

In Defense of Jesus Christ:

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This is a talk intended only for Covenant Christians.

Although “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies so that our children can know to what source they can look for a remission of their sins[,]” (CoC 2 Ne. 11:8) there remains much that is unacknowledged about Jesus Christ. This talk will defend His status as the greatest of God’s creations.¹ There are misunderstandings about Him that need to be corrected. He explained to Abraham, “that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they. I am the Lord, your God; I am more intelligent than they all.” T&C 145: Abr. 5:4. We can read those words without any idea of how significant they are and how much they tell us about our Lord.

It is possible this talk will challenge long-held religious beliefs for many of you. If so, be patient and let this settle on your mind to see how it illuminates your understanding. Nothing is better suited to helping us progress than receiving new truth. On the other hand, when truths are rejected it interferes with our progress. Rejecting or refusing to receive a new truth is what damns us.²

Nephi wanted for mankind to keep an open mind capable of welcoming new instruction from heaven. Nephi wrote:

“Woe to those who say: We’ve received God’s word; we don’t need more of God’s word because we have enough. This is what the Lord God has said: I’ll give mankind line upon line, a teaching here and a teaching there, a little here and a little there. Those who follow My teachings and listen to My counsel are blessed since they’ll learn wisdom. And I’ll give more to those who receive;

¹ Christ self-identifies as “the beginning of the creation of God” in Rev. 1:19, and therefore it is no insult or disrespect to refer to our Lord as a “creation.”

² *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, (Macmillan Publishing, New York 1992) Vol. 2, Damnation: “In LDS doctrine, to be damned means to be stopped, blocked, or limited in one’s progress. Individuals are damned whenever they are prevented from reaching their full potential as children of God. Damnation is falling short of what one might have enjoyed if one had received and been faithful to the whole law of the gospel.” P. 565.

but from those who say we have enough, even what they have will be taken away. Those who put their trust in the scholarly arrogance of men or follow the false teachings of a man are cursed, because only those teachings given by the power of the Holy Ghost are true. The Lord God of Hosts has said: Woe to the Gentiles; because despite extending My welcoming arm to them from day to day, they will deny Me.” 2 Ne. 12:6-7.

With this talk, you can consider things you have already heard in a new light that changes the picture by removing shadows. You do not need new or additional scriptures to learn what is in this talk. All you need is to be willing to accept what the scriptures state.

Because of the mission of Joseph Smith, and in particular the funeral sermon for King Follett,³ we know more than other Christians about the Lord and the plan for mankind’s salvation. Sometimes that additional understanding results in unwarranted assumptions about how similar we are to Him. LDS Church President Lorenzo Snow stated it this way: “As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be[come].”⁴ This brief assertion foolishly omits any recognition of the nearly incomprehensible gulf between who and what Jesus Christ is, and all He has accomplished on the one hand, and where and what we are on the other. The Follett sermon and Lorenzo Snow’s statement are both true, but have proven to be quite misleading. A great deal separates and distinguishes Him from us. This talk will address that great gulf.

There is a necessary balance between the awesome stature of Jesus Christ compared with our weak and embryonic state, on the one hand, and recognizing He cares for and wants to comfort us on our journey, on the other hand. We should be in awe

³ The sermon was given on April 7, 1844 in Nauvoo, Illinois, and stated in relevant part: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another.”

⁴ Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1844) p. 46.

about Him, and recognize His willingness to accompany us on our way. I am so humbled by Him that even as I talk respectfully of Him, it seems completely inadequate.

Defending Jesus Christ begins by explaining the reasons for justified awe and amazement. He is the “gatekeeper”⁵ on the upward pathway to God’s Throne. Everyone must confront Him before we will be permitted to enter God’s Kingdom. Before that, we should attempt to understand Him, His role, His accomplishments, and how very dependent we are upon Him, in order to help us understand that upward pathway to God’s Throne.

Christ progressed over eons in “worlds without end” on a journey that prepared Him before His birth in this world. He completed His long journey here in this world. How long the Lord’s development took is not fully revealed in scripture, but scripture makes it clear that He alone achieved the required progress to become like His Father. While the scriptures clarify that others *can* follow His path and arrive at the same place, scripture also makes it clear that no one else has ever done so, and Christ alone is the prototype of the saved man.

This is what we have been told about our Lord:

Before He entered this world as a mortal, He was given the leading role in organizing the universe. The apostle John explained,

“In the Highest Council of Heaven there was One who spoke out. And the One who spoke out was among the Gods, and He was a God. He was in the Council of the Gods, and the creation of the cosmos was organized through Him. And without Him does not exist one thing that has come into existence in the cosmos. In Him was the power of life and this power was conveyed into the cosmos as the Light in men and every thing. The Light shone in the chaos and those in darkness have not been able to grasp it. ...The Messenger of the Heavenly Council was in the cosmos, and the cosmos existed through Him, and the cosmos had not acquired His knowledge. He came into His own creation, but those there were unable to understand Him. As many as perceived the Light in Him, to them He gave

⁵ See 2 Ne. 6: (Book of Mormon) “the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel, and he employeth no servant there.” (Covenant of Christ) “the gatekeeper is the Holy One of Israel, and He doesn’t use any servant there.”

knowledge to enable them to follow the path to become like Him, begotten children in the family of the Most High God. This is only possible for those who believe through His name. Those who believe through His name are no longer born of blood to follow the appetites of flesh, nor the ambitions of man, but are able to become, like Him, the offspring of God. This one who was Spokesman from the Heavenly Council was made flesh, and He temporarily cast His tent among us, and we could see His knowledge of the path to ascend in light and truth, he was a member of the Family of God, full of the power to ascend and able to display truth to others.” T&C 171: TSJ 1:1, 3.

This part of Christ’s pre-mortal history has been referred to repeatedly in scripture. Although we do not have a full explanation of the Lord’s pre-earth accomplishments, what we have establishes His central role in organizing everything in this creation.

For example, in Genesis it is written:

“Here is wisdom and it remains in me. And by the word of my power have I created them, who is my Only Begotten Son, full of grace and truth. And worlds without number have I created, and I also created them for my own purpose; and by the same I created them, who is my Only Begotten. And the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many. But only an account of this earth and the inhabitants thereof give I unto you. For behold, there are many worlds which have passed away by the word of my power, and there are many also which now stand, and numberless are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them.”

Gen. 1:6.

Not only was this world organized by Jesus Christ, but He also organized many others. There is a depth in understanding the comment: “worlds without number have I created” by the Father’s “Only Begotten” (meaning Jesus Christ) The many worlds cannot be numbered because they continue to roll into existence, in an ongoing process that remains “numberless.” It is not a static number because it actively changes, grows, and multiplies everlastingly.

Think of it, so many worlds have been organized by Jesus Christ that they are “without number”—and many of them have “passed away” after their organization. From what we can observe with our present technology, there are now trillions, even

more, quadrillions, and yet even more, stars. Our present state of science confirms our Lord's creations are beyond our ability to count; more so if we consider all that have passed away alongside all now rolling into creation. [Of course, many of those were created and redeemed by the Father beforehand and we have only passing mention of that by Joseph Smith.⁶]

A recent vision referring to the Lord's accomplishments included this: "we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father, that by him, and through him, and of him the worlds are made and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God." T&C 69:5. Jesus Christ was not like you and I. He was the Only Begotten Creator of the universe, and organized an essentially infinite number of worlds. None of us has done anything comparable.

It was this mighty individual who condescended to become a mere man, born into this world, clothed in dust of the earth. When we read the account of His mortal life, we hardly recognize Him as the Creator responsible for infinite creations.

Despite His accomplishments, once He took upon Himself mortality, He declined to acknowledge He was even 'good.' Matt. 9:22 records: "And behold, one came and said, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why do you call me good? There is none good but one — that is, God." Have you ever pondered why the Lord would decline to acknowledge He was 'good?' Let's not let that remain a mystery.

Christ's mission here was difficult, and He undertook it as a mortal man. Whatever man encounters in a body of dust, the Lord also encountered. As stated in Heb. 1:11: "we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin." Everything we face He faced. He was hungry, thirsty, tired, weary, stirred with unbecoming thoughts, tempted to be impatient, unkind, ambitious, aspiring, indifferent, judgmental, and angry. No appetite of the body was unfamiliar to Him. No ugly thought, unkind reflection, or impatient reaction was absent from His life. But He was nonetheless

⁶ In the King Follett Sermon, quoted infra, Joseph Smith said: "Jesus said, 'As the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power.' To do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious--in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible. The scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom, all the combined powers of earth and hell together, to refute it."

“without sin” because He did not succumb. He confronted, endured, but gave no heed to temptations.⁷

Given the fact He “was in all points tempted like we are,” the Lord would not acknowledge He was “good” while clothed in mortal dust and subject to the weaknesses of flesh. No one whose mind is beset with the ugliness of fleshly appetites could regard themselves as “good.” “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam...” which is rendered in Covenant of Christ in these words: “Men and women, in their natural state, are out of harmony with God and have been since the Fall of Adam.” Mosiah 1:16. When He condescended and took mortal flesh upon Him, Christ joined us in being an enemy to God. He was out of harmony with God, and subject to the same struggle to subdue the flesh to the spirit, becoming meek, submissive, and patiently willing to accept all the Father required of Him. *Id.*

For Christ to acknowledge He was good, required the flesh to be defeated and Him to rise from the grave. Until His mortal journey was completed, He faced temptations that left His mind in mortal turmoil, in a state less than “good.” It was only after the resurrection that the Lord declared, “All power is given unto me in Heaven and on earth.”⁸ Once He finished His final step on the upward pathway, then He was “good” and empowered, and beyond the reach of any temptation. He has been trusted with “all power” in Heaven and earth, becoming exactly the same as His good Father, and They are now One in every sense that -They are the same kind or quality of being. They are in complete harmony or agreement. They have the same continuity without deviation or change in purpose or pursuit. They have equal power and authority. They exist in the same glorified, self-existent state. Nothing can tempt or corrupt them.

In order for Him to arrive at that ultimate end, the Lord had not only to organize or create a cosmos like the Father had before Him, but also needed to attain to the resurrection and redeem or reclaim that creation. That required specific conditions. The Lord had to voluntarily lay down His life, even when He was entitled to live forever. Since He was without sin, and death entered the world because of transgression, His death needed to be unjust. His suffering needed to be unmerited.

⁷ T&C 1: *HJS*, Part 16, ¶6.

⁸ NC Matt. 13:4.

He needed to be an innocent sacrifice, so that justice was violated by His death, making mercy possible.⁹

The unique conditions of this world were required for the Lord to voluntarily sacrifice His life. Our world is unlike any other of God's creations. For the many "worlds without number" that have and do exist, ours is the only one where the Lord's sacrifice could have happened.

God's description to Enoch shows how unique this world is among all of God's creations: "Behold, I am God, Man of Holiness is my name, Man of Counsel is my name, and Endless and Eternal is my name also. Wherefore, I can stretch forth my hands and hold all the creations which I have made, and my eye can pierce them also. And among all the workmanship of my hands, there has not been so great wickedness as among your brethren." Gen 4:17. This world, among all of God's creations, is singularly wicked. Our world was the scene of the first murder in the second generation. Then oaths were adopted to conceal and protect murder, and men obtained power using threats of murder. This creation descended into such wickedness that within ten generations, God concluded the world had to return to the second day of creation, when waters covered the face of the earth and the dry land had not yet appeared:¹⁰ "But the earth was corrupt before God and it was filled with violence. And God looked upon it, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh has

⁹ "Now remember, my son, if it weren't for the plan of redemption — setting it aside — as soon as they were dead, their spirits would be miserable, being cut off from the Lord's presence. Now there was no means to reclaim people from this fallen state, which they had brought upon themselves because of their own disobedience. Therefore according to justice, the plan of redemption could only be brought about on the condition of mankind's repentance in this probationary state — that is, this preparatory state. This is the only condition that could allow mercy to take effect without destroying the requirements of justice. Now the requirements of justice couldn't be ignored. If so, God would stop being God. And so we see that all mankind had fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice — indeed, God's justice — which forever relegated them to be cut off from His presence. Now the plan of mercy couldn't be brought about unless an atonement were made. Therefore God Himself will atone for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to meet the demands of justice, so that God can be a perfectly just God, and a merciful God as well." CoC Alma 19:14— see the entire 19th chapter for an exposition on the need to satisfy justice in order to allow for mercy.

¹⁰ "I, God, said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters. And it was so, even as I spoke. And I said, Let it divide the waters from the waters. And it was done. And I, God, made the firmament and divided the waters, yea, the great waters under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so, even as I spoke. And I, God, called the firmament heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day." Gen. 2:4.

come before me; for the earth is filled with violence, and behold, I will destroy all flesh from off the earth.” Gen. 5:11.

This astonishing turn of events was a result of mankind’s continual meditation on wickedness: “And every man was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, being only evil continually.” Gen. 5:9.

This world was and is the worst of all God’s creations. But even among the wicked of this world, there was still only one people living in one generation who would kill the Lamb of God. We read: “Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ (for, in the last night, the angel spake unto me that this should be his name), that he should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world. And they shall crucify him — for it behooveth our God — and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God. For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations, they would repent and know that he be their God. But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.” 2 Ne. 7:1 [As restated in Covenant of Christ: “Therefore, as I told you, it must necessarily be that Christ — and last night the angel told me this was to be His name — should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world. And they will crucify Him — because it’s essential for God — and no other nation on earth would crucify their God. Because if the mighty miracles were performed among other nations, they would repent and know He was God. But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, those at Jerusalem will be stubborn and hardened against Him, resulting in His crucifixion.”] This was also singular, never having happened in any other creation, in any other generation, for the gravest injustice of all eternity to take place. That terrible but essential injustice broke the demands of justice and allowed an infinite price to be paid. That infinite injustice opened the door for mercy to become possible. Now, despite the demands of justice on each of us, requiring our death because of sin,¹¹ that price has been paid by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and justice cannot demand more. As a result, Jesus Christ is both the author and dispenser of mercy, and has set the condition for us to access that mercy.

Because this world is the most wicked of all creations, and only one generation in this world would crucify their God, the atonement has happened once. Here. Only once

¹¹ “[T]he wages of sin is death” Rom. 1:28. See also, Alma 3:8.

and only here. Mormons often conjecture that there have been many “Christs” and many “atonements”—but there is nothing in scripture to support that conjecture. The record we have identifies it as a singular event in which Jesus Christ did what He saw the Father do before Him.¹²

Jesus Christ not only sacrificed Himself to bring about mercy, He also exposed Himself to every form of wickedness mankind has committed. He did this to understand the depths of our depravity, the consciousness of our guilt, and the despair of our souls. Not only that, but also to see how unjust suffering, violent victimization, and innocent martyrdom co-exist with predatory persecution, hatred, and sociopathology. He made it possible to repent and avoid the suffering caused by these mortal failings.

Christ understood the prophecies. Therefore, Christ knew His destiny, and had a clear idea of what would be required of Him. His mother no doubt helped Him to understand.¹³ Scripture foretold of His vicarious suffering:

He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray — we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth[.] Isa. 19:2

Although this was His destiny, when the moment came He recoiled, describing it as exquisitely hard to bear:

how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer, if they would repent. But if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I, which suffering caused myself, even

¹² We have no record of how or when the Father laid down His life and took it up again. But we have reason to trust that the Father accomplished that, and then organized a plan to permit others to become like Him. That plan has produced His Only Begotten Son, as proof His plan can work. The scriptures only identify Christ as that singular proof - It has now been done. Therefore, it can be done again.

¹³ Christ knew His purpose, see. NC John 10:7.

God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, to suffer both body and spirit, and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink. Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. T&C 4:5

He knew the specific prophecy foretelling His public humiliation, suffering and death. He quoted the beginning words from that Psalm as it was fulfilled on the cross:

Psalm 22:1-5: "My God, My God why have you forsaken me? ...

"But I am a worm, and loved of no man, a reproach of man and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

"But you are he that took me out of the womb. You did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from the womb. You were my God from my mother's breasts.

"Be not far from me — for trouble is near — for there is none to help. Many armies have encompassed me; strong armies of Bashan have beset me around. They gaped upon me with their mouths like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my inward parts. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws, and you have brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have encompassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tally all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not far from me, O Lord. O my strength, hasten to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, for you have heard me speak from the secret places of the wilderness through the horns of the re'em.

"I will declare your name unto my brethren. In the midst of the congregation will I praise you.

He knew this was His destiny, but just like us all, when the final trial arrived it was astonishingly more difficult than expected. The Lord prayed in Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing to, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." NC Luke 13:9. Living in this fallen world is far more difficult than what it

seemed when we shouted for joy at the news of this creation.¹⁴ This world challenges everyone who enters it. The Lord was no exception. This life is extraordinarily challenging, and we were quite unrealistic about how we would succeed before coming here. But thankfully the Lord knows exactly what we can face, and how to refine us like silver into a mirror-like image in which He can see His own face when He looks upon us. We are all required to soldier on, and fight the good fight.

Christ has begged us to repent and follow Him so we can escape the consequences of our failures. If we refuse to repent and accept the Lord's sacrifice, we will suffer: As T&C 4:5 warns us, it will be "sore", "exquisite", and incomprehensively "hard to bear." Even the Lord was shocked when required to suffer both body and spirit. He did not want to drink the bitter cup. He recoiled and wanted to avoid it. Our experiences, while infinitely less demanding, are likewise also hard for us in our limited capacity to bear.

He provided us with a more complete description of that awful ordeal in T&C 161:4-9:

"He thought His sufferings were over, but to His astonishment another wave overcame Him. This one was much greater than the first. The Lord, who had been kneeling, fell forward onto His hands at the impact of the pain that was part of a greater, second wave.

"This second wave was so much greater than the first that it seemed to entirely overcome the Lord. The Lord was now stricken with physical injuries as well as spiritual affliction. As He suffered anew, His flesh was torn which He healed using the power of the charity within Him. The Lord had such life within Him, such power and virtue within Him, that although He suffered in His flesh, these injuries healed and His flesh restored. His suffering was both body and spirit, and there was anguish of thought, feeling, and soul.

"The Lord overcame this second wave of suffering, and again found peace of mind and strength of body; and His heart filled with love despite what He had suffered. Indeed, it was charity or love that allowed Him to overcome. He was at peace with His Father, and with all mankind, but it required another, still greater act of will and charity than the first for Him to do so.

¹⁴ See Job 12:2.

“Again, the Lord thought His suffering was over. He stayed on His hands and knees for a moment to collect Himself when another wave of torment burst upon Him. This wave struck Him with such force He fell forward upon His face. He was afflicted by this greater wave. He was then healed, only to then be afflicted again as the waves of torment overflowed. Wave after wave poured out upon Him, with only moments between them. The Lord’s suffering progressed from a lesser to a greater portion of affliction; for as one would be overcome by Him, the next, greater affliction would then be poured out. Each wave of suffering was only preparation for the next, greater wave.

“The pains of mortality, disease, injury, and infirmity, together with the sufferings of sin, transgressions, guilt of mind, and unease of soul, the horrors of recognition of the evils men had inflicted upon others, were all poured out upon Him, with confusion and perplexity multiplied upon Him.

“He longed for it to be over, and thought it would end long before it finally ended. With each wave He thought it would be the last, but then another came upon Him, and then yet another.” ...

Id. at ¶17-26: “After long inquiring into the things which he had seen, the Lord, who is patient and merciful and willing to instruct those who call upon Him, again appeared to the man on the 20th of December, 2007. He made known unto him that the waves of torment suffered by the Lord came in pairs which mirrored each other. The first of each wave poured upon the Lord those feelings, regrets, recriminations, and pains felt by those who injured their fellow man. Then followed a second wave, which mirrored the first, but imposed the pains suffered by the victims of the acts committed by those in the first wave. Instead of the pains of those who inflict hurt or harm, it was now the anger, bitterness, and resentments felt by those who suffered these wrongs.

“From each wave of suffering, whether as the one afflicting or as the victim of those wrongs, the Lord would overcome the evil feelings associated with these wrongs, and find His heart again filled with peace. This was why, in the vision of the suffering of the Lord, it was in the second waves that there appeared oftentimes to be injuries to His body.

“The greater difficulty in these paired waves of torment was always overcoming the suffering of the victim. With these waves the Lord learned to

overcome the victims' resentments, to forgive, and to heal both body and spirit. This was more difficult than overcoming the struggles arising from the one who committed the evil. This is because the one doing evil knows he has done wrong and feels a natural regret when he sees himself aright. The victim, however, always feels it is their right to hold resentment, to judge their persecutor, and to withhold peace and love for their fellow men. The Lord was required to overcome both so that He could succor both.

"In the pairing of the waves, the first torment was of the mind and spirit, and the second was torment of mind, spirit, and body.

"The Lord experienced all the horror and regret wicked men feel for their crimes when they finally see the truth. He experienced the suffering of their victims whose righteous anger and natural resentment and disappointment must also be shed, and forgiveness given, in order for them to find peace. He overcame them all. He descended below them all. He comprehends it all. And He knows how to bring peace to them all. He knows how to love others whether they are the one who has given offense or the one who is a victim of the offense.

"In the final wave, the most brutal, most evil, most heinous sins men inflict upon one another were felt by Him as a victim of the worst men can do. He knew how it felt to wrongly suffer death. He knew what it was like to be a mother holding a child in her arms as they are both killed by those who delight in their suffering. He knew how it was for ambitious men to rid themselves of a rival by conspiracy and murder. He knew what it was to have virtue robbed from the innocent. He knew betrayal, treachery, and abuse in all its worst degrading horror. There was no cruelty, no offense, no evil that mankind has suffered or will suffer that was not put upon Him.

"He knew what it is like for men to satisfy their ambition by clothing their hypocrisy in religious garb. He also felt what it was like to be the victim of religious oppression by those who pretend to practice virtue while oppressing others. He knew the hearts of those who would kill Him. Before confronting their condemnation of Him in the flesh, He suffered their torment of mind when they recognized He was the Lord, and then found peace for what they would do by rejecting Him. In this extremity there was madness itself as He mirrored the evil which would destroy Him, and learned how to come to peace with the Father after killing the Son of God, and to

love all those involved without restraint and without pretense even before they did these terrible deeds. His suffering, therefore, encompassed all that has happened, all that did happen, and all that would happen in the future.

“As a result of what the Lord suffered, there is no condition — physical, spiritual, or mental — that He does not fully understand. He knows how to teach, comfort, succor, and direct any who come to Him seeking forgiveness and peace. This is why the prophet wrote: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. [Isa. 19:2] And again: Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. [Isa. 19:2] He obtained this knowledge by the things He suffered. He suffered that we might avoid sin by being obedient to His commandments. None of us need harm another, if we will follow Him. He knows fully the consequences of sin. He teaches His followers how to avoid sin.

“The prophet Alma taught and understood our Lord’s sufferings as he wrote: And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith: He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. [Alma 5:3]

“He can bring peace to any soul. He can help those who will come to Him love their fellow man. He alone is the Perfect Teacher because He alone has the knowledge each of us lack to return to being whole and at peace with the God and Father of us all after our transgression of His will. He is wise to what is required for each man’s salvation”

This was a singular achievement. Jesus Christ is the only one who has ever accomplished what His Father achieved. The scriptures are quite clear about this single achievement. There may be a plan that makes it possible to happen again, but so far, there is only one who has done what the Father did. Scripture has proclaimed the singular accomplishment of God and His Son:

Moses was told: “Know therefore this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord, he is God, in Heaven above and upon the earth beneath. There is none else.” Deu. 2:7.

The Psalms declare: “All nations whom you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name; for you are great and do wondrous things. You are God alone.” Psl. 86:1.

Isaiah wrote: “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his redeemer, the Lord of Hosts: I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.” “Is there a God besides me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.” Isa. 15:16. And also: “Before me, there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.” Isa. 15:12.

Those who believe in the restoration, and who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet sent by God to teach lost truths, have taught the opposite of this.¹⁵ They have not correctly understood this singular achievement. It is a widespread misunderstanding that there are many who have achieved exaltation and are, like the Father and His Son, also occupying the same glory and holding the same enthronement in the heavens. There is also a widespread misconception that this will be given to anyone who qualifies for “celestial glory” by obedience in this lifetime. Those ideas are incorrect. These misconceptions are based in part upon a misunderstanding of the King Follett Sermon.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1966, Second Edition) entry *Exaltation*, p. 257: “...they have spirit children in the resurrection, in relation to which offspring they stand in the same position that God our Father stands to us. They inherit in due course the fulness of the glory of the Father, meaning that they have all power in heaven and on earth.” See also, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, (Macmillan Publishing, New York 1992) Vol. 2, entries: *Eternal Life*, *Eternal Lives*, and *Exaltation*. See also, *Gospel Topics Essays* on <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng> for the article “Becoming Like God” for one example of how Mormons, post-Joseph Smith, have taught about achieving godhood. See also, Robert L. Millet, Noel B. Reynolds, *Do Latter-day Saints believe that men and women can become Gods?* pdf article available on <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu> and <https://mormonfaq.com/mormon-beliefs/what-is-mormonism/why-do-mormons-think-they-can-become-gods> among other places.

The language from the King Follett Discourse¹⁶ used to support this misunderstanding is the following:

“I want you all to know God, to be familiar with him. And if I can bring you to him, all persecutions against me will cease; you will know that I am his servant, for I speak as one having authority. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear all ye ends of the earth; for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and I am going to tell you the designs of God for the human race and why he interferes with the affairs of man.

“First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heaven, is a man like one of you. That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today and you were to see the great God who holds this world in its orbit and upholds all things by his power, you would see him in the image and very form of a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion and image of God. He received instruction from and walked, talked, and conversed with him as one man talks and communes with another.

In order to understand the subject of the dead for the consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, it is necessary they should understand the character and being of God; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. [That he was not is an idea] incomprehensible to some. But it is the simple and first principle of the gospel-to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another. God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.

“I wish I had the trump of an archangel; I could tell the story in such a manner that persecution would cease forever. What did Jesus say? (Mark it, elder Rigdon!) Jesus said, ‘As the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power.’ To do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious--in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible. The scriptures

¹⁶ This quote is taken from *the Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5 (15 August 1844): 612-17, which was published a month and a half after Joseph Smith’s death and without his editing input. It was based on notes taken by several people present at the time of the talk.

say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom, all the combined powers of earth and hell together, to refute it.

“Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God. And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves--to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, [until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and¹⁷] until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.

“And I want you to know that in the last days, while certain individuals are proclaiming his name, God is not trifling with you or me; it is the first principle of consolation. How consoling to the mourner when he is called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to know that although the earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved that dear one shall rise in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more but shall be God's heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What is it? It is to inherit the same glory, the same power, and the same exaltation until you ascend the throne of eternal power the same as those who are gone before. What did Jesus do? Why, I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. I saw my Father work out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom I shall present it to my Father so that he obtains kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt his glory. And so Jesus treads in his tracks to inherit what God did before. It is plain beyond disputation.” ...

“Thus you learn some of the first principles of the gospel, about which so much hath been said. When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while

¹⁷ The material inserted in the brackets comes from the *TPJS* at p. 346 account of the discourse. When the *TPJS* was prepared the author had access to more of the contemporaneous notes of people in the audience than the publishers of the *Times and Seasons* did when they published their account on August 15, 1844, half a month following Joseph's death. Notes from the following note-takers include reference to “everlasting burnings”: Willard Richards (“Till they are able to dwell in everlasting burning & everlasting power.”), Wilford Woodruff (“to dwelling in everlasting burnings,”), and the Thomas Bullock Report mentions it in a different place in his notes (“some shall rise to the everlasting burning of God”). The account of William Clayton does not mention it as part of his notes. See, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith* (Religious Studies Center BYU, Provo, 1980) pp. 340-362.

before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave. I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible. And I think there are many ‘wise men’ here who would put me to death for treason; so I shall turn commentator today.”

We need to have some of the terms used in this Discourse better defined. The word “exaltation” has often been used but poorly defined, and misunderstood. God the Father dwells in such glory that it has been referred to as “everlasting burnings,” or “consuming fire,” or a “brightness above the sun.”

Deu. 2:5: “...for the Lord your God is a consuming fire[.]”

Deu. 3:10: “...the Lord your God is he who goes over before you; as a consuming fire[.]”

Heb. 1:57: “...we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.”

Accounts of Him appearing include descriptions of His power and glory:

Acts 12:41: “I saw in the way a light from Heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them who journeyed with me.”

1 Ne. 1:3: “As he prayed to the Lord, a pillar of fire descended and rested on a rock in front of him, and he saw and heard many things.” (Book of Mormon) “As he prayed to the Lord, a pillar of fire descended and rested on a rock in front of him, and he saw and heard many things.” (Covenant of Christ)

T&C 116:3: “...A pillar of fire appeared above my head. It presently rested down upon me and filled me with joy unspeakable. A personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame[.]”

T&C 157:26: “They saw the Lord in his glory standing above them and the breastwork of the pulpit; and under his feet appeared as it were a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah[.]”

The Glory of God will consume those who are unprepared to endure His presence. That effect is one of the signs that will accompany the return of the Lord in glory. As Nephi informed Joseph Smith, in language taken from Malachi but altered for clarity: “For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly, shall burn as stubble; for they that cometh shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” T&C 1: JSH:3:4. Who are they that are coming? Who are these glorious persons whose presence will burn up the wicked? As mentioned in scripture, the angels who dwell in God’s presence, within the flaming brilliance of His presence, are referred to as “seraphs.” In the Dedication Prayer for the Kirtland Temple, T&C 123:22, Joseph Smith asked the Lord: “And help us by the power of thy spirit that we may mingle our voices with those bright shining seraphs around thy throne, with acclamations of praise, singing, Hosanna to God and the Lamb.”

Being present with God, dwelling in His glorious, flaming presence, is what the word “exaltation” means. If you can endure God’s habitation, you are exalted by being present in it. It is a mistake, however, to assume that being able to endure that presence means that you are equal to God. Joseph Smith explained, “And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves--to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.” We will not become God’s equal until we have passed from exaltation to exaltation through successive steps in which glory is then accompanied by the knowledge and wisdom required. If you understand this, then you know what Joseph was telling us when he taught: “When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave.”

Even if we attain exaltation through our heed and diligence in this life, that is but one step in a path requiring a great while beyond the grave to arrive in the same place as Jesus Christ. For us, the greatest we can hope to receive if we are true and faithful in all things, will be to dwell in God’s presence after this stage of development. Having the promise of your calling and election made sure by the voice of God only means your journey will continue. You will not be cast out, and will achieve a Terrestrial

Glory in the coming afterlife. Those who are honorable, but allow crafty men to mislead you, as happens in abundance in this world, still merit glory in the afterlife. The Terrestrial Glory is conferred on those who receive the presence of the Son, but not the fullness of the Father. And it includes those who believe, but fail to be valiant in their testimony of Jesus, and therefore cannot be trusted with greater glory. This presence of Jesus Christ in the afterlife is what most Christians hope to acquire. Good, faithful people who have accepted the traditions of theologians and the reasoning of uninspired ministers will be elected to have the Son's presence in the afterlife.

In contrast, those who inherit Celestial Glory are described in T&C 69:14-22: “These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ for ever and ever. These are they whom he shall bring with him when he shall come in the clouds of Heaven to reign on the earth over his people. These are they who shall have part in the first resurrection. These are they who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just. These are they who are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the Heavenly place, the holiest of all. These are they who have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn. These are they whose names are written in Heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all. 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. These are they whose bodies are Celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical.”

We have another seraph servant sent at the beginning of Joseph Smith’s dispensation. Joseph described the event in these words:

“On the evening of the 21st September, A. D. 1823, while I was praying unto God and endeavouring [sic] to exercise faith in the precious promises of scripture, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance and brightness, burst into the room; indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire. The appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body. In a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I was already surrounded. This messenger proclaimed himself to be an angel of God, sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which

God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled; that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel in all its fulness [sic] to be preached in power, unto all nations, that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign.”¹⁸

To “learn to be Gods” requires something greater and more demanding than receiving what is referred to as ‘exaltation’ from your progress here. That much greater task will require each recipient to be exactly, precisely what Christ is, and nothing else. This has been taught to us in the *Lectures on Faith*:

“And if we find one saved being in all existence, we may see what all others must be or else not be saved. We ask, then: Where is the prototype? Or where is the saved being? We conclude as to the answer of this question there will be no dispute among those who believe the Bible that it is Christ. All will agree in this, that he is the prototype or standard of salvation, or in other words, that he is a saved being. And if we should continue our interrogation, and ask how it is that he is saved, the answer would be, because he is a just and holy being. And if he were anything different from what he is he would not be saved, for his salvation depends on his being precisely what he is and nothing else. For if it were possible for him to change in the least degree, so sure he would fail of salvation and lose all his dominion, power, authority, and glory, which constitutes salvation. For salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power, and dominion which Jehovah possesses, and in nothing else, and no being can possess it but himself or one like him.” T&C 110: Lecture 7:9.

Joseph Smith explained how spirits could advance to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until one has attained to the resurrection of the dead, and becomes able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and can sit in glory enthroned in everlasting power: “The first principles of man are self-existent with

¹⁸ *JSP: Histories, Vol. 1*, p. 508. See also, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/latter-day-saints-1844/2>; see also, *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in The United States*, compiled by I. Daniel Rupp, (Philadelphia: J.Y. Humphreys 1844), containing the Chapter: “Latter Day Saints,” by Joseph Smith, beginning on page 405.

God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.”¹⁹ This process was ordained by the Father’s decree. It was Jesus Christ who proved the word of the Father was faithful and true. Therefore, insofar as the great plan permitting souls to advance can benefit us, that plan was followed, proven, and ultimately implemented for the first time by Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father. In that sense, Jesus Christ has *become* the Word of God. Now we can advance, knowing that it is possible.

However, knowing it to be possible does not make it happen. It can only happen if someone is precisely what Jesus Christ is and nothing else. Thus far, despite there have been worlds without number, it is Jesus Christ alone who has become God the Father’s heir. For that reason, our faith is anchored in Christ and our hope is confirmed by His great accomplishments.

We have inherited the same opportunity as Jesus Christ. He began on the same footing as all of us.²⁰ But He gave the necessary heed and diligence to His Father to attain the resurrection. While it may take worlds without end for us to do the same, there is every reason to believe Jesus Christ has likewise been progressing worlds without end before His life here. As the prototype of the saved man, Christ proves to us that our faith is not in vain. God the Father is faithful and true, and we are allowed to grow by following His pathway to become like Him.

The Lord inspires us, even speaks with us through individuals He has chosen from time to time.²¹ But it is only the message, not the messenger who matters. If the messenger is made the object of veneration, it will damn their followers: T&C 69:26: “And the glory of the celestial is one, even as the glory of the stars are one, for as one star differs from another star in glory, even so differs one from another in glory in the celestial world. For these are they who are of Paul, and of Apollos, and of Cephas.

¹⁹ From a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.

²⁰ Alma 9:10.

²¹ See, e.g. Moroni 7:6 (CoC), Moroni 7:6 (BoM), Acts 5:9.

These are they who say they are some of one and some of another: some of Christ, and some of John, and some of Moses, and some of Elias, and some of Esaias, and some of Isaiah, and some of Enoch, but received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus, neither the prophets, neither the everlasting covenants.” Men are, in their mortal state, never “good”—even Christ declined to say He was “good” while in the flesh. But Christ came to do the Father’s will, and that came from One who is good. So, also, when a message comes from the Lord, the messenger is merely the mechanism used by the Lord. The Lord’s words are all that deserve respect: T&C 180: “When the king sends a messenger to deliver his letter, and the messenger delivers the message by reading it with a stammering tongue, but hands the letter to the recipient, then the letter can be read, and the messenger has been faithful to his king. The letter stands as the king’s word, and the messenger has done his part.”

The only rule for the messenger is to be faithful to the Lord. And the duty imposed on the Lord’s people is limited to and defined by the message. None of the messengers has been anything more than a mere man, flawed and weak, subject to all the infirmities we share. But when trusted with the Lord’s message then the message is the Lord’s.

Jesus spoke of John the Baptist in words that describe him as a seraph: “You sent unto John, and he bore witness also unto the truth. And he received not his testimony of man, but of God. And you yourselves say that he is a prophet, therefore, you ought to receive his testimony. These things I say that you might be saved. He was a burning and shining light, and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.” John 5:6.²² But the Baptist testified of Christ: “[T]here is one standing among you, whom you do not acknowledge and I bear testimony of him. He is the one foretold by Moses, and he will preach following my witness of him. He has progressed beyond me so much that in comparison I am not worthy to kneel before him; his shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose, nor am I worthy to wash his feet. I could never substitute for him.” T&C 171:TSJ 1:8. Or as it is stated in John 1:4: “[T]here stands one among you whom you know not. He it is of whom I bear record. He is that Prophet, even Elias,

²² See also T&C 171: TSJ 5:6-7: “He did not receive his testimony from only a man, but directly from God, and you admit he is a prophet. Therefore you should accept his testimony. I am telling you these things to save you. John was a brilliant light sent from above, and you were willing to hear and acknowledge him for a short while.”

who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to untie, or whose place I am not able to fill."

We should never lose our justified awe for Jesus Christ. In addition to all that has been covered in this talk, the experience of Moses with the Lord reminds us of the Lord's great glory:

Gen 1:2: "And the presence of God withdrew from Moses, that his glory was not upon him, and Moses was left unto himself. And as he was left unto himself, he fell unto the earth. And it came to pass that it was for the space of many hours before he did again receive his natural strength like unto man. And he said unto himself, Now for this once I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed. But now my eyes have beheld God — but not my natural eyes, but my spiritual, for my natural eyes could not have beheld, for I should have withered and died in his presence. But his glory was upon me and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him."

King Benjamin explained our dependence on the Lord in Mosiah 1:8 (BoM): "I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole souls have power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another — I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and art preserving you from day to day by lending you breath that ye may live, and move, and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another — I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole soul, yet ye would be unprofitable servants." This is stated in (CoC) in this way: "I want to remind you that if you used all your energy to thank God and praise Him to the fullest, acknowledging He has created you, watched over and preserved you, filled you with joy, and given you the ability to live in peace with one another, you would still not be able to repay Him for all He's done for you. God is the one who created you from the very beginning, and He's the one who continues to preserve you day by day by giving you breath so that you can live, move, and act according to your own will. He's even supporting you from one moment to the next. Therefore I urge you to serve Him with your entire soul. Even if you do this, you'll still be unprofitable servants."

He invites us to "follow Him" and has provided the example. He is the single example and the confirming proof of the Father's plan for mankind.

Let me close by testifying that Jesus Christ is more intelligent than all of us. John the Baptist was apparently more worthy than any of us, as Christ said of John: “Truly I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” Matthew 6:2.²³ Christ created all we see, entered into this world as a man, suffered unjustly all the tragic horrors that result from our sins, voluntarily laid down His life, and had the right to then take it up again. He opened the way for all of us to also rise from the grave. He has no peer. He is greater than us all. It is a mistake to think we will easily or effortlessly be like Him.

I began this talk by referring to the scripture: “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies so that our children can know to what source they can look for a remission of their sins[,]” (CoC 2 Ne. 11:8) I would add to that, we “follow” Christ—because for any upward progress we know we are required to follow Him.

There was a conversation between Christ and the Sanhedrin that took place following His arrest and during His trial. Although we consider the Sanhedrin part of the “most wicked” and the only ones who would kill their God, we should let Christ’s dialogue with them provoke our reflection about our status:

T&C 171:TSJ 6:15-18: “Then Jesus repeated to them, I will continue onward following the path of my Father, and you will not accompany me, but will instead die under the burden of your sins. Therefore you cannot go where I will be. Then the Sanhedrin scornfully asked, Does he plan to kill himself? Is that why he said, The path he will take we will not join? And Jesus responded to them, You are from a lower estate. I am from the Heavens. You are stuck in this world, and I am not of this world. Because of this I said to you that you will die burdened with sins. If you do not believe that I am sent by the Most High God, bringing light and life with me, you will die burdened with sins. They said to him, So tell us who you claim to be. And Jesus answered them, I am the same as I told you from the beginning.

I have many things to teach that will be used to judge you; and the one who sent me is the Source of all truth. I am teaching what he has sent me to teach and he provided my message. They did not understand that he was speaking the words of Father Ahman. Then Jesus added, When you have lifted up the

²³ See also, Luke 5:17.

Son of Man, then you will realize that I am Son Ahman, and that I have done nothing on my own; but as my Father has taught me, I repeat his words. He sent me and accompanies me here; the Father has never abandoned my side. I always do the things that please him.

When he spoke these words, many believed on him.

Then Jesus addressed those Jews who believed on him, Only if you continue to follow my teachings will you be my students indeed, because you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. The leaders interrupted to claim, We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been slaves to any man. Why do you say we will become free? Jesus answered them, In the name of Father Ahman I say unto you, Whoever misses the mark is the slave of errors. And such a slave will not be allowed to be within Abraham's house in the resurrection, but the Son will remain part of God's Family forever."

We cannot rely solely on our status to progress upward. Jesus Christ faithfully followed what the Father required. He set the mark and provided the example for us to follow. Now we are offered the same opportunity to continue on the upward journey. But moving upward is only accomplished by obedience and fidelity to the Father's plan. Jesus Christ is the revelation of what following that plan requires of us.

As one of the seraphim of heaven confessed, none are worthy to touch His feet in adoration and submission to Him. Yet we vainly often think ourselves equal to Him, without having done any of the great things that were required of Him. I hope that we will show our Lord more awe, respect, and adoration, and that we will have more humility, as the Lord's status has been defended in this talk. Although He is willing to condescend to speak with us in plain humility, as one person speaks to another,²⁴ we should never lose sight of who He is and what He has done for us.

As stated earlier, Jesus Christ is both the author and dispenser of mercy and has set the condition for us to access that mercy. This leads us to Christ's doctrine, which establishes the requirement to obtain mercy, and forms the foundation for being a disciple of His, or a "Christian"—more correctly, a Covenant Christian.

Listen carefully to what I tell you: I will declare to you My doctrine. This is My doctrine, and it is the doctrine that the Father has given to Me: I testify

²⁴ Ether 5:8 CoC, *Id. BoM.*

of the Father, and the Father testifies of Me, and the Holy Ghost testifies of the Father and Me. I also testify the Father commands all people everywhere to repent and believe in Me. And anyone who believes in Me and is baptized will be saved, and they are who will inherit God's kingdom. But anyone who doesn't believe in Me and isn't baptized will be damned. In truth I tell you this is My doctrine, and I testify of it from the Father. Anyone who believes in Me also believes in the Father, and the Father will testify to them of Me, since He will visit them with fire and with the Holy Ghost. In this way the Father will testify of Me, and the Holy Ghost will testify to them of the Father and Me, because the Father and I and the Holy Ghost are united as one. In addition, I say to you: You must repent and become as a little child and be baptized in My name, or under no circumstance can you receive these things. And again, I say to you: You must repent and be baptized in My name and become as a little child, or under no circumstances can you inherit God's kingdom. In truth I tell you this is My doctrine. Whoever builds on this builds on My rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against them. And those who declare more or less than this and establish it as My doctrine advocate evil and are not built upon My rock, but are built on a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive them when the floods come and the wind pounds them. Therefore go to this people and declare to the farthest reaches of the earth the words that I've spoken. CoC 3 Ne. 5:9; see also BoM 3 Ne. 5:9.

It is my prayer that you will accept and follow the Lord's doctrine and obtain mercy.

As I said at the beginning, this message is for Covenant Christians. Think for a moment about why that is: What changes is not the plan of salvation and progress for mankind. Nor does the potential for us becoming like the Father's Only Begotten Son change. What changes, I think, is the sober assessment of just how far we have yet to progress if we are to become like the prototype of the saved man. I believe that sober assessment is to get us to realize how petty, immature, foolish, selfish and unjustifiably proud we have become. We are far, far from holding the attributes Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount. But we are haughty, dismissive and judgmental with one another as if we were able to judge

one another without offending God. We don't reason together. How can you hope to reason with the Lord when we can't do so with each other?

We have ignored the Lord's statement describing us in July of 2017:

But remember that without the fruit of repentance, and a broken heart and a contrite spirit, you cannot keep my covenant; for I, your Lord, am meek and lowly of heart. Be like me. You have all been wounded, your hearts pierced through with sorrows because of how the world has treated you. But you have also scarred one another by your unkind treatment of each other, and you do not notice your misconduct toward others because you think yourself justified in this. You bear the scars on your countenances, from the soles of your feet to the head, and every heart is faint. Your visages have been so marred that your hardness, mistrust, suspicions, resentments, fear, jealousies, and anger toward your fellow man bear outward witness of your inner self; you cannot hide it. When I appear to you, instead of confidence, you feel shame. You fear and withdraw from me because you bear the blood and sins of your treatment of brothers and sisters. T&C 157:49.

That is what we are. That is who we are. But the Lord is inviting us to be something greater. The Christian world does not comprehend how much growth and development will be needed before we are ready for the Lord's return. But Covenant Christians should have some idea. In that same revelation the Lord posed this question to us: "In the world, tares are ripening. And so I ask you, What of the wheat? Let your pride, and your envy, and your fears depart from you." Id., ¶64. We can do better. We must do better.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.