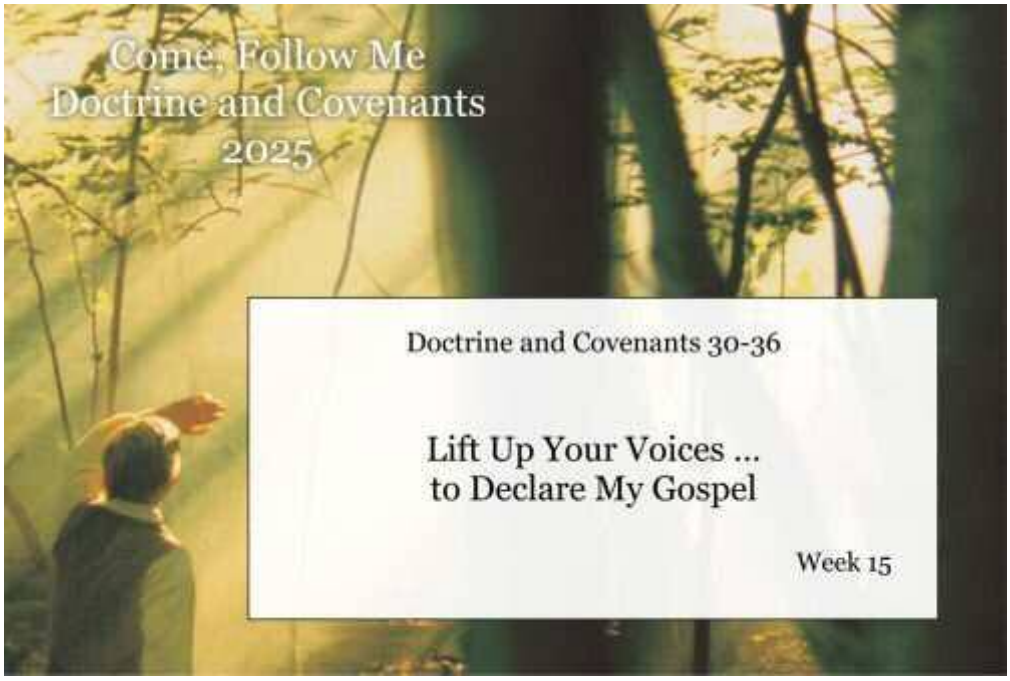

Here is a quote from the manual. "If you know enough to accept the restored gospel by baptism, you know enough to share it with others."

This sentence from the introduction to this week's lessons really struck home for me. The sacrifices the Lord required of those who had only days or weeks before joined the church are remarkable. Such sacrifice and service has never been a hallmark of any other dispensation of time. Why this one? This week my focus is on what makes this dispensation different from all other dispensations of time. As you read Doctrine and Covenants 30-36 you will see these themes of the final dispensation of time throughout God's conversations with these servants He called to preach the gospel.

6 themes of the final dispensation

Guarantee of success

Over and over again the Lord has had to re-establish His kingdom on the earth. The dispensation of Enoch was during a time of great evil. Enoch could see that only a handful of people were willing to accept the gospel he had to preach. The wickedness was so great that the Lord found it expedient to take Enoch's city of Zion to His own bosom rather than leave it among the burgeoning evil of Enoch's day. These righteous people didn't deserve to be left in that condition.

The dispensation of Moses was given as a band-aide meant to last only until the Savior came with a higher law. The law of Moses was designed to prepare the people for the coming of the Savior in the flesh. And even though the Savior came and taught the covenant people himself, the Apostles all knew that an apostasy was coming they couldn't stop from happening. They had no technology available to help them maintain a regulation in the church over vast distances. That and all the people who sought power, and the destruction of the church from inside the organization, eventually spelled the end of the pure doctrine of Christ.

What the building up of the kingdom did do successfully was to plant the gospel seed among the nations so it could grow. True, it had become a corrupted seed with the rejection of the true doctrines and the absence of the priesthood keys, but the essence of the gospel remained. This dispensation prepared the world to receive the gospel in the final dispensation of time.

Time is how we refer to our mortal life. When the garden of Eden was inhabited by Adam and Eve they were not in time, but were eternal, since there was no death. Their Fall introduced Adam and Eve's family into time where it became needed to measure out our days and years. When Jesus comes again the earth will pass from time back into eternity. Death in the Millennium will come only as the instant transition from mortality to immortality, and those who live in the eternal world will walk among those who are experiencing mortality. Slowly the spirit world will be emptied of its population as they are resurrected and given back the bodies they lost at death. By the time the Lord's work is complete and all is turned back over to our Father in Heaven, there will be no more mortality. All of us will have returned to the eternal world as resurrected beings. This is why we refer to ourselves as being in the last dispensation of time.

Every dispensation before us came with the understanding that the gospel would eventually have to be restored yet again, because the people would only remain faithful to its teachings for a certain amount of time. What sets this dispensation apart from all that came before us is that God has promised us that the covenants given to Joseph Smith at the opening of this dispensation will last for as long as the earth will stand in its current form. The gospel is secure from another general apostasy.

We may wonder how the gospel can be secure while the world plunges itself into greater and greater wickedness, and in that process takes some of our members with it. There are promises of great destruction that we will participate in. We won't all make it out alive, so to speak. But the promise is that the Lord will protect and spare His people, even if He needs to do it by fire, meaning He will burn the wicked alive if there is no other way to save us. Along with those promises of protection from evil we also have promises of priesthood power that will come from our own obedience and faithful living. Think back on your reading of Doctrine and Covenants 30-36 as the Lord sent missionaries out to preach to the world. He didn't send them out to die, but to find success and to secure for themselves a place in heaven on His right hand. His promise to these missionaries was that their faithful obedience would secure their eternal salvation.

Every person is called to be a witness of Christ

In earlier dispensations the gospel may have been sent to all the world, but the priesthood was of a patriarchal order and was not as widespread as it is in our dispensation. In later dispensations only a very few were allowed to hold the priesthood and perform ordinances. The covenant people were required to just live by the laws given to them and cooperate with those who did hold the priesthood. Their lives were still blessed by the priesthood covenants they had, because of their personal faithful living, but most people were not allowed to directly enjoy the use of the priesthood in their daily lives like we have today.

Today's dispensation is unique in that every person is able to receive priesthood covenants given through the higher priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood. In the dispensation of Moses the people lived by the covenants of the Aaronic priesthood only. (If you know of any Melchizedek priesthood covenants they had, please let me know.) Currently, all worthy male members of the church can hold the Melchizedek priesthood. After we are baptized (an Aaronic ordinance) all our ordinances and covenants are of the Melchizedek priesthood. That literally makes us a generation of high priests.

In every generation from Adam to the present those who held the higher priesthood were commissioned to preach the gospel to those the Lord sent them to teach the gospel to. Because we all have and live by the covenants of the Melchizedek priesthood,

it is also our responsibility to use that priesthood to bless the lives of those around us, members or not. That means we are each called to be a voice of warning and one who extends the invitation to come and find rest in the service of our God. Our baptismal covenant expressly states that we are willing to represent our Savior in all places and at all times. And in other covenants we explicitly promise to give our all to further God's work on earth.

Personal revelation is expected

Never before has any dispensation offered God's people such grand blessings through such wonderful covenants. And never has any other dispensation required so much of each individual member of God's earthly kingdom. Truly, where much is given much is required. The blessings of salvation are in every covenant we make. Listen to our prophets and see how often they promise us the peace that comes from God alone, and protection from the temptations of Satan as we participate in the temples and keep our covenants. As the world becomes more wicked God's people are being endowed with greater and greater protections from the evil around us. This helps us open our mouths and live our lives with confidence that God's love and presence will continue to be seen in our daily living. This is why we need to stay close to the Spirit and make revelation from Him part of our lives. Revelation in all its forms must become a natural part of our life. It is a large part of our personal spiritual survival. That is part of the purpose of the covenants we have made.

Sacrifice for salvation

Something that is difficult for me to comprehend, and by extension I am guessing it is difficult for others to also comprehend, is that salvation isn't like a light switch. Salvation isn't something that either is or isn't. We don't qualify for it and no matter what you did to qualify for it you get the same reward as everyone else. Jesus has made it clear through the scriptures that there is a huge variety of blessings awaiting those who are rewarded with exaltation. Go back and look at Doctrine and Covenants 7:5, 8.

> 5 I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire; but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet among men than what he has before done.
>
> 8 Verily I say unto you, ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired.

Peter was questioning John's request to not die, but to continue to do saving work for God's children. These verses are part of the answer Jesus gave Peter. Notice that Jesus didn't tell Peter that his desires weren't as good as John's. Peter wasn't condemned for his righteous desire to be with Jesus at the end of his own ministry. Jesus just matter of factly tells Peter that John's desire is to do a greater work than what John was currently doing and would be blessed accordingly. This tells me that we can strive for greater blessings and not have to settle with having to worry about whether or not we meet the minimum requirements. We can be as blessed as we want to be in the next life.

Receiving blessings comes at a price. The price is always worth the sacrifice we make, but the sacrifices are unavoidable. What we are willing to give up of our personal pleasures and devote to the Lord determines in part the kind of sacrifices we are willing to make for our God and His work. This is a reflection of our belief and our faith. The greater the faith, the greater the willingness to sacrifice. And the greater the sacrifices, the greater the eternal blessings. They go hand in hand.

Not all sacrifices are the kind like the early missionaries who trudged through multiple feet of snow across the prairie to get to the Indian tribes they were sent to preach the gospel to. They could have easily died out there on the prairie and no one would have ever found their remains. But they were on a mission from the Lord and they trusted that He would spare them so they could deliver God's message to the Lamanites.

Some of our sacrifices may not be as grand as the early missionaries and Saints made, but we can't discount the everyday sacrifices the members of the church make as they live with disabilities, poverty, personal limitations, yet continue to do all in their power to attend the temple and provide the work of salvation for those already beyond the veil. They set examples for their neighbors of charity and kindness, serve in their callings, and support others to encourage righteous living in all that they do. We can't put a value on this wide range of goodness, but God can, and does.

Sacrifice is a choice most of the time. Are we choosing to give up our personal comforts to represent the Lord wherever we are and in whatever we do? Do we represent the values of Christ's opportunity for salvation in the way we treat others and live our life? Truly not every sacrifice need end in the loss of our life. Most of our sacrifices will result in greater joy, peace, and satisfaction in our current life, and greater blessings in the life hereafter.

We're in partnership with each other and with Christ

Sometimes I feel bad for the prophets of old. They taught the gospel of Christ to a nation of unbelieving and backsliding people. Those same people were supposed to be the covenant people of the Lord. I am guessing they often felt very much alone in their work. A good example of this is found in the Book of Mormon as we read about Mormon and his son Moroni and their efforts to salvage the life of their people the Nephites. They knew there was only one result that could come from the choices the people were making, and that was their own destruction. Yet they continued to try to help them choose the right, but to no avail.

In this dispensation all of us, not just the prophets, have been called to preach repentance to those around us. In fact the preaching of repentance and faith on Christ is all we are supposed to teach. See verses such as Doctrine and Covenants 6:9.

> 9 Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed.

This commandment is given over and over again to those the Lord sends out to spread the news of the restoration of the gospel. We are not alone in our efforts to spread the gospel. We may be the only one in the conversation talking about the restored gospel, but God has promised us that the Holy Ghost is the one responsible for conveying our testimony into the heart of those who hear our words. We are not responsible for someone's conversion, He is. We are just the messengers, the bearers of good tidings. It is the Spirit who changes their hearts and souls and prepares them to hear what we have to say. When we are willing to open our mouths, and especially when we seek through prayer for the opportunity to do so, God provides us with the opportunities to share the feelings of our hearts with others.

We can support each other in this effort to be of service to the Spirit as we seek to spread the word of Christ's gospel of love. We never need be fully alone, for if no one else is there, the Spirit is, and as such we have a member of the Godhead backing us up in our efforts to do good and to save another's soul. That ought to give us more confidence.

The gospel is all about covenants and relationships

I've already mentioned both of these topics in other entries above. I need to bring these two items together, because the plan of salvation is a family matter, not just an individual matter. Yes, no one else can be responsible for saving our soul. We each need to do what is necessary to prove our commitment and worthiness to God's plan for our salvation. But God doesn't expect us to try to be saved on our own.

The plan of salvation was created as a group project. The whole concept for Zion, being of one heart and one mind, is in support of the plan for our salvation. We are supposed to support each other, love each other, and become one as a people. Covenants are difficult to keep when we are the only one apparently keeping them. It is like trying to be on a strict diet when everyone else around you is feasting with abandon.

When we go to church and worship with likeminded people, and fill our assignments with the support and cooperation of others trying to do the same thing in their assignments, we feel part of something that is bigger than ourselves. We don't feel so alone and abandoned. The Celestial kingdom is a place where everyone looks out for the welfare of each other. No one is made to suffer in silence and alone. There is always others around them to love them, comfort them, and minister to their needs. That is what a Zion society is all about.

This can be a difficult concept in today's world. The world teaches us that we are supposed to be in it for ourselves. Life is all about what each of us can take from it or make it give us. The gospel of Christ is about how much each of us can help another person have even if we have to part with something of our own to help them have what they need. We each give for the welfare of others, and we find joy in that service. Learning to think and act differently from what the world teaches can be a difficult thing to do.

The difference between the world's way of living and the Lord's way of living is that in the world we each end up alone and possibly bereft of human comfort. Any human comfort we have is all we leave life with. With the Lord's way of living we may or may not end our lives with lots of human comfort and support, but we have developed a companionship with the Holy Spirit who gives us God's peace and comfort, His direction and confidence in all that we do. We will leave this life knowing we have done the good God needed us to do and that our Father in Heaven and our Savior is pleased with our efforts. Isn't this the whole object of our belief and faith?

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