

# Repentance and a Change of Heart

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Good morning, brothers and sisters. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. I pray that the Lord's Spirit might be with me as I speak and that it might be with you as you listen, that together we might be edified.

## Two Parts to Baptism

John, chapter 3 verses 1 through 5 reads:

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

As other scripture elsewhere tells us, the kingdom of God is the celestial kingdom, the highest kingdom in heaven, the place where God dwells and the place that those who inherit all that he has go. All those who fail to qualify for this kingdom, inherit a lower. This, then is the most succinct expression of the requirements to gain entrance into that highest of kingdoms: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

These then being the requirements, it would profit us therefore to suss out the meanings of these two births, the birth of water and the birth of the Spirit.

## Repent, be Baptized, and Obey the Commandments – the First Baptism

Members of the church often equate the birth of water with the one-time ordinance of baptism by immersion. But this is only part of the requirement as it is intertwined with other principles. It begins with repentance.

Moroni 8:25:

25 And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

True repentance leads to baptism and the keeping of all of God's commandments. It is the continued obedience of the baptized person which obtains for them remission of sins, not just the ordinance itself. Baptism therefore should be performed only for those who are repentant and are willing to keep all of God's commandments. Let us review the steps of repentance. In the church's Gospel Principles manual, lesson 19, we find these familiar steps outlined:

1. Recognize that you have sinned
2. Feel sorrow for your sin
3. Confess your sin
4. Forsake your sin
5. Make restitution
6. Forgive others
7. Keep the commandments

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Although the light of Christ, which is in all of us, can tell us right from wrong, in order to recognize that something we have done is a sin and that we need to repent, we must first have a fundamental belief in and understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must therefore study and pray to God that we might know what is true. Otherwise we will remain separated from God although we sin ignorantly. To paraphrase the prophet Joseph Smith, "We cannot be saved without knowledge."

Having recognized that we have sinned, we must feel remorse or sorrow. In order to feel sorrow, we must know that the sin we committed will prevent us from returning to God and inheriting His kingdom and we must want our condition to be otherwise. We must want to make things right between us and God. Again, this requires knowledge of God's plan for us, so we must study it and gain a witness and belief in this too.

President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Ezra Taft Benson

"Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that our behavior caused the Savior, He who knew no sin, even the greatest of all, to endure agony and suffering. Our sins caused Him to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having 'a broken heart and a contrite spirit.' (See 3 Ne. 9:20; Moro. 6:2; D&C 20:37, 59:8; Ps. 34:18; Ps. 51:17; Isa. 57:15.) Such a spirit is the absolute prerequisite for true repentance." ("A Mighty Change of Heart," Ensign, Oct. 1989, 4)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell adds:

Neal A. Maxwell

"After recognition, real remorse floods the soul. This is a 'godly sorrow,' not merely the 'sorrow of the world' nor the 'sorrowing of the damned,' when we can no longer 'take happiness in sin.' (2 Cor. 7:10; Morm. 2:13.) False remorse instead is like 'fondling our failings.' In ritual regret, we mourn our mistakes but without mending them.

"There can be no real repentance without personal suffering and the passage of sufficient time for the needed cleansing and turning. This is much more than merely waiting until feelings of remorse subside. Misery, like adversity, can have its special uses. No wonder chastening is often needed until the turning is really under way! (See D&C 1:27; Hel. 12:3.)

"Real remorse quickly brings forth positive indicators, 'fruits meet for repentance.' (Matt. 3:8; see also Acts 26:20; Alma 5:54.) 'In process of time,' these fruits bud, blossom, and ripen." ("Repentance," Ensign, Nov. 1991, 31)

The next step is confession. We confess all sins to God through prayer and we also must confess those sins he has specified, like sexual sin, and a few other serious sins, to our priesthood leaders – namely our Bishop or Branch President. If you are in doubt as to whether a sin you committed needs to be confessed to your Bishop, it is better to do so than not.

Next, we must forsake our sin. This means that we never, ever repeat it. We find in the scriptures that when we repeat a sin, the old sins come back as well - as if we never repented of them.

Elder Orson Pratt, one of the first Twelve Apostles of our dispensation had this to say about confessing and forsaking our sins:

Orson Pratt

"It would be of no use for the sinner to confess his sins to God unless he were determined to forsake them; it would be of no benefit to him to feel sorry that he had done wrong unless he intended to do wrong no more; it would be folly for him to confess before God that he injured his fellow man unless he were determined to do all in his power to make restitution.

Repentance, then, is not only confession of sins, with a sorrowful, contrite heart, but a fixed, settled purpose to refrain from every evil way." (Orson Pratt's Works [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1945], 51 – 52.)

Having forsaken our sin we must make restitution – that is, we must restore to its former condition, as much as we can, the object or person we have injured.

Following all of these steps, we must continue to do two more things; We must forgive others and we must keep the commandments of God.

In D&C 64:9 we are told:

9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

In other words, in order to secure forgiveness for ourselves, we must forgive others.

Lastly, keeping the commandments is a lifelong effort. Continually repenting of our sins, great and small, each week, as we renew our baptismal covenants by partaking of the sacrament, has the effect of cleansing us from sin and retaining for us a remission of sins. Partaking of the sacrament worthily, repentingly, with the intent to do better the next week, has the same effect as being baptized every week.

The steps we have considered to this point: repentance, baptism, and then continuing our efforts of righteousness are just half of the equation of being born again – those of the baptism of water.

The prophet Joseph Smith said:

Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

### *A Change of Heart – the Second Baptism*

We can spend our whole lives running through the above steps of repentance and of partaking the sacrament weekly, and of trying our best to sin less and still ultimately fail to enter the kingdom of God. More is required; the second half of baptism. This second part will aid us and actually make the first part easier to do and will give the baptism of water lasting efficacy. The burden of righteous living is not ours alone to bear.

In Matthew 11, the Savior tells us:

28 ¶Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Further, Moroni 8:26 says:

26 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.

And again, we read in 3 Nephi 9:20:

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost,...

Taken together, these scriptures tell us two things – first, that we must make a willing sacrifice of our hearts – or in other words, our will, our desires. We must conform our will and desires to match that of God's. The second thing they tell us is that in making the sacrifice, we will be rewarded with the visitation of the Holy Ghost and that it will effect the baptism of the Spirit, or of fire.

When the Holy Ghost's influence is upon us, it has a sanctifying effect. Frequent or continual companionship with this member of the Godhead produces the changes we are after if we are to be born again. Some scripture refers to this as 'a mighty change of heart', after which we have 'no more disposition to do evil'. This process usually takes time.

As the Spirit is with us, it burns out the dross and corruption within us. Most burning we are familiar with can only remove material, leaving a charred reekage barely resembling the original item. Instead of leaving us as husks of our former selves, baptism by the Spirit replaces what it burns out; it fills us with light and with truth and with charity.

Mosiah 3:19 tells us what it is we sacrifice when we turn our wills over to God and why:

19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child,

submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

In other words, we must become as unlike the natural man as we can. We must become as much like our Heavenly Father as we can, or as Mosiah said, a saint. This process is made available because of the atonement of Jesus Christ which not only makes repentance possible, but is the very thing that makes personal change into a saint via the sanctification of the Holy Ghost possible.

*What must we do to secure this mighty change of heart?*

So what steps can we take to have this mighty change of heart occur within us? What can we do to become a saint? What is required of us to gain more frequent and more meaningful companionship of the Holy Ghost?

There are two main things we need to focus on in order to gain meaningful companionship of the Spirit; 1) an overwhelming desire to have that companionship and which overrides all other desires and 2) we must be clean enough for Him to be with us.

In the Savior's most well-known sermon on the Mount of the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us that "blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost."

We must develop this insatiable desire for righteousness.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

"As starving men crave a crust of bread, as choking men thirst for water, so do the righteous yearn for the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a Revelator: he is a Sanctifier; he reveals truth, and he cleanses human souls. He is the Spirit of Truth, and his baptism is one of fire; he burns dross and evil out of repentant souls as though by fire. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the greatest of all the gifts of God, as pertaining to this life; and those who enjoy that gift here and now, will inherit eternal life hereafter, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God in eternity." (The Mortal Messiah, Book 2, p. 122)

Elder Robert E. Wells adds:

"How many people strive for higher spiritual levels as though they truly hungered and thirsted after them? To hunger and thirst for something involves strife, struggles, work, sacrifice, and a host of other efforts...Perhaps you have heard the story of the philosopher who held a young disciple's head under water until the latter gasped for air. The philosopher then told the disciple, 'When you want knowledge as much as you wanted air while you were under water, you are ready to study with me.'

"The highest blessings of the gospel are not for the faint-hearted, coolly rational, theoretical philosopher, nor for the person who is merely intellectually curious. Those great blessings are reserved for stouthearted souls who hunger and thirst for greater personal righteousness and who are willing to pay the price to achieve it.

"...The blessings promised are immeasurable. Remember the woman of Samaria at the well? The Savior told her (and this applies to all of us), 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life...He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' (Jn 4:14; 6:35)" (The Mount and the Master, pp. 42-3)

Once such a great desire to be filled with the Holy Ghost is ours, we must also clean the vessel in which it is to abide. This goes beyond repentance as outlined earlier.

Consider this:

John 2

13 ¶And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

Our bodies are meant to be temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in. As natural men and women, we have a host of money changers and animals milling about inside of us, in the form of sin and weakness which ought nought to be there. Repentance and fidelity to God cannot be a simple asking of the money changers in our hearts to please leave, or of shooing one or two lambs away. We can't be half-hearted in our attempts, but must deliberately and forcibly excise all unrighteousness from within us. We must cast out everything that offends God. We cannot make excuses for leaving even one table upright.

Also consider this:

In Bible times, there were a number of laws surrounding the treatment of lepers. Because they were highly contagious, they were not allowed within city or town limits. They had to remain covered at all times save for their eyes. They had to call ahead as they walked crying "unclean! Unclean!" Nobody was allowed to greet them. No one could approach within 6 feet and if the wind was blowing, one could not be within 100 feet downwind. Any building the leper entered was considered defiled and had to be purified. Lastly, while not a part of the law, the common practice was to throw stones at and run and hide from lepers.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating treating anyone like this. However, we should certainly shun all sin and sinful influences and keep them far from us as if they were lepers. We shouldn't let them come close.

And yet, we do, don't we?

Most of what comes into our homes on our televisions or over the radio or other media is not worthy of Christ's saints. Our eyes and ears are bombarded by the vulgar and obscene on every side, corrupting our spirits. How can virtue garnish our thoughts unceasingly, when the music, movies, tv shows, internet videos, and other media we consume are not virtuous? Can we possibly expect the Lord to change our hearts when we love our filth so much?

It is not enough to spend some time studying our scriptures daily if we are spending more time with those things produced by Babylon for Babylon. God's saints should shun those things which are not of God.

As has been said before, we desire to have a home in Zion, but wish also to keep a Summer home in Babylon. This cannot be. The yard stick by which to measure the activities and media we partake in is this: does it help me draw nearer to God or not? It's that simple.

While the process of having our heart change is something effected by the Holy Ghost, it only occurs at our invitation and as a response to our righteous efforts which conform to God's prescribed pattern.

Our capacity for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and also its efficacy in changing us into beings worthy of exaltation is limited by our choices, by our diligence, by our sacrifices. The more we understand and then do our duty, the more we understand what is and is not worthy of our time and energy, the more we hunger and thirst after righteousness and the will of our Father in Heaven, then the more our capacity is enlarged, our understanding is more complete, our worship more sincere, our works more charitable, and the Holy Ghost can dwell with us more often and with greater effect.

Alma 5:14

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Jesus showed us the pattern we must follow. He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Forget not that we also came down to do the same.

A parting thought: In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus said, "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

May we each commit to a life of repentance and in obtaining this change of heart spoken of, for truly, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.