who's disappointed in us, who's angry with us. Here we have verse five. He's merciful, he's gracious. He delights To honor those. It's not transactional. Oh, you are obedient? Here's a blessing. It's I love blessing my children. Then we get verse 24. We are begotten sons and daughters unto God. We know we three, how we feel about our sons and daughters. How is a God going to feel about his sons and daughters? Spencer, I can't stop thinking of your first statement. This is a monument to the redemptive work of Christ. I want to keep viewing it that way.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:00:57 I want to highlight what you just said, John, too at the end there, sons and daughters unto God. I want to highlight that prepositional relationship between those two phrases. You just sparked a thought here. This is describing Jesus. Of course, we get a vision of Jesus here, begotten sons and daughters unto God in this context. I think this is the fatherhood of Jesus being referenced here, that there are begotten sons and daughters unto God. This pops up in the early sections of the Doctrine & Covenants as well. We're used to talking about all of us being sons and daughters of God. That spiritual relationship with the Father, I'm not convinced that's what this is a reference to. I think this might be a reference to Christ's spiritually begetting us as father of our new lives in him.

00:01:55 This isn't a wild guess. This is an educated guess given the language of earlier sections of the Doctrine & Covenants, but I think that's what's going on here. This underscores something beautiful, John, that you've inspired in me about Christ's centrality. Even in this description of our son and daughter relationship with deity. The Son is the Father in many ways. This is one of the key ways for Latter-day Saints that he's the father of our new spiritual lives in him when we are covenantal bound to him, faith, repentance, baptism, gift of the Holy Ghost, and so on. That one unto is worth a highlight here from me because I think it's pointing to the Son where it could easily point to the

Father as well, but I think it might be talking about the Son's fatherhood as well. Absolutely beautiful.

Hank Smith: 00:02:52 Spencer, you're teaching King Benjamin, Mosiah, 5:7, the children of Christ. Because of the covenant which you have made, you shall be called the children of... you think, oh, he is going to say God. He doesn't. You shall be called the children of Christ, His sons and His daughters. This day He has spiritually begotten you.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:03:13 That's it. I think that's a tie here that is worth holding onto. I think that's we're getting with the unto there. Yeah, well done. Hank, that's perfect. All of this beautiful language, all of this glory, all of this screeches to a halt in the next verse. This is the rhetorical equivalent of a wrecking ball to a great experience we were all having. This is a sharp turn from the sublime to the tragic to the evil. There's purpose in it. We've got to take it on. We really can't get around it. In this section, what comes next is a vision of the angel of God who fell. A rebel against the Only Begotten Son and the Father called perdition. Verse 26, heavens weep over him. He has fallen. He has fallen. Verse 27, verse 28. The Lord commanded that we should write. They can't skip this either.

00:04:23 We'd just as soon skip it. It's not where we were a few verses ago. It's a crash. That old serpent, the devil who rebelled against God and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ. In verse 28 and verse 29, chilling, mood change for the whole section for me rhetorically, wherefore he maketh war with the saints of God and encompasseth them roundabout, very different feel to the section. We go from the Son to the enemy. If we are hoping for a turn, we don't get it yet. Verse 30 expands that theme to those who he overcomes, who the evil one overcomes. Verse 30, we saw a vision of the sufferings of those with whom he made war and overcame. These are described for us. Verse 31, they know my power. Powerful phrase. They have been made partakers thereof, but they have been overcome in verse 31 there to the point that they deny the truth and defy my power.

00:05:43 In verse 32, they're called the sons of perdition. Verse 33. They're vessels of wrath. I can't imagine a more horrifyingly vivid description. They're containers of wrath. They're of wrath. Unbelievable haunting, heavy, dark imagery with these folks. Verse 35 continues the theme. They've denied the Holy Spirit after having received it. They've denied the Only Begotten, the Son having crucified Him unto themselves and put him to an open shame. Verse 36, we end up with fire and brimstone. My

whole contextual, all that time I just spent with all of this here, I'm minimizing fire and brimstone, but in 36 we get it more accurately. They get it. They go away into a lake of fire and brimstone with the devil and his angels. If we're left here about verse 36 forlorn, a little eyebrows raised, maybe eyebrows singed. It's heavy. There's a point here.

00:06:51 The fact that we've gone from the Son to the adversary to the sons of perdition are all in service of what comes next. It's pretty powerful. This is the beating heart of the vision. At least for me. I shouldn't tell your listeners what the beating heart of the vision should be for them, but it is the beating heart for me because Joseph Smith pushed me here. This is why we're given that vision of evil, why it's not just skipped. Verse 37, those sons of tradition are quote, the only ones on whom the second death shall have any power. Verse 38, the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord. Verse 39, all the rest brought forth by the resurrection of the dead through the triumph and glory of the lamb. Outside that small group of renegades who have known God's power denied it and rebelled against that power.

00:08:02 All the rest brought forth by the resurrection of the dead through the triumph and glory of lamb. What we get here is a breathtaking scope of Christ's redemptive power. Everyone else saved, lest we miss the point. Verse 40, this is the gospel, the glad tidings. This is the gospel. This is why we rejoice in verse one. This is why the inhabitants of the earth should listen up. The gospel is this message verse 41, that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, to bear the sins of the world, to sanctify the world, to cleanse it from all unrighteousness, that through him all might be saved, whom the Father had put into his power and made by him who glorifies the Father and saves all the works of his hands. The ark of the revelation of the vision. It gives us Jesus and it gives us this counter to that vision of the Son only again to come back to emphasize the breathtaking scope of Christ's redemptive work and when he says crucified for the world, what does he mean the world?

00:09:23 Well, the world. I mean it's big. It's broad. If we're ever tempted to see Christ's work as sectarian, is happening within our little corner of humanity only, we've missed this grand scope of Christ's work. It's the world he's after. It's the world he's saving. It's the world he's sanctifying. It's the world he's cleansing except for those few in verse 43, verse 44. He saves all except them. There we have it. My shorthand for the vision itself and we've got a lot more to talk about. I pause here purposefully.

This is the great pivot for me. This is the core for me. This is the shorthand for the vision for me is the triumphant glory of the Lamb. That's what this is bearing witness to. Universalistic in its scope without being universalism of Joseph Smith's day. It's much, much more than that in the end, and we'll see that by the end.

00:10:26 We must not miss that core there, that core message of the extent of Christ's redemptive work when we're getting to three degrees of glory. We're going to get the height here in a minute because exaltation marks the other axis. I guess I'm laying out a, of all metaphors, me and a mathematical metaphor. How in the world did this happen? but I guess I'm mapping two kind of axes for the vision. That X axis, the breadth of it is just mapped in these verses. We just read that Y axis. The height is going to be mapped here in a minute with exaltation, and we're going to see the height here in a minute.

Hank Smith: 00:11:01 Kind of a whiplash of a good Hollywood movie, grand and then dark and then grand.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:11:09 Yeah, I think on purpose, yeah, I think on purpose.

Hank Smith: 00:11:12 It reads a little like Revelation five. Both of you know Revelation five, John is weeping. There is no one to play the role of Redeemer, and then this angel says weep not. The lion of the tribe of Judah, but he looks, it's not a lion, it's a lamb. John goes on to say, when the Lord, the Redeemer takes the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne or he takes his assignment as the Lamb of God, a new song is sung. Listen to the same language that you brought out. All, the world, the world, the world, all, saves all the works of his hands. He saves all except this small group. This is Revelation 5:11. I beheld and heard the voice of angels roundabout the throne and the number of them was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands. Pretty high percentage description.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:12:15 Well, it's beautiful. I glanced down at verse 44 and in light of our discussion of section 19, do you allow guests to engage in reckless speculation?

Hank Smith: 00:12:29 We'll allow it. Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:12:30 This next point, this is just for fun. No one has to think hard about it. It's really interesting. You get this from historians. He says, wherefore, he saves all except them. They shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment,

which is eternal punishment. Our radar just went off you and me, given where we've just been.

John Bytheway: 00:12:59 We just read section 19.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:13:02 We just read section 19. This is like I say, reckless speculation. I'm not counting any redemption out at this point. I'll throw in for fun when this revelation is recorded in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams. It originally didn't read that way. Verse 44, it read eternal punishment and then went on in the handwriting of Joseph Smith. I kid you not. He came in and added endless punishment and eternal punishment. I kid you not both E's are capitalized.

John Bytheway: 00:13:45 Which means? His comes from him.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:13:48 It comes from him, and then in verse 45 and the end thereof no man knows. My point here is just simply don't count Jesus out.

John Bytheway: 00:13:58 Ever.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:13:59 Do not count Jesus out in terms of his redemptive work. This is speculative. I'm acknowledging that absolutely. Those of us who spend time on these documents, it is fascinating to see Joseph Smith's hand, above the line, adding Endless and Eternal both in capital E's. Given where we've been in on the podcast today, the ways in which our sense of things is limited and then expanded with a grander sense of Christ's redemptive work. Fascinating. That one's maybe a throwaway, but I can't help myself.

John Bytheway: 00:14:38 I'll never forget that. I'm going to capitalize those E's. Right there, it changes it.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:14:43 Your listeners can go to Joseph Smith papers website. You can see this document. This is some secret that only the nerdiest among us had, get access to. This is right waiting for you in the Joseph Smith papers, the Revelation series. This is that Kirtland revelation book manuscript. Revelation book two. You can go and see it right there. You can see the handwriting. It's color coded. You can see who's writing where. It's a beautiful little quirky moment. Caught my eye given that wrestle with D&C 19.

John Bytheway: 00:15:17 One of my favorite quirks.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:15:20 Isn't that fun?

John Bytheway:	00:15:22	I looked up on citation index scriptures.byu.edu, section 76 verse 43. Who glorifies the Father saves all the works of his hands. You want to hear the first six results 35 times. General conference, 2023, President Dallin H. Oaks, Kingdoms of Glory, 2022, President Dallin H. Oaks, Divine Love in the Father's Plan, 2020, President Dallin H. Oaks, The Great Plan 2019, President Dallin H. Oaks, Trust in the Lord 2019, President Dallin H. Oaks, The Two Great Commandments, 1995, Apostasy and Restoration, Dallin H. Oaks.
Hank Smith:	00:16:02	Wow.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:16:04	It's almost like there's a theme developing there.
John Bytheway:	00:16:07	About saving all the works of his hands and these talks. He gave those two talks in that sounded like almost two sessions in a row. They weren't, but The Great Plan and Divine Love in the Father's Plan used those verses.
Hank Smith:	00:16:24	If by chance President Oaks is listening, thank you President.
John Bytheway:	00:16:30	Yeah the last six citations of that were all President Oaks the most recent.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:16:35	Amazing. Yeah. That's amazing.
Hank Smith:	00:16:37	By the way, we'll put both the link to Spencer's document that he's talking about on Joseph Smith papers and those talks that John referenced. Our great Lisa Spice. She will put those on our show notes. Follow him.co. If you're worried how do I find that kind of thing? We'll help you out.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:16:55	Marvelous. What we get from here in the vision are vision of the degrees of glory. These are the parts that I grew up knowing were there. I had missed the forest for the following trees right here. I'd known of these descriptions of the degrees of glory, as my kids would say, they hit different with that forest in mind of Christ's redemptive work. I read these a little bit differently now. I'll point out some of those ways with the forest in mind.
Hank Smith:	00:17:23	Would you say if I'm a teacher this week, don't miss verses 22 through 24. Don't miss 39 through 44. Don't jump into the kingdoms.
John Bytheway:	00:17:38	Yeah, this preparatory part.
Hank Smith:	00:17:40	You're going to miss the Lord's redemptive power.

John Bytheway: 00:17:43 That you talked about. You'll drive right past the monument.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:17:47 Yeah. The big framework is a big heaven. We have to remember that it's a big heaven. It's God in Christ Jesus saving all of his children. That's the big story. The big narrative is exactly what we hoped it would be. It is precisely what we hoped it would be. It's God in Christ. Saving all the children. The big heaven is the big story. It is the big story. We can't lose that X axis, that breath. I did skip past that early on. I did until the saints slowed me down, taught me why. That was it, the good kind of trouble, good scandal. Until they taught me. I would skip that because I was hurrying on my way to the degrees of glory without realizing God's economy. The big narrative there, these degrees of glory, they fit better with that big story in mind. Verses 50 through 70, give us the vision of the celestial.

00:18:48 71 through 80 gives us the vision of the terrestrial and the telestial. 81 through 90. We get a summary section at the end there, 91 through 113. Then a benediction we'll finish off with. That's reminiscent of the opening divine. We get the celestial first. We can highlight pieces here. This is the height. This is the vision of exaltation that reorients the saints. In some ways, this comes slowly to them. Some of this language to us seems very rooted in the restoration, completely in line with Joseph Smith's teachings in Nauvoo. That garnered a lot of controversy then and since. For Christians outside the restoration, this becomes one of the divides that separates us from other Christian communities. No doubt, saints at the time didn't read it this way. This wasn't read with all the implications. This gets clarified and expanded and amplified by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo.

00:19:59 Exaltation does. It appears here. The saints miss it. I don't know how else to say it. I think it's because the language is biblical for one thing. To them, it could be heard and read as conventional, but given the eyes that we bring to it that Joseph Smith gives us in the Nauvoo period and that Nauvoo amplification, it pops to us now. This is the vision of the celestial. We can't forget it's 1832. It's years before the saints or observers start to put this together like it's 1839 before we get any rich sense. Anyone's paying attention to what this could mean for human potential. It's belated. It's a slower recognition. Where we come to it now in a lot of ways seems like the announcement of a distinctive Latter-day Saint conceptualization of exaltation. God's ultimate intention for humanity. Verse 51, they receive the testimony of Jesus.

00:21:11 They believe on his name and were baptized. In keeping the commandments, verse 52, they're washed and cleansed from all

their sins. They receive the Holy Ghost. Verse 53, they overcome by faith, they're sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. Verse 54, they are the church of the firstborn. That language church of the firstborn pops up several times in the section. It's an amplification of Hebrews 12, a description of the heavenly city, the saints of God who have overcome. In some ways, this section of the vision reads, sounds, feels like an amplification of that Hebrews 12 language. For sure. They're they in verse 55, into whose hands the Father has given all things. My voice inflected the all, saints didn't see all there a reference there might be to the oath and covenant of the priesthood. In section 84, that phrase is pregnant with possibility, shall we say.

00:22:21 It's loaded with implication. They're they in verse 56, who are priests and kings who have received of his fullness and of his glory. Priests of the most high after the order of Melchizedek. All of this language will be elaborated on in subsequent revelations. Verse 58. As it is written, they are gods. Even the sons of God playing on that earlier language maybe of begotten sons and daughters unto God. They are gods. Even the sons of God, 59, all things are theirs. The life or death things present to come. Verse 60. They overcome all things. The language is potent. It's powerful. It's soaring in some ways because it's biblical, because it resonates with biblical language. It could have been seen by saints at the time and observers at the time as conventional, and it was like I've said, but given what we get from Joseph Smith, it charts a different course for human potential for Latter-day Saints than is the case with most Western Christians at least.

00:23:39 There are strains in Eastern Christianity that are richer with language, with theology about salvation as deification, as participating in God, partaking of divine life. That's richer in the Eastern tradition than the Western. What we end up with in the revelations of Joseph Smith and especially in his teaching in Nauvoo, is we end up with a vision for these verses and their implications that resonates with Eastern Christianity in ways, West took a different track thousands of years ago. Most of our Christian friends in the anglophone world of European descent, those Christians take those teachings of Joseph Smith as difficult as separating as even heretical. It is a separating point. This is where we get these kernels of insight into God's intention for the exalted. This is where we get them.

Hank Smith: 00:24:43 So far in what we've studied this year, the Lord seems to say line upon line. Line upon line. Here it's almost, let's see, throws the doors open and says, I'll explain this later. Let me show you the big beautiful vista. For example, let me ask you about one,

Geritt Dirkmaat has helped us see this. Verse 51. These are they who were baptized, but yet no word of those who weren't baptized.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:25:12 This becomes really interesting in a lot of ways. One of the critical footnotes for these degrees of glory section is section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants because it's a clarifying point on the vision itself. In the language that we get here from Joseph and Sidney, they certainly tweak, but our vision of the terrestrial are those who die without law. Verse 72 or receive not the testimony of Jesus, but afterward receive it. They're honorable, maybe honorable but not valiant. In Joseph Smith's reckoning after 1832, he spends a number of years assuming that those who die without the law or the restored law, a baptism or priesthood or however we want to articulate that, that this describes them.

Hank Smith: 00:26:11 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:26:12 That they're saved. They're enveloped within the reach of Christ's atoning work that their inheritance is a glory by comparison to traditional Protestant formulations that he'd grown up with. This is still breathtaking, but then in 1836, the deck gets reshuffled a little bit toward the side of the extent of Christ's redemptive work as recorded for us in Doctrine & Covenants Section 137 sees a vision of the celestial kingdom and his brother's there and he says, my paraphrase, not his language. What now?

Hank Smith: 00:26:52 Yeah. Wait, what?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:26:54 Yeah. It's clear how he read his own revelation in the vision that by the terms of the vision, Alvin would be provided his older brother had passed away before the restoration of authority that he had been provided for a terrestrial degree of glory here in the vision. That's corrected for Joseph Smith, but with a really potent phrase that when combined with D&C 19 and D&C 76, D&C 137, it's the huge karate chop on the conventional heaven hell judgment dichotomy.

00:27:33 Those three together fatal karate chop on the older way of seeing. It says, I'm paraphrasing, those who would have if they had been permitted to tarry, which again, this injects more nuance into judgment. It qualifies hell even further or limitation even further. It underscores God's judgment. Again, I'm glad we were shown a person when the question was judgment. I'm glad we were shown a person, a perfect person, a person filled with glory and love and power beyond our comprehension.

Who could discern? Who would know? Well he would is the point of the vision. He would. Who determines if they had been permitted to tarry? All of this nuance, all of these caveats. I was tortured by these questions as a young missionary. I really was. I'm a chronic overthinker. Maybe that's me, but I was obsessed with the question of God's justice and mercy and what constituted someone's,

John Bytheway: 00:28:42 Chance to hear the gospel.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:28:44 I was tortured by this as a young man. What if my incapacity as a speaker or my weakness as a conveyor of God's message, am I walking around messing people up? Am I? What if you know my youth and my ignorance notwithstanding there are questions that are answered here. I wish I would've had a clearer sense then, but God reassuring, Hank, to your point, all of this, all of it, all of it matters. There is not injustice here. Taking it wide angle, the vision makes allowance for the vast variety of human experience precisely what Joseph and Sidney didn't see in their upbringing with conventional Christian understanding, and what we get here is all of the individual details and caveats and conditions, all of that taken into account here, heaven is big and vast and varied and diverse. All of it counts and matters and is held, sanctified, glorified, lifted up and saved by Jesus. The crushing quirk of timing that Joseph had assumed had doomed Alvin to less, God says, not so fast. Do you think that some accident of chance plays in judgment? No. In a way, we're getting God's character revealed in all of this too.

John Bytheway: 00:30:26 Exactly.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:30:27 Is the mystery a capricious one? No, the mystery's a beautiful one as it turns out. The mystery, yes, but it's not capricious. It's not unsearchable. It's comprehensible within the calculus of God's love. That's what we're seeing in these revelations. That baptism point is addressed specifically in Joseph Smith's own anxiety, which is answered by a subsequent vision.

Hank Smith: 00:30:51 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:30:51 Of family secured, redeemed unexpectedly. Unexpectedly. I mean, can we stop and celebrate the moments of unexpected redemptive work of God in the world? I thought this thing was broken, lost. I mean, what a beautiful moment. Joseph gazes into heaven and is surprised by what he finds there. I love it. It's what makes me a Latter-day Saint. The way that this reveals God to me means everything to me. My own encounter of God has everything to do with the revelations of Joseph Smith, and

that's what makes me a Latter-day Saint. The God I have encountered in these revelations of breathtaking mercy and love means everything to me.

John Bytheway: 00:31:44 I love this and Hank, I'm a broken record. I actually know what a record is. I actually know what an LP is at 33 1/3 revolutions per minute. Not only is God real, the first vision, what is he like? We get more and more as these sections go on. Here's Joseph verse 51. These are they who received the testimony of Jesus, believed on his name and were baptized and maybe somewhere in the back of his mind, ah, Alvin, but wait, just wait until 137. Hey, what's Alvin doing here?? I'm glad you said it. Spencer, who would've believed? Who makes that judgment? The perfect judge decides who would've believed. We don't make final judgments. Thank you, President Oaks. We don't make final judgments, but only he who can read their hearts makes that judgment. Who would've believed he sees Alvin there? Thank you for rounding that out. What did you call it? You got 19, 76, 137,

Hank Smith: 00:32:46 The karate chop.

John Bytheway: 00:32:48 Yeah. Here, karate chop. Here's Section 19 I, God have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer. We're, oh, that's really what he's like. He doesn't want us to suffer and then we get all the way to Alvin who's there smiling in this celestial kingdom.

Hank Smith: 00:33:07 I feel like section 19, Joseph says, God is more merciful than I thought. Section 76. God is a lot more merciful than I thought. Then section 137 God is

John Bytheway: 00:33:18 Boy is God merciful.

Hank Smith: 00:33:20 He's much more merciful than I thought.

John Bytheway: 00:33:24 He's so merciful. I'm going to capitalize those E's in verse 44.

Hank Smith: 00:33:31 When you said, that's what makes me a Latter-day Saint, you chose a scripture to go on your mission plaque. This was mine. Alma 26:16. As I'm reading 76, this is what comes to mind. Let us glory. We will glory in the Lord. We will rejoice, for our joy is full. We will praise our God forever. Who can glory too much in the Lord than this? Who can say too much of his great power, his mercy and his long suffering toward the children of men. Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part, which I

feel. That's the feeling I'm getting from section 76. It's beyond our words to express how this makes a child of God feel.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:34:20 Yeah, I love it. Before we leave the exaltation verses, I want to highlight verse 61 for us. It's a fascinating verse to me. It caught my attention years ago in the back and forth with close friends who aren't of our faith, who are profoundly Christian, deeply Christian, the back and forth over some of these very doctrines that we've just been discussing of exaltation. Human potential. The question of whether or not humans could reasonably participate in the divine life in any meaningful way. I noticed this first years ago, I think it's fascinating to see that it's wired into the discussion of exaltation. The critique that my friend had of his sense of Joseph Smith's teaching is that if we're not careful, the line between God as the object of worship and anything else could be blurred. I ended up seeing verse 61 in the context of that critique.

00:35:26 Wherefore, let no man glory in man. This is coming on the heels of the breathtaking portrait painted for the church of the firstborn into whose hands are put all things, who share glory with God himself. All of that transcendent language. Attach those who inherit celestial glory, let no man glory in man, but rather let Him glory in God who shall subdue all enemies under his feet. Almost even as it's proclaiming the heights of human potential, a check on a twisting of that idea away from the glorification of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, almost an anticipatory guardrail against misunderstanding the giver of the gift versus the receiver of the gift. That would be the fatal flaw as of verse 61 is misunderstanding who the giver of the gift is and who the receiver of the gift is. This has reinforced a few verses later in another amplification of the New Testament, verse 69, describing the exalted.

00:36:48 These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. How? By what means have they become these beings of glory of holiness Here, it's Jesus again. These are just men and women made perfect through Jesus. Wired in to the exaltation theology of the restoration is this centering of Christ. He is centered even in that, that we cannot miss him in any doctrine. Going back to the classic by President Packer, any doctrine disconnected from Christ loses its meaning. It's subject to distortion to the extent that it's disconnected from the very root of Christian doctrine, the atonement of Jesus Christ that's in there. It can't be missed either.

John Bytheway: 00:37:59 Thank you, Spencer. Bringing up verse 61, let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God. I'm looking at the footnotes. They are abundant. We got 29 lines of footnotes right here in my high priest size scriptures. One of the footnotes, Hank is Alma 26:16. Your mission plaque scripture tied into that perfectly, but I'm glad you pointed out verse 69. They are just men made perfect through Jesus. Tie in, be ye therefore perfect. How is that? The only way that's possible, Moroni 10:32, be perfected in him, not be perfect. Then you can come to him. Maybe you'll be good enough but you're perfected through Jesus. That's a great text to add to your be ye therefore perfect at the end of Matthew five. How is that even possible? It isn't possible for us by ourselves.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:38:55 We've gone the world behind the text. We're now in the world of the text, but John, you've put us hopefully in the world that we bring to the text. I think one of the, we might call it pitfalls of discipleship, is with a vision like this of the celestial. If we imagine this apart from Jesus, it can feel like a game of spiritual achievement. That in itself it doesn't work. So many of us have experienced that. It doesn't and can't work. There is no striving equal to what has just been described. Verse 95, he makes them equal in power, in might and in dominion. What? If we read 95 apart from 94, we're in deep trouble. If we see 94, those who dwell in the presence of the church of the firstborn, they're seen as they're seen, known as they're known. Having received of his fullness and of his grace.

00:39:55 It's the only math that works is the arithmetic of grace here. It's the only math that can possibly work. If we read 95 apart from 94, then it's a burden we wear every day. All that's in front of us are our shortcomings. How could we ever get there? I can't get to Saturday for crying out loud. How am I going to get there? I'm not getting there ever. If we see these exaltation doctrines apart from Jesus, it can be ironically stifling to spiritual life. We can even try harder. We can be more disciplined. It's sapping because if we try and be a branch without the vine, we wither. You can't be a branch without the vine and not wither. You're disconnected from the source of life. That is a pitfall of discipleship that conscientiously you can want to follow Jesus, but that the distortion comes right there. How could I ever be equal in power in might... What does that even, I have no frame of reference for that. When we're talking about me.

John Bytheway: 00:41:09 You talked about when this revelation was given, some of it was actually used in anti newspapers. I bet verse 95 was there from four years ago. I have in my notes this is a repugnant idea to

most of Christianity. He makes them equal in power and in might and dominion. Then you're saying gotta read 94 first.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:41:31 It does become noticed. Eventually we're beaten up over distortions of this doctrine for sure, but I have gently said to my Christian interlocutors, you have a sense, understandably, in some ways it's our fault at times that we've tried to earn what God has provided for us. I point you to the vision here, we're actually the other kind of problem. Jesus is actually doing too much saving. At least be offended on the right point. We may have distorted this in well-intentioned ways.

John Bytheway: 00:42:17 Who does he think he is the Savior or something? Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:42:20 That's what we end up with in the wide angle with that big a heaven with these kinds of blessings for the faithful, which they again in the arithmetic of striving could never earn. In that one for one equation, we end up with an anthem to Christ's redemptive work in my mind without parallel.

Hank Smith: 00:42:46 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:42:46 Nowhere.

Hank Smith: 00:42:48 It would be interesting for Joseph Smith to know. Let's say he finishes the vision and then finds out, oh, in some future day, Latter-day Saints are going to be known for earning their own salvation. He might what? What? We should be the exact opposite. We should be known for section 76. These are they who are made perfect through Jesus Christ. He makes them equal in power, they received of his fullness and of his grace, his fullness, his grace.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:43:23 Yeah. Maybe it's an important moment to sum up the vision carrying on this sense of what we bring to the text, our own questions of discipleship. John, you've helpfully started us in that direction. I think we could say as a summary comment here that what we get is a distinctive Latter-day Saint, it's really fancy word, but it's meaningful. Soteriology. This is the study of salvation. We get a distinctive Latter-day Saint sense of salvation slash exaltation in this section. It's one that steers clear of two extremes I took pains at the beginning to lay out, and that is that human beings are passive recipients of God's judgment. Section 76 doesn't give us that. It gives us agency mattering a great deal. It gives us quote unquote works and that's the language of the section. Certainly mattering a great deal. We're nothing like passive recipients of God's action.

	00:44:35	We are actively implicated in these gradations of God's presence. In fact, we could say the question animating Doctrine & Covenants section 76 is proximity to God. How close do we want to be? That's the logic of the revelation is exactly that, that the exalted have the presence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit out from there. Folks are positioned by their own actions, desires, intentions, all of it. That's what emerges here. You've both mentioned some interesting predecessor Book of Mormon passages to D&C 76, but the one that might stand out to me now that I'm thinking of it is as Alma 29 that our desires figure in judgment so titanically, that's what connects here. How close do you want to be to God? I've got Elder Maxwell ringing in my ears. The education of our desires is not an insignificant part of mortality.
	00:45:46	Do I want the right things? What do I want? This is a rubber hits the road discipleship question for us. D&C 88, given a few months later puts us here as well. What doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him and he receive not the gift, behold he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift. What we have tallied for us here in D&C 76, another rubber hits the road discipleship question. This enumerates God's gifts to his children and the question for me is, what good are these gifts given if I don't receive them? Every covenant act of obedience, every good work, quote unquote in this sense is reformatted for me as an act of reception. It's the way I receive God's gifts.
John Bytheway:	00:46:45	Spencer, when I was a teenager in Highland High School seminary reading this, I'm reading in verse 101, for example, but received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus. I have to say this because I wonder if there's anybody out there who thought the same thing. Verse 74, who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh but afterwards received. I thought, well, that's not fair because I thought received meant they never heard it.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:47:12	Yeah. Yeah.
John Bytheway:	00:47:13	The special definition here is no, they never accepted it. This is just Brother Bytheway here, Corianton had four issues and Alma 39, 40, 41, 42. In Alma 42 his issue was I think it's unjust for God to consign sinners to a state of misery. I've always wondered if he had what we have back then if he knew that it wasn't endless misery. I am right with him there. It doesn't sound just to consign people to endless misery, meaning with no end. Isn't it interesting that he wondered about that? Alma has a good answer, but I wonder if Alma knew section 19. I wonder if he

knew the redemptive power of Christ here in 76, how incredibly pervasive it is except for a handful of sons of perdition.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:48:17 It's a great question, John. I mean, in some ways the vision presents itself as a mystery being made down as a revelation of something hidden.

John Bytheway: 00:48:26 Corianton that's a good question, right?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:48:29 Yeah. Corianton's question is Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdons question, John.

John Bytheway: 00:48:33 Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:48:34 Yeah. It's another version of the same question. If there's a resurrection of the just and the unjust, does that do justice really? To all the vast variety of human experience and variation.

John Bytheway: 00:48:47 What they knew and when they knew it, what light they had and yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:48:50 Yeah. Corianton's question is Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's question. The vision is the answer, and the answer is, Jesus.

John Bytheway: 00:48:57 I love Alma's answer. It's listen, let these things trouble you no more. Let your sins trouble you, which will bring you to Christ. Let his justice and his mercy have full sway in your heart. Here we are learning the full sway, to use Alma's phrase of the mercy of Christ. It's bigger than you think when you read this section, as you've so beautifully told us.

Hank Smith: 00:49:25 Spencer, I think you've articulated something that we probably need to hit again, and that is when we look at the terrestrial kingdom and the Telestial kingdom, that word receive not comes up over and over. It's an active no.

John Bytheway: 00:49:41 It's not not just hearing it. I'm not accepting it.

Hank Smith: 00:49:43 Yeah. I don't want this. Whatever you're offering me, I receive not. Yeah.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:49:49 When put together with Doctrine & Covenants section 88, maybe Alma 29, this one, we get a heaven with no stark duality there, no justice in that inherited sense. One scholar called it, it's more about affinities.

Hank Smith:	00:50:05	Yeah.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:50:09	What have you resonated with? Where are you inclined? What have you become?
John Bytheway:	00:50:17	What's the desire of your heart? What are you drawn to?
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:50:20	You get what you want. It's a weird way of framing it. I love that word from that scholar that it's about that the heaven that emerges here in vision is one of affinities.
John Bytheway:	00:50:31	Yeah. Book of Mormon. You'd be more miserable to dwell with a just holy God, you're going to be where you're less miserable. I guess.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:50:40	Yeah, and other scriptures. Light cleaves unto light. What am I cleaving to? What am I joined with? What am I united with? That brings us, again, back to vine and branches. If my desire is love and holiness in Christ, my inclination is toward the life of the disciple. These are good signs.
Hank Smith:	00:51:03	Yeah. Yeah these are good things.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:51:06	These are good things. If not, then I'm at education of my desires again. Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:51:11	Education of my desires. I have a question for both of you. I sometimes see something happen in lessons on section 76 that I don't see happen in the text. That is, Spencer, you've taught us that mainstream Protestant heaven is small. Hell is big. He reverses those. Heaven is huge. Hell is small. Sometimes in Latter-day Saint lessons, we swap it back again. We say the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. That's heaven. The rest is really some version of hell. How would you say to not let that happen? Because then the message is reversed.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:52:00	Yeah. I think we're seeking a balance there that the vision itself holds together to simply create a new heaven isn't the point of the, you thought you had a small heaven. Well, this one is even smaller. As it turns out. That's not the trajectory of the vision. The exaltation versus the height has to be embedded within the breath to get a full sense of what Christ is doing in the world. That helps us be less sectarian. It helps us be less judgmental. It helps us be more open and alive to what God is doing beyond the bounds of my own ward. It helps me see my neighbors in a different way. It helps me see my children who have chosen different paths in a different way. That's all good outcomes

from sensing the breadth of God's work in the world. By the same token, I guess the other pitfall would be we don't want to mute the exaltation invitation either. Exactly what that balance is is a good question. I love that these are in the same section, just verses apart. It's working together because you're right. We don't want to ignore the rest of the section and only see the 10 verses from 50 to 70.

00:53:17 All of it's the economy of God in the world. By the same token, we have to hear God's call in 50 through 70. He delights John, back to your point, as the giver of good gifts to his children, he wants to share divine life with them. He wants them to participate in divine being. That's what he intends. That's what's said there. We have to be able to hold them both. I guess I'm surrendering before that mystery, but Hank you've highlighted an important productive tension, I would say is holding those two ideas together simultaneously. Don't swap it back. Your point points to another good footnote for us, and if we thought a tripartite heaven was a stunning revelation of God's love and redemptive work, it's further subdivided later, the prophet subdivides, the celestial kingdom into three, a later revelation in the Doctrine & Covenants will do that. We end up with kind of six degrees of glory. One might wonder profitably, wait a minute. It's as if God reckons with individuals at the level of individuals and it really starts getting breathtaking when we're counting desires and who would have if they had tarried? Then it starts getting beautiful. It's a great point, Hank. It really is.

Hank Smith: 00:54:46 President Oaks helped in October, 2023. Kingdoms of glory. His talk starts this way: Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are frequently asked, how is your church different from other Christian churches? Among the answers we give is the fullness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Foremost among that doctrine is the fact that our heavenly father loves all his children so much that he wants all to live in a kingdom of glory forever. He goes on, the revealed doctrine of the restored church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints teaches that all the children of God, with exceptions too limited to consider here will ultimately inherit one of three kingdoms of glory, even the least of which surpasses all understand.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 00:55:38 That is a perfect benediction on this section. It really is. Amen.

John Bytheway: 00:55:44 That was one of those talks that listed in that citation index. President Oaks has spent a lot of time in section 76. If nothing else, the lake of fire and brimstone is great for cartoons. What would you say? The lake of fire and brimstone is a metaphor, but it's a temporary metaphor. What do you do with that?

Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:56:09	That's a great question. I mean, at very least we can say it's vanishingly insignificant in the broad scope of the vision. It's a point of contrast that is on its way to something else. It's not a meaningful category within the vision itself. It just isn't.
Hank Smith:	00:56:27	Another question for you, put on your historian hat again, who and why would they struggle with this? Yes, it goes against everything you've ever been taught, but that's a good thing.
John Bytheway:	00:56:39	Other than that.
Hank Smith:	00:56:40	Is it no there's people that need to suffer. Is that what it is? God is too merciful. I can't handle that.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:56:49	I think it goes back to the traditionalists response to universalism. I don't know that we'd say that. These are folks who had plumbed the depths of the vision had sorted It had wrestled it to the ground. It was new. It was challenging. It was aligned with this radical, unorthodox universalist insurgency within the broader New England religious world. The critique was it absolves folks of responsibility. It saps their initiative. It undercuts calls to repent. If they're just, why would they repent? Why would they need to keep God's law? All of those critiques supplied, I suspect that animated some of the Latter-day Saint critiques as well. So what's interesting for the universalists, they don't solve the problem of human will. They share with their critics an assumption that God would simply save everyone, period. But human will didn't figure in their calculation. What we see in the vision here is a fuller, richer reckoning with the implication of our own choices, of our own ability to respond to God's call.
	00:58:09	If I could build a time machine, I'd go back and I'd say, now don't miss what's going on here. This isn't universalism as they had known it. This is not what we get. Like I say, lowercase universalistic in its implication, but it's not universalism of their time. It's not. It's different. It holds together those contraries in a characteristically restoration way. This is the Joseph Smith method. These things that look like opposing positions somehow find reconciliation in the restoration. This is one of them. I think that's what we're seeing here.
Hank Smith:	00:58:46	Brigham comes to love it and others I'm sure.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:58:48	He does. He probably gives us a good spiritual pattern there. He's like I had to wait a little. I'm an impatient person. I've never had time for patience is my problem. I'm endlessly curious. I

		want to wrestle things to the ground. I want to sort them out. What a powerful note from a former president of the church. Wait, a little. That's worth the highlighting too, is that that's a spiritual skill that we need to develop. The ability to know that we're not ready yet to pass judgment on this or that, or to sort this or that.
Hank Smith:	00:59:27	Made me laugh a little bit what you said there about missionaries. How do you teach someone to repent? You better repent or you're going to heaven.
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	00:59:36	Yeah. This was the conundrum.
Hank Smith:	00:59:37	Spencer this has been spectacular in every way. My scriptures are covered in notes. I want to go share with my family all that I've learned. I'm a hundred percent certain Steve would be elated over what's happened. I think he is. I want to bring two things together that you've taught us. One is how much you love the Lord and how you've highlighted him in this section more than any other piece. Then here you are a historian who knows the history of the church. There may be a narrative out there that, oh, you don't want to know the history of the church. You'll lose your faith. Yet, you know the history of the church. You brought out the beauty of the revelatory gift of Joseph Smith. Could you share with someone who is maybe listening saying, how do I connect the history of the church with my testimony of the Lord? How can I not be scared of the church's history? How have you done it?
Dr. Spencer Fluhman:	01:00:52	I'm idiosyncratic like everyone. We all have our own way through things. I'm not a committed, faithful, Latter-day Saint in spite of my study of our past, but because of it. I mean that for me, the history of the church reflects human life more generally. Of course, it's complicated. Of course, there are paradoxes. Of course, there are failures. Of course, there are complexities. Of course, there are deep disappointments. That is the mortal experience. That is our ecclesiastical experience in so many ways. I have found a reservoir of insight and inspiration that is bottomless over the past several decades as a teacher and as a scholar. I haven't found bottom and there is no bottom. It continues to be a source, an engine for me of potent questions, of answers, questions again, and then more answers. But church history for me, stretches me to see all of God's children in the ways that he does.
	01:02:16	It stretches me to be compassionate to my own failings as I'm compassionate with others' failings. It stretches me to be patient with God's slow work and long game. That's how God

works. It has stretched me to be compassionate with the suffering on every side. Our history, human history reveals to me all of the things that makes God weep, but all of the things that motivates his loving action in the world as well. I see all of that. I am, at least Holly tells me slowly over time, it's made me a better disciple, my study of our past. I'm a better disciple because of it. Not in spite of it. I've still got miles yet to go. I would say to anyone who's overwhelmed, fresh courage take, God's not going to forsake you or us or anyone now or ever, and that's the message of the vision too.

Hank Smith: 01:03:23 Wonderful. Thank Holly for us please, for letting us steal you away.

Dr. Spencer Fluhman: 01:03:28 She'd do anything for the Sorensen's.

Hank Smith: 01:03:31 That's true. We have loved having you here. We want to thank Dr. Spencer Fluhman for joining us on followHIM. We want to thank our executive producer Shannon Sorensen. We love you, Shannon. We want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen, every episode. This episode especially, we love and remember our founder Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We've got more church history, more Doctrine and Covenants to cover on followHIM. Thank you for joining us on today's episode. Do you or someone you know speak Spanish, Portuguese, or French? You can now watch and listen to our podcast in those languages. Links are in the description below. Today's show notes and transcripts are on our website. Follow him.co. That's follow him. co. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Iride Gonzalez and Annabelle Sorensen.

Hank Smith:	00:02	Hello everyone! Welcome to followHIM Favorites. This is where John and I are sharing a single story to go with each week's lesson. John, we are in section 76. You know how big this one is.
John Bytheway:	00:14	Big, big.
Hank Smith:	00:14	Huge. Maybe most important section up to this point, maybe of all the sections.
John Bytheway:	00:20	It was called The Vision before they started calling the First Vision. The first vision. This is the vision. Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:27	Well, that fits perfectly with the story I want to tell you. It's a vision that a young lady had for a relationship that she could change. I noticed in section 76, it seems to be a lot of invitations to living celestial. Here's this celestial glory. Come live this way. Years ago, I was in a seminary class. I noticed that one student, her name was Savannah. She had a really close relationship with her younger sister. She's about two years younger than her. They were such good friends, and I admire that, John, in a teenager that has a close relationship with a sibling. That's a sign of spiritual maturity. Well, I asked Savannah about it. I said, have you always been this close? And she said, no. Like, there's a story behind this. No. Once she told me, I asked her to write it down. Here's what she wrote.
	01:21	She said, Brother Smith, my sister Katie and I never got along as well as my parents wanted us to. When Savannah was beginning high school and Katie was in junior high, she said, I never put any effort in getting along with her. We constantly fought over everything. We fought over clothes, food, chores. She said, we especially fought when she wanted to hang out with me and my friends. She said, as a punishment, our parents would make us sit in the same room until we got along. Did you ever do that with you know, you gotta wear this sibling shirt where you both have to wear the shirt. She said, so we would just fake apologize to each other so we could get out. She said,

		as I got older, I would yell at her for doing things. In the back of my mind, I would realize that I used to do those same things when I was that age. She said, I always felt sorry about that. I knew I should apologize, but I wouldn't. I couldn't let go of my pride. I rationalized thinking things like all siblings fight. It's normal. She said, come on I know we'll be friends when we grow up. What's the point of trying now? But things changed. John, she said, as time went by, I watched my sister's self-esteem sink lower and lower. What had happened is that Katie had entered junior high. You know what I say about junior high?
John Bytheway:	02:45	Oh, it's one of my favorite Hank Smith quotations. It's just a bad idea.
Hank Smith:	02:51	It's a terrible idea. Let's take the most insecure people in society. We'll put them in the same building together for eight hours a day. It's like an emotional hunger games. We'll see who comes out with self-esteem.
John Bytheway:	03:04	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	03:05	Katie was going through a lot of bullying at school. Then she was getting bullied at home. She couldn't get away from it. Savannah says this. She said, I know she needed me. I know I couldn't keep putting in such minimal effort to get along with her. There was this moment Savannah told me about John, where Katie had told her about some of the girls at school who were bullying her. Savannah got really mad. They're bullying you almost like no one gets to bully you except for me.
John Bytheway:	03:35	That's my job.
Hank Smith:	03:36	That's my punching bag. She said it was kind of a gut check moment when Katie said, you're way worse than them. Oh, ouch. She said, Brother Smith, I'm a good person. My church leaders love me. My teachers love me. I'm a good person. But she said, I sat on my bed going, I'm a bully. She said, it was like finding out I was Prince Hans in Frozen. I'm a bad guy.
John Bytheway:	04:02	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	04:03	She said, I saw I only had a couple of years left. I was gonna leave for college. I would probably be out of chances. She's decided one goal, John. She said, my goal was to tell my sister I loved her every day. She said, I remember distinctly, I'd never heard my sister tell me she loved me. She said, that saddened me. My own sister wasn't comfortable enough to just tell me

that she loved me. I made that my goal. I was gonna hear my sister tell me that she loved me without me having to say it first. She went into the bathroom that first day as she's leaving for school and said, bye, Katie. I love you. I love you. And Katie went, ew. What? She goes, I love you. She said, Ew, I don't love you. Ah, so frustrating. She said, but I would do little things. When I felt a fight coming on, I would pause and I would take a step back and say, wow, is this really worth fighting over? She said, the answer was always no. Things started to change slowly. We still fought, but our apologies became real. Instead of hating to apologize. Saying sorry actually gave me some peace and some happiness. There she is John, every day going to school. Bye Katie. I love you, Katie would say. Kay, thanks. Bye. Every time. Bye Katie. I love you. Kay. Thanks.

John Bytheway:	05:26	Okay, thanks.
Hank Smith:	05:27	Bye. Which I think all girls should say to boys in high school. Yeah. I love you. Kay thanks. Thanks. Bye.
John Bytheway:	05:37	Especially the bye part. Yeah.
Hank Smith:	05:38	Yeah. Goodbye. She said, I still remember the day it happened. I was on my way out of the house. I was in a hurry and I didn't tell her that I loved her. She said, well, I hear her chase me down out of the bathroom, down the hall and over the railing. She said, Savannah and Savannah said what? She said, you know, say it. Say what? And she said, you know, like,
John Bytheway:	06:08	Wow.
Hank Smith:	06:08	You know, she gave the little heart sign like, come on.
	06:12	Savannah was funny. She said, what do you mean? Like what are you talking about? She said, Savannah, I love you. And Savannah said, I don't think she realized how happy she made me that day. That's all I could think about. And then she wrote this, John, think about this from going from a telestial way of living to a celestial way of living. This is what she said. I had a taste of what a relationship with my sister could be like, and I wanted more. There's actually an epilogue to this story John. I ended up seeing Savannah just a couple of years ago, and she was married to a wonderful guy named Nate. I said, Nate, how great is it being married to Savannah? She was such a great seminary student. I said, do you ever see Katie? He kind of looked at me like this. He's like. He said under his breath. He's like, it's like I married two people. She's always there.

John Bytheway:	07:16	She's, oh, that's great.
Hank Smith:	07:18	Savannah laughed and she said, I told him, look, if you're gonna marry me, my best friend comes with me. They're the best of friends. It was a girl John who saw something telestial happening in her life and decided, I'm gonna make a change.
John Bytheway:	07:34	Wow. I love it. This could bless a lot of people out there listening because it's not, well, she had it coming. It's not, she makes me mad. It's like, I could change. I could do something different. She did. Great story.
Hank Smith:	07:48	It took her a while. She said it didn't turn around overnight because Katie didn't trust me at first because I had hurt her for so long. It took a while to earn her trust. But once it happened, I remember going to Savannah's farewell. I'd never seen a little teenage girl crying so hard as her sister. Don't leave me. But they are still best of friends. I think Section 76, John, is inviting us to live a higher holier way. We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. We're with Dr. Spencer Fluhman this week, and John recording with Dr. Fluhman was a life-changing experience.
John Bytheway:	08:29	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	08:29	It really was.
John Bytheway:	08:30	So excited for everybody to hear this.
Hank Smith:	08:32	Yeah, he does a great job. He knows the history, he knows the verses. He knows the doctrine. It's really great. Come back here next week we'll do another followHIM Favorites.