

draft of March 19, 1999

The Saviour Teaches about the Eternal Family.

by

LeGrand L. Baker

The gospel principle of the eternal nature of the family seems difficult to find in the Old and New Testaments, yet it is apparent that it was understood by the Saints of both periods. This may be seen in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are considered by many Christians to be among the most fundamental and beautiful of all the Saviour's teachings. Yet it is apparent from the fact that they were spoken by the Saviour at the temple in ancient America, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, that they have a significance which goes beyond the simplicity with which they are often read. The depth of meaning of the Beatitudes may be understood by tracing their ideas back to the Old Testament. It is significant that when we follow the ideas of at least two of the Beatitudes back to the verses in Isaiah and the Psalms to which the Lord was referring, we find their focus is on the eternal nature of the family. Those two Beatitudes are: "Blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," and "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Isaiah 61 is a prophecy of the Lord's visit to the world of the spirits of the dead during the period between his own death and his resurrection. President Joseph F. Smith saw in vision the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. In recording his own vision (which is D&C 138) President Smith used much of Isaiah's language, and paraphrased the entire first verse when he wrote that Isaiah had "declared by prophecy that the Redeemer was anointed to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound." (D&C 138:42)

The second verse of that same chapter of Isaiah is paraphrased by the Saviour in the Beatitudes. The Isaiah version, which is still speaking of the spirits of the dead, reads, "... to comfort all that mourn." The Saviour said, "Blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (3 Nephi 12:4; Matthew 5:4) From President Smith we learn that they the spirits of the dead mourn because they "looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage." (D&C 138:50) And from Isaiah we learn what it means to be "comforted." Isaiah's explanation of the meaning of "comfort" is amazing to many biblical scholars, because it recites the sequence of ordinances of the ancient Near Eastern royal coronation rites.* The third verse of Isaiah 61 reads,

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion" is to make the dead a part of Zion, which is the Kingdom of God.

"To give unto them beauty for ashes" represents both a ceremonial washing and the wearing of a ceremonial hat. In ancient Israel, a red heifer was sacrificed and its ashes were saved to be put upon a person who was unclean. When the ashes were removed by a specified ceremonial

washing the person became clean again. (Numbers 19:17-19) Similarly, before an Israelite king was anointed king, he received a ceremonial washing to prepare him for that anointing. Thus this phrase in Isaiah which replaces ashes with "beauty," is seen by some scholars to represent a ceremonial ordinance of washing.* The Hebrew word translated "beauty" means the beauty of a headdress, and may have the connotation of the flat hat worn by the ancient High Priest, or of a crown.

"The oil of joy" is an anointing. Kings and priests were each anointed to be such in ancient Israel.

"The garment of praise" is part of the sacred clothing which was worn during the coronation ceremony.

In "that they might be called..." the word "called" is significant. Kings were given new names which were covenant or royal names. In this scripture, the new name is "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he might be glorified." This new name represents two important ideas. The first is the Tree of Life, and second is the principle of eternal family. Trees produce fruit, fruit produce seeds, seeds produce trees, and thus it continues forever. The symbolic eternal repetition of this process is what Isaiah calls "the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Thus the new name given to those who are "comforted" suggests the blessings of eternal family, but this new name is not the only part of Isaiah's prophecy which conveys that promise.

The symbolism in next six verses of Isaiah chapter 61 may suggest the relationship between the dead and those who will do genealogical and temple work.

Then the last two verses of the chapter bring us back to the coronation scene with which the chapter began. Here we have reference to a royal marriage. From the relationship between Isaiah 61 and D&C 138 we know that this wedding is also part of the temple work for the dead. In Isaiah, the bride and groom in this marriage sing a beautiful hymn whose words begin,

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

The last part of their wedding hymn is a testimony of the resurrection. They sing,

For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:10-11)

The Book of Mormon lays specific emphasis on the fact that in the Beatitude the Saviour is quoting Isaiah 61, for as it is given Third Nephi, it is a more exact quote of Isaiah than the way it is recorded in Matthew. (Isaiah 61:3 and Nephi 12: 4 each have the word "all," but Matthew 5:4 does not.) Thus it is apparent that the Saviour's intent, when he said, "Blessed are all they that

mourn, for they shall be comforted," is that those few words should be an encapsulation of the ordinances and blessing associated with salvation for the dead and the promise to them of the blessings of eternal family relationships.

The other Beatitude, which also calls attention to the eternal family is "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Here the Saviour is quoting directly from the Psalms.

In the other Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," the Saviour quotes directly from the Psalms. "Meek" is a code word. In the scriptures, when those scriptures speak in a temple setting, the word "meek" always means the same thing — and it is not "humble," and it is not "timid." Some people choose to interpret this Beatitude as if it said, "Only non-self-assertive people will inherit the earth," with the implied, sometimes stated quip, "and they will have to inherit it, because that's the only way they can get it." Those folks miss the point. The scriptures suggest that the word "meek" is the very opposite of a lack of assertiveness, and that the meek do not inherit the earth by default, but it is theirs as a legal heritage — it belongs to them by right.

About the earth which the meek will inherit, the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants says,

This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made.... And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.... And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. And the redemption of the soul is through him that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it. Therefore, it must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory; For after it hath filled the measure of its creation, it shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father; That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made and created, and for this intent are they sanctified. And again, verily I say unto you, the earth abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law— Wherefore, it shall be sanctified; yea, notwithstanding it shall die, it shall be quickened again, and shall abide the power by which it is quickened, and the righteous shall inherit it. For notwithstanding they die, they also shall rise again, a spiritual body. They who are [present tense] of a celestial spirit shall receive [future tense] the same body which was a natural body; even ye shall receive your bodies, and your glory shall be [future tense] that glory by which your bodies are [present tense] quickened." (D&C 88: 7, 10, 15-20, 25-28 italics added)

So here we have an interesting equivalency: The "poor" ("poor in spirit" in the Beatitudes) and the "meek" are those who will inherit the earth which was created to be inhabited by celestial persons. Therefore, the words "poor" and "meek" are words which describe the people in this world who will ultimately become celestial persons.

That use of "meek" is consistent with the way the word is used elsewhere in the scriptures. An example is the Isaiah chapter we have just quoted. Isaiah wrote that the Lord was anointed "to preach good tidings to the meek." In the Doctrine and Covenants version, Joseph F. Smith tells

us that among those to whom the Lord preached were "the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God." (D&C 138: 55) So, in their instance at least, the quality of "noble and greatness" and the quality of "meekness" are represented as being the same quality. This is shown in the Bible where we learn, "the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3) Those who are "meek" are meek before the Lord. For example, in my view, Abinadi, standing defiantly before king Noah while delivering the Lord's message to him and his fellows, is a splendid example of true meekness. Abinadi's "meekness" is descriptive of his attitude toward God, but not of his attitude toward men. The Beatitude "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," seems to be a composite of two Psalms, which, together, speak with amazing power. The Psalm from which the Saviour is actually quoting in the Beatitude is 37:11. Its context reads:

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him:
fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his
[his own, rather than the Lord's] way,
because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath:
fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.
For evildoers shall be cut off:
but those that wait upon the LORD,
they shall inherit the earth.
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea,
thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.
But the meek shall inherit the earth;
and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:7-11)

To "wait" means to be in attendance that one might be ready serve (as a waiter in a restaurant). The implications of that are clarified in Psalm 25. I'll show you when we get there. For the present let's just observe that it is apparent from that scripture that to "wait on the Lord" means to be alert to keep the covenants which one made with him at the Council in Heaven.

Here in our present Psalm (25:11) the important relationship of the Psalms with the Beatitudes is shown in more than in the fact that the Lord quoted the Psalm almost verbatim. Verse 11 reads, "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

In the Beatitudes, the Saviour not only quotes the first part of that verse, but he quotes it in its own sequential context. Notice the sequence in the Beatitudes:

- v. 5 And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
 - v. 8 And blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God
 - v. 9 And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
- [The key to the meaning of "peacemakers," is Moroni 7]

In that sequence, verse 8 brings one into the presence of God, and verse 9 sits one on the royal throne of God as his legitimate heir. So we find ourselves again discussing the ancient coronation rites, just as we did in Isaiah 61. Here, one's receiving the new name "child of God"

(for they shall be called "the children of God") occurs just as it does in the final anointing rites in the kingship sequence of the ancient New Year's festival. It is a question of legitimacy. Before one can sit upon the throne, one must be adopted as a legitimate child. In the ancient coronation ceremony, the final anointing of the king was apparently a dual ordinance, both of adoption and coronation. It had to be, because anyone who was anointed king, and who sat upon the throne, but who was not a legitimate child, would be a usurper. So the king-apparent had first to be acknowledged as a child of God, before he could set upon the throne of God.

In that 9th verse of the Beatitudes, the characteristic of the one who is "called" a "child of God" is: "peacemaker." Now notice again the sequence in our Psalm: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Same sequence — same idea.

The other Psalm which the Saviour's Beatitude refers to is 25:9-14. Even though the direct quote is not there, in many ways this psalm is even more explicit than the other. Let me quote it all to you, then look at it more closely.

The meek will he guide in judgment:
and the meek will he teach his way.
All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth
unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.
For thy name's sake, O LORD,
pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.
What man is he that feareth the LORD?
him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.
His soul shall dwell at ease;
and his seed shall inherit the earth.
The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;
and he will shew them his covenant. (Psalm 25:9-14)

Lets begin by looking closely at verse 14, then go back and examine the other verses in light of that conclusion. It reads, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."

The word "secret" is the same Hebrew word as in Amos 3:7, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." The word is SOD ("sode" in Strong). It means the secrets or the decisions of a council. In these and similar contexts, it refers to the decisions of the Council in Heaven. [Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 2-6.] What Amos says is the Lord will not do anything until after he recalls to the prophet the covenants and decisions made in Council. What our Psalm says is that the Lord will teach the decisions of the Council to those who fear (respect) him, and "will shew them his covenant." That is, God, by the power of the Spirit, will teach each individual the covenant he made in the pre-mortal existence, relative to that person's expectations of the mission he would do while on the earth. The psalm introduces that idea by associating the word "meek" with those who remember and keep that covenant. The remembering comes as a gift from God; the keeping is a matter of one's

faith and integrity.

Now lets re-read the portion of Psalm 25 which is quoted above. I'll put the words of the Psalm in caps and my comments in lower case letters.

"THE MEEK [those who keep their eternal covenants] WILL HE [the Lord] GUIDE IN JUDGEMENT," [To judge righteously, that is to be a righteous judge, is the first and most important function of a king. It is represented in verse 7 of the Beatitudes, immediately before one sees God, as "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." If the meek are to be the kings and priests of a celestial world, they must learn how to judge righteously. To not learn to judge righteously, is to disqualify oneself. Those who keep their covenants can learn that requisite lesson, because the Lord will be their "guide in judgment."]

"AND THE MEEK WILL HE TEACH IN HIS WAY." [In a temple context, "way" is a code word which usually means the sequence of the ordinances and covenants. (The Beatitudes, especially as they are reported in the Book of Mormon, may thus be seen as a quick map of the "way.")]

"ALL THE PATHS [same code meaning as "way"] OF THE LORD ARE MERCY [Another reference to the primary responsibility of kingship] AND TRUTH [Truth is knowledge of things as they were, are, and will be (D&C 93). So, the "path" of kingship includes learning judgement which is based on an understanding of reality.]

UNTO SUCH AS KEEP HIS COVENANTS [The covenants, in this context, would be the ones which one made at the Council and which one re-makes in this world.] AND HIS TESTIMONIES. [Scholars aren't sure what "testimonies" mean in this and similar contexts. Some believe it was something which was worn on the body, and that the wearing of it was a testimony of the covenants which one had made.]

"FOR THY NAME'S SAKE, O LORD" [God has many names, just as covenant people have. New Names are always associated with covenants (For example, one takes upon himself the name of Christ when one is baptized and takes the sacrament.) Therefore, in a temple context, one can almost always replace the word "name" with the word "covenant" in a scripture without changing the meaning of the scripture. In this instance that is true. The name in question is "LORD," i.e. "Jehovah," which the scriptures and our own Bible's dictionary suggest is the Saviour's king-name or covenant-name. In which case "Jehovah" would be the new name given him when he was anointed King of Israel at the Council. (Our Bible Dictionary reads, "Jehovah. The covenant or proper name of the God of Israel." p. 710). The phrase, "for thy name's sake" would mean, "for the sake of the mutual covenant which we made at the Council, and which is represented by your king-name, Jehovah."]

"PARDON MINE INIQUITY; FOR IT IS GREAT." [This is an obvious reference to the powers of the atonement. At the New Year's festival, before one could be anointed king, the king-designate had to be ceremonially cleansed (washed and pardoned) before he could continue in the sequence of ordinances and covenants. In our case, the Saviour's atonement must be applied

for the same reason.]

The next three verses of our Psalm are a reiteration of the blessings of those who receive the ordinances and covenants already referred to. These verses begin with the question, "WHAT MAN IS HE THAT FEARETH [respects, as being in "awe" of, gives honor to] THE LORD?" Then it answers its own question:

"HIM [the man] SHALL HE [God] TEACH IN THE WAY [I presume "in the way" means in the way. In other words, as one moves through the sequence called the "way," God will teach him, not only the sequence, but also the meaning and significance of the steps.]

THAT [The word "that" is a powerful conjunction. It means, so that — in order that — to the end that.] HE [the man] SHALL CHOOSE." [As I read it, these words mean God will teach the man "in" the "way" so the man may know which options he should choose in order for him to have both the means and the opportunity to keep the covenants he made in Council.]

"HIS SOUL SHALL DWELL AT EASE; AND HIS SEED SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH." [This is an enlargement of the promise we read in Psalm 37. Here the blessing that one's soul will "dwell at ease" is tied to a further declaration that "his children shall inherit the earth." Thus, the Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek," carries with it all the promises of exaltation in the eternal bonds of family.

The final verse of our Psalm, the one with which we began, reads: "THE SECRET [decisions of the Council]OF THE LORD IS WITH THEM [the meek]THAT FEAR [respect, honor] HIM; AND HE [the Lord] WILL SHOW THEM [the meek]HIS COVENANT." [which, I presume, means: The Lord will show him the covenant assignments made at the Council — and also remind him of the covenant provisions made at the Council which would guarantee that one would be able to fulfil those assignments]

As a review, let me get out of the way so you can read the scriptures as they are written, without all the stuff I put in between. They simply say,

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him:

fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way,
because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath:

fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.

For evildoers shall be cut off:

but those that wait upon the LORD,
they shall inherit the earth.

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:

yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

But the meek shall inherit the earth;

and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:7-11)

The meek will he guide in judgment:
and the meek will he teach his way.
All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth
unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.
For thy name's sake, O LORD,
pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.
What man is he that feareth the LORD?
him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.
His soul shall dwell at ease;
and his seed shall inherit the earth.
The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;
and he will shew them his covenant. (Psalm 25:9-14)

Now if one adds to that, Albright and Mann's statement that the classic Greek meaning of the word translated "blessed" is "in the state of the gods,.." (Anchor Bible, Matthew, p. 45, fn 3.), what we hear the Saviour saying is this:

"In the state of the gods are those who keep their eternal covenants, for it is they and their children who shall inherit the celestial earth."

=====

* Margaret Dee Bratcher, "Salvation Achieved, Isaiah 61:1-7, 65: 17-66:2," in *Review and Expositor*, Spring, 1991, Vol. 88, No. 2, p. 177-187.

Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40 - 66, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1995), p. 223-226.

George A. Knight, *The New Israel, A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 56--66* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985) p. 50-57.

Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40 - 66* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1969), p. 364-367.