

ZION, The City of Our God

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“...Surely Zion is the city of our God; and surely Zion can not fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there, and the hand of the Lord is there, and he hath sworn by the power of his might to be her salvation, and her high tower; therefore verily thus saith the Lord, Let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion, THE PURE IN HEART; therefore let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn; for, behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly, as the whirlwind, and who shall escape it; the Lord’s scourge shall pass over by night and by day; and the report thereof shall vex all people; yet, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come; for the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations, and all their wicked works; nevertheless Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her, but if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her according to all her works, with sore affliction, with pestilence, with plague, with sword, with vengeance, with devouring fire; nevertheless, let it be read **this once** in their ears, that I, the Lord, have accepted of their offering; and if she sin no more, none of these things shall come upon her, and I will bless her with blessings, and multiply a multiplicity of blessings upon her, and upon her generations, for ever and ever, saith the Lord your God. Amen.” D&C 94:5b-g

Recently, as I was preparing for a prayer service, I felt the impress of the Lord’s Spirit directing me to confess two specific things regarding the redemption of Zion, the city of our God. First, it is important for each one of us to be praying that the Lord will prepare a home in Zion for ourselves and for our families. This should be done through the prayer of faith (cf. Philippians 4:4-7). Second, while I do not fully comprehend this confession, I was instructed to testify that the Lord has taken the “whole matter” of the redemption of Zion into His own hands. The assurance that Zion will be redeemed was firmly impressed upon me; the Lord is again bringing Zion upon the earth for His name’s sake and to fulfill the covenants He

has established.

Each of us must prepare ourselves for this glorious work of our Lord by purifying ourselves, our thoughts and the intents of our hearts, and by submitting to the will of our heavenly Father in all things (cf. Mosiah 1:115-120). One of the most important ways to prepare for Zion is to permit the Lord our God to mature the hope of Zion in our hearts. It is upon this hope that we obtain an inheritance in Zion (cf. Ether 5:32). Those who do not have the hope of Zion, i.e. the hope to be purified and to become of one heart and mind with all those who love our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, cannot dwell there (cf. D&C 38:6a).

Accordingly, the message of this letter focuses on Zion, and what it means to be a part of the glorious work of the Lord in redeeming Zion.

Hope For A Better World

The vision of Zion is one of the most important beliefs, or should we say, promises of the Restoration movement. It has drawn many to the movement and sustained them in their faith throughout the difficult trials of its relatively short history. What is Zion and why does it appeal to so many? Consider the words of the prophet Ether, who wrote:

“Wherefore, whoso **believeth in God, might with surety hope for a better world**, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.” Ether 5:4

The hope for a better world, even a place at the right hand of God (i.e. to be favored of God for His righteousness’ sake), is the anchor of the soul (cf. Hebrews 6:19 with D&C 98:5g-j). Without this hope, which is a gift from God through His Spirit (Ether 5:9,10 & Moroni 8:29), there can only be despair, “which despair cometh because of iniquity” (Ephesians 2:12, Moroni 10:16). The lack of hope exists simply because of unbelief:

“...if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.” Moroni 10:18

Again, the testimony of the prophet is that “whoso believeth in God, might with surety hope for a better world...always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God”. And so, in contrast to the despair of the unbelieving, there will come forth an abundance of good works to the glory and honor of our heavenly Father out of the lives in whom this hope

dwells. Jesus spoke very plainly of the relationship of Zion, as “a city set on a hill,” and of the good works spoken of by Ether:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of the world; a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Therefore, let your light so shine before this world, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16-18

Jesus affirmed that those who believe in Him will do the same good works, i.e. works of the Father, that He had done on earth (John 14:10-12). In other words, good works will abound in Zion, the city of our God, to His honor and glory. God alone is good; therefore, good works are the fruit of His Spirit which are manifest in the lives of those who believe (cf. Galatians 5:22-25 & with Matthew 19:17).

“For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” Ephesians 5:9

The hope for a better world, even the city of light, is foundational for faith in the vision of Zion. It is essentially the same as the hope of the gospel by which we are saved (Romans 8:20-25). Such hope is God’s hope for us, i.e. that we would dwell together in equity and peace as His children. Our heavenly Father is “the Father of lights”; therefore His children are to be the children of light (cf. James 1:7 with John 12:36).

Hope is a precious gift of the Spirit of “the God of hope,” who instills His hope in all those who believe in Him and exercise faith upon His word (cf. Romans 15:13 with Moroni 8:29). It stimulates vision and courage to move toward that vision; otherwise the people of God will eventually dwindle and perish in unbelief. And so the vision of Zion is the vision of our heavenly Fa-

ther for His children.

Hope is vital, for without hope we cannot obtain an inheritance in Zion (cf. Hebrews 6:11,12):

“...and I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man; yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; **wherefore man must hope, or he can not receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared.**” Ether 5:32

As noted above, those who abide in this hope bear the fruit of righteousness to the honor and glory of God (cf. John 15:1-8). The fruit they bear by the Spirit of truth, i.e. the Spirit of Christ, is “the evidence of things not seen” part of faith (Hebrews 11:1 with Galatians 5:22-25). The fruit reveals the very countenance of God dwelling in them, thus fulfilling the end of their creation in which they were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:29,30).

One might ask, “Why should anyone hope for a better world?” “What is wrong with the one into which we all have been born?” they might ask. The best answer, I believe, was given by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote:

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth; they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider’s web; he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they

cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings; they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us; we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves; we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey...”
Isaiah 59:1-15

Whether or not all these things are visible around about us, yet they are what God sees when He looks upon our hearts. How we regard each other in our hearts is what is important to our God (cf. Genesis 7:40). For example, Jesus said that if we are angry with someone, we are in danger of judgment because we are murderers in God’s eyes (Matthew 5:23,24):

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” I John 3:15

But do people really care what God thinks or sees? Only those who truly believe in Him, as Ether confessed, do care and heed His counsel. And so they hope for a new world, one in which God's views are held in high regard. In essence, this is the hope of Zion, to care about what is important to God, and to have the desire to please God above the opinions and cares of our fellow creatures. If we do not place God's views above all others, how can we exercise belief in Him?

“How can ye believe, who seek honor one of another, and seek not the honor which cometh from God only?” John 5:45

Your Iniquities Have Separated Between You and Your God

In the opening quotation from Section 94 of the Doctrine and Covenants, we read:

“Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her, but if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her according to all her works, with sore affliction, with pestilence, with plague, with sword, with vengeance, with devouring fire.”

It is a matter of history that the people to whom this promise, to “be read this once,” was given, did not observe the precepts and commandments of the Lord and so they suffered according to the terms of the revelation:

“For I have suffered them thus far, that they might fill up the measure of their iniquities, that their cup might be full, and that those who **call themselves after my name** might be chastened for a little season, with a sore and grievous chastisement, because they did not hearken altogether unto the precepts and commandments which I gave unto them.”
Section 100:1b

Their iniquities were the source of their trouble. They called themselves the people of the Lord (cf. D&C 63:1a), but they had not given strict heed to His precepts and commandments. Had they heeded the admonition delivered by the apostle Paul, “Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (II Timothy 2:19), they would not have lost their peace or place of inheritance.

What is iniquity? Paul enumerated to Timothy a number of iniquities that would be prevalent in the last days (II Timothy 3:1-7). However, without going into specific detail, iniquity is simply the transgressing of God's laws, i.e. going contrary to His commandments. What are God's commandments? They have been summarized for us in a number of ways throughout the scriptures. For example, the prophet, Micah said:

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:8 (cf. Matthew 23:20, D&C 10:6, Alma 19:78, Zephaniah 2:3 & Zechariah 7:9,10;8:16,17)

Therefore, unjust attitudes, unforgiving hearts and pride are all iniquity. Further consider the words of the apostle John who summed up the commandment of the Lord in this way:

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”
I John 3:23-24

Conversely then, unbelief and ill-will toward fellow laborers in Zion are iniquities (cf. Matthew 24:55 & II Nephi 108,109). These both were a stumbling block to the first laborers in this last kingdom (cf. D&C 83:8a & 98:3) and

must be avoided by those who now seek to establish Zion in accordance with the promised heavenly gift of the Holy Ghost (I Nephi 3:187 with IV Nephi 1:1-4 & Romans 14:17).

According to the apostle Paul, the commandments are “briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:9,10). This emphasis on the great commandment of brotherly love is not misplaced. Jesus, Himself, stated plainly the boundary which lies between righteousness and transgression when He said that all the law and the prophets “hang” upon the two great commands of 1) loving God with our whole beings and 2) loving each other as ourselves (Matthew 22:35-39). Outside the bounds of the two great commandments of our Lord lies the barren wasteland of iniquity (cf. I John 4:20,21).

As quoted above, Isaiah prophesied, “your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). When people regard iniquity, i.e. consider going contrary to God’s commandments, in their hearts, they separate themselves from His Spirit (Jude 19). Consequently, He no longer hears their prayers.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Psalms 66:18

The Holy Ghost has asserted through scripture that iniquity has not just been a problem with some, but that all are under condemnation because of it (cf. Romans 3:23).

Oh That Zion Were Established Out Of Heaven

“The Lord answered, and said, They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy, thou canst behold none of them that are doing good, no, not one. All they have for their

teachers are workers of iniquity, and there is no knowledge in them. They are they who eat up my people. They eat bread and call not upon the Lord. They are in great fear, for God dwells in the generation of the righteous. He is the counsel of the poor, because they are ashamed of the wicked, and flee unto the Lord, for their refuge. They are ashamed of the counsel of the poor because the Lord is his refuge. ***Oh that Zion were established out of heaven, the salvation of Israel. O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion?*** When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad.” Psalms 14:3-7

At the heart of the hope of the gospel is the exclamation and question, “Oh that Zion were established out of heaven, the salvation of Israel. O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion?” Will God remain unmoved forever by such a plea as this from among those who are convicted of their sin and seek deliverance from their plight in this present world? Will He refuse to hear the cry of those who have become broken because of the bondage of iniquity? The testimony of the apostles and prophets is a resounding “No!” Our God is a God of great compassion and mercy.

The Lord our God resists the proud who resist Him. But those who humble themselves before Him and repent, i.e. turn away from their iniquity and toward Him, are greatly beloved of Him and receive an abundance of grace (James 4:6, I Peter 5:5 & I Nephi 5:122 with Daniel 9:1-23).

“The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us accord-

ing to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Psalms 103:6-14

So great is the compassion of the Lord of Hosts for His creation, that He came down and dwelt in the flesh among the children of men to redeem them from their fallen nature, i.e. from being carnal, sensual and devilish (cf. Mosiah 8:13-37).

“...the Lord saw it [the iniquity of mankind], and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever.” Isaiah 59:15-21

Jesus Christ came to break the bands of death which held mankind fast because of transgres-

sion (Mosiah 8:13-37). Putting on the armor of the strength of the Lord, He rose triumphant over our bondage and now holds forth the promise of a new world to those who will follow Him.

The Armor of Light

To receive the promise of Jesus Christ’s redemption we must be washed clean of our transgressions and be born anew (cf. Titus 3:4,5). Stated another way, we must be spiritually born of God to become His children and thus enter His kingdom (cf. John 1:12,3:3-8). By taking upon us the armor of God we, too, will be victorious as was He. We put on the armor of God by putting on Christ, as the apostle Paul put it:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us **put on the armor of light**. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But **put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make not provision for the flesh, to gratify the lusts thereof.” Romans 13:12-14

Jesus Christ is the Armor of Light we are to put upon ourselves. He is each component of God’s armor provided for our warfare as spoken of by the apostle Paul in his letter to the saints at Ephesus (see Ephesians 6:10-18 with Galatians 3:27):

1. He is the truth (John 14:6) that we are to gird about ourselves;
2. He is the breastplate of righteousness, even **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**, which we are to put on (Jeremiah 23:6 with Philippians 3:9);
3. In Him is the gospel of peace (John 1:4) with which we are to shod our feet (cf. Mosiah 8:51-53);
4. His faith brings newness of life (Galatians

- 2:20) by which He shields us from the adversary (Psalm 18:1-3);
5. He is God's salvation for all who believe in Him (Luke 25-32) – we are to bring every thought into captivity to His obedience (II Corinthians 10:3-6 with Philippians 2:1-8) by taking upon us “the mind of Christ” as a helmet (I Corinthians 2:16);
 6. He is the Word of God (John 1:14) and the word He speaks is sharper than a two-edged sword (Revelations 1:13-16 & 19:15 with Hebrews 4:12) – He is the Word of Faith, by which if we confess we will be saved (Romans 10:8-11); and
 7. He leads us in prayer by His Spirit of truth, who prompts us to pray and teaches us how to pray “as we ought” (Romans 8:26 with II Nephi 14:11,12).

Simply stated, Jesus Christ is our hope (I Timothy 1:1) and He is our life (Colossians 3:2-4). There is no other hope for our world, generations without end. Jesus is the hope of Zion (Joel 3:16):

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. **The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.**” Isaiah 9:6,7