The Example of Abraham

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Abraham’s fulfillment of his stewardship in the home led the Lord to say of him: “For I know him, that he will command his children . . . and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” (Gen. 18:19.)

On September 21, 1823, the Angel Moroni appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in his father’s home at Manchester, New York. In the course of this revelation the angel quoted a prophecy contained in the fourth chapter of Malachi in these words: “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (JS—H 1:38.) This prophecy, made nearly 2,300 years previously, was fulfilled early in the summer of 1829, when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John, “whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and special witnesses of my name.” (D&C 27:12.)

We commemorate the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, called “the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3), once more this month. It is an event of supreme importance to man in this dispensation, for the priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of men. It is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. Without this priesthood power, men are lost. Only through this power does man “hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church,” enabling him to receive “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened” unto him (see D&C 107:18–19), enabling him to enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and to have his wife and children bound to him in an everlasting tie, enabling him to become a patriarch to his posterity forever, and enabling him to receive a fullness of the blessings of the Lord.

My dear brothers and sisters, reflect for a moment on the vast magnitude of the blessings promised to those who are valiant in their priesthood callings: “For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

“They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.” (D&C 84:33–34.)

The elect of God! A moment’s reflection ought to convince us that no sacrifice would be too great if a man and woman and their family could qualify to be the elect of God! These promises of great blessings are conditional, however; I know of none that are not—even the resurrection, for each of us had to qualify in the premortal existence to receive the blessing of an immortal body.

All blessings, then, are conditional upon faithfulness. One is ordained to the priesthood with a conditional promise; one is married and sealed in the temple on condition of his faithfulness. And so far as I know there is nothing—no blessing in the world—that anyone can receive except through faithfulness.

The faithful in the priesthood are those who fulfill the covenant by “magnifying their calling” and living “by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.” (D&C 84:33, 44.) Far more seems to be implied in these requirements than token obedience—far more is needed than mere attendance at a few meetings and token fulfillment of assignments. The perfection of body and spirit are implied, and that includes the kind of service that goes far beyond the normal definition of duty. “Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen.” (D&C 121:34.)

Christ is the supreme example for every faithful holder of the priesthood. As I search the scriptures I read of many who followed this supreme example and qualified themselves for the blessings promised through the priesthood. One of these was Father Abraham, whose life is a model that will lift and elevate any father in this Church who wishes to become a true patriarch to his family.

We learn something of Abraham’s character when we read in the scriptures that he faithfully endeavored to qualify himself for the great blessings that he could see were obtainable through the holy priesthood:

“And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.” (Abr. 1:2.)

Even though his family had “turned from their righteousness” (Abr. 1:5) and followed the ways of idolatry, Abraham recognized the blessings in store for the faithful and sought earnestly to obey the commandments of God. He thereby qualified himself for godhood through obedience by doing “none other things than that which [he] was commanded.” (D&C 132:37.) Abraham’s obedience, and therefore his blessing, was such that the Lord himself was referred to throughout the scriptures as “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.” (See, for example, Ex. 3:6, where the Lord so names himself.)
There are many examples of Abraham’s obedience to the Lord’s will. In Genesis we learn that God commanded Abraham to circumcise every male in his household. Upon receiving that commandment, Abraham did not say, “Yes, I will obey the Lord, but first I must move my sheep to another pasture, and mend my tents. I should be able to obey by the end of the week, or by the first of next week, at the latest.” But instead of so procrastinating his obedience, Abraham went out and complied “in the selfsame day.” (Gen. 17:26.)

A similar, but even more impressive, example is Abraham’s obedience to God’s command that he sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham could have put this abhorrent task aside or even chosen to ignore the commandment entirely, but instead he arose early the next morning and began the journey to the appointed place.

How often do Church members arise early in the morning to do the will of the Lord? How often do we say, “Yes, I will have home evening with my family, but the children are so young now; I will start when they are older”? How often do we say, “Yes, I will obey the commandment to store food and to help others, but just now I have neither the time nor the money to spare; I will obey later”? Oh, foolish people! While we procrastinate, the harvest will be over and we will not be saved. Now is the time to follow Abraham’s example; now is the time to repent; now is the time for prompt obedience to God’s will.

Abraham is a model for us in other important ways. For example, Abraham’s faithfulness in all things qualified him to receive revelation for his family; indeed, he often spoke with the Lord “face to face.” (Abr. 3:11.) The blessing of revelation is one that all should seek for. Righteous men and women find that they have the spirit of revelation to direct their families and to aid them in their other [page 5] responsibilities. But, like Abraham, we must seek to qualify for such revelation by setting our lives in order and by becoming acquainted with the Lord through frequent and regular conversations with him.

Abraham’s desire to do God’s will in all things led him to preside over his family in righteousness. Despite all his other responsibilities, he knew that if he failed to teach and exemplify the gospel to his children he would have failed to fulfill the most important stewardship he had received. Abraham’s instruction and example in his home led the Lord to say of him: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” (Gen. 18:19.) As we are told in the pamphlet Father, Consider Your Ways:

“Fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership. It has always been so: it always will be so. Father, with the assistance and counsel and encouragement of your eternal companion, you preside in the home. It is not a matter of whether you are most worthy or best qualified, but it is a matter of law and appointment. You preside at the meal table, at family prayer. You preside at family home evening; and as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, you see that your children are taught correct principles. It is your place to give direction relating to all of family life. You give father’s blessings. You take an active part in establishing family rules and discipline. As a leader in your home you plan and sacrifice to achieve the blessing of a unified and happy family. To do all of this requires that you live a family-centered life.”

Fathers and mothers, your foremost responsibility is your family. By working together you can have the kind of home the Lord expects you to have. By showing love and consideration for one another and for your children, you can build a reservoir of spiritual strength that will never run dry.

Some families neglect to build that reservoir for their children, depending solely on runoff from other sources. They depend on the Sunday School or the seminary organizations; a dam built in such a manner is like a dam of rock and brush, full of cracks and leaks, which washes away when the torrents flood. The Church auxiliaries are very important, and we should all partake of the blessings they offer. But we should never, never allow them to replace parents, to relieve parents of the responsibility to teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ. Abraham built a strong spiritual reservoir for his son, Isaac, a reservoir that never leaked dry, and we find that Isaac became one of the great patriarchs of the Old Testament.

President Joseph F. Smith gave us some valuable counsel on this subject: “… let the Spirit of God take possession of your hearts. Teach … your children … in spirit and power, sustained and strengthened by personal practice. Let them see that you are earnest, and practice what you preach. Do not let your children out to specialists in these things, but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth. Let our meetings, schools and organizations, instead of being our only or leading teachers, be supplements to our teachings and training in the home.” (Gospel Doctrine, p. 302.) Let us follow that counsel and we will see the Lord smile on our efforts; we will find the peace that comes from doing our duty with purity of heart.

But we cannot limit our righteous actions to our homes. We must also do all we can to bless our fellowmen. Part of our responsibility in this regard is in missionary work. Again, Abraham is an example. The Lord called him, saying, “I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land.” (Abr. 2:6.) Already having borne witness of the gospel to his neighbors, he accepted the call to travel and preach the gospel in a new land, and he departed with his family “and the souls that we had won.” (Abr. 2:15.)

Just as the Lord called his servant Abraham to serve as a missionary 4,000 years ago, so is he calling the Saints today. We must all be missionaries and prepare our sons to be fulltime missionaries. Those who have made even a slight effort to share the gospel can testify of the joy they find
through sharing it with their earthly brothers and sisters. Our
efforts to spread the gospel have been feeble; we must do
more. Like Abraham, we must declare the gospel to the
world, not stopping with a vocal declaration, but living the
gospel so others can see the truth.

We must experience the peace of repentance and
forgiveness and then proclaim that peace to the world.
Abraham, ever a model of righteousness, sought peace
among his brethren. Abraham said to Lot, “Let there be no
strife, I pray thee, between me and thee … for we be
brethren.” (Gen. 13:8.) Once we have found peace within
ourselves, we must share it by being long-suffering, gentle,
and meek and by having the pure love of Christ for all we
meet.

Such peace comes only through integrity. When we make
a covenant or agreement with God, we must keep it at
whatever cost. Let us not be like the student who agrees to
live by certain standards of conduct and who then breaks his
oath and tries to see how long he can get away with his
deceit. Let us not be like the missionary who agrees to serve
the Lord for two years, then wastes his time with laziness and
rationalization. Let us not be like the Church member who
partakes of the sacrament in the morning, then defiles the
Sabbath that afternoon by cleaning the house or by watching
television or by choosing an afternoon of sleep over an
afternoon of service. Instead, let us have integrity like
Abraham did, observing with all soberness the solemn
contracts we have made with God.

“And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the
persons, and take the goods to thyself.

“And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up
mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of
heaven and earth,

“That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet,
and that I will not take any thing that is thine.” (Gen.
14:21–23.)

The king of Sodom knew nothing about Abraham’s
covenant with the Lord; Abraham could have made himself
rich by receiving of the king’s generosity. But he had made
an oath which he would not violate. Oh, that all of God’s
children could be so true!

Abraham was true with God in all respects. oft cited is
the instance when Abraham gave to God “tithes of all.” Do
you think it was any easier for Abraham to be righteous than
it is for you? Do you inwardly suspect that Abraham was
given a little extra help by the Lord so that he could become
a great and righteous man, or do you feel that we can all
become as Abraham if we will learn to put God first in our
lives? I testify to you that we can become as Abraham, who
now, as a result of his valiance, “hath entered into his
exaltation and sitteth upon his throne.” (D&C 132:29.) Is
such exaltation a blessing reserved only for General
Authorities, or stake presidents, or quorum presidents, or
bishops? It is not. It is a blessing reserved for all who will
prepare themselves by forsaking their sins, by truly receiving
the Holy Ghost into their lives, and by following the example
Abraham has set.

If members of the Church could only have such integrity,
such obedience, such revelation, such faith, such service as
Abraham had! If parents would seek the blessings Abraham
sought, they could also receive such revelation, covenants,
promises, and eternal rewards as Abraham received.

“Fathers, what is your report concerning your family?
Will you be able to report that you created an environment in
your home to build faith in a living God, to encourage
learning, to teach order, obedience, and sacrifice? That you
often shared your testimony of the reality of your Father in
heaven, of the truthfulness of the restored gospel with your
wife and children? Will you be able to report that you
followed the living prophets? That your home was where
your tender children could feel protected and safe, and where
they felt the love and acceptance and warmth of you and their
mother?” (Excerpt taken from Father, Consider Your Ways.)

I plead with stake presidents and Melchizedek Priesthood
quorum presidents to inspire and train the fathers and men of
the quorums to realize the importance of the calling of a
father. I plead with priesthood holders throughout the Church
to return to their kingdoms—their homes—and with kindness
and justice inspire their families to obey God. I plead with
mothers to follow their husbands in righteousness, to
motivate their husbands to spiritual greatness.

Act now, before it is too late. Now is the time to chart the
course of action you will follow tomorrow and next week and
next year. Now is the time to commit yourself to be as
Abraham, to follow the Lord, to refuse to procrastinate, to
repent of those sins you have committed, to begin to keep
those commandments you have been failing to live.
Determine now to attend priesthood and sacrament meetings
every Sabbath, pay your tithing faithfully, sustain in very
deed the General Authorities of the Church, support the
programs of the Church, visit the temple often (or whenever
possible when one is not near), give service in the
organizations, and keep your actions constructive, your
attitudes wholesome.

Remember that Abraham sought for his appointment to
the priesthood. He did not wait for God to come to him; he
sought diligently through prayer and obedient living to learn
the will of God. Here then, is the challenge the Lord gives
every returned missionary, every single man and woman,
every father and mother in the Church: “Go ye, therefore, and
do the works of Abraham.” (D&C 132:32.)

As we follow Abraham’s example, we will grow from
grace to grace, we will find greater happiness and peace and
rest, we will find favor with God and with man. As we follow
his example, we will confirm upon ourselves and our families
joy and fulfillment in this life and for all eternity.