

Doctrines & Covenants Lesson 2 Notes: The Word of God

*And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy
God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, ...
to know what was in thine heart,
And he ... fed thee with manna,
which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know;
that he might make thee know
that man doth not live by bread only,
but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the
Lord doth man live.*

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

*For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth
from the mouth of God.*

D&C 84:44

LIVING BY THE WORD OF GOD

Deuteronomy 8:3 contains a truly remarkable statement. God says that the reason he fed the Children of Israel manna in the wilderness for forty years was to “make them know” that man should not live by bread, or food, alone, but “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” That is repeated in command form in modern scripture. “We are to...” That is a polite way of saying you are commanded to, since it is God speaking. This is not grandfatherly advice. You *are to* live by every word. (D&C 84:44) The life of a godly person, a disciple of Christ, *must* be based upon the word of God. There is no other basis for a life that is approved of God.

What exactly did the manna in the wilderness teach the Israelites about living by every word of God? Well, for those who make the connection, there are many lessons to be learned about God's word from the story of manna. First, the authority of something is critical. We will not live in right relationship to God's word if we don't have it settled in our minds that God's word holds authority in our lives. God is the only one who has the authority to give commandments and tell us how to live and what He requires of us. No earthly man, no matter how brilliant, how learned, or how high his position, can have this kind of authority in our lives. It is the words that “proceed out of the mouth of God,” that have this authority to instruct and command and inform us. These are words that we can use as a foundation for our lives. When the Israelites were fed manna, they knew that it came from God.

Secondly, the manna came down from heaven. It came as a miracle. Do we constantly remember what a miracle it is that we have the word of God in our lives? Think of the story of the young farm boy, Joseph Smith, translating golden plates received from an angel. God truly sent his word down from heaven to us. And all His words have been miraculously preserved and watched over that we might have and read them so readily today. These miracles have been God's part of the work.

But we have work to do also. Manna was something you had to go out and gather. There was work required to get it. The Israelites didn't wake up every morning with a pot of manna simmering on the stove like oatmeal. They had to expend some effort. So when we hear the saints complain that the scriptures are hard to understand or that it doesn't come “naturally” to them, we remember this labor. That it is “hard” is simply no excuse. You are expected to labor at it.

The body needs food every day. Daily is the operative word. "Give us this day our daily bread." And in the same way that we eat and give thanks daily, we must have a daily pattern of receiving spiritual nourishment from God. If we ignore the feeding of our bodies, we begin to weaken. We are being taught from this parable of the manna that we are to live in daily relationship to God's word in our lives. Not weekly or monthly or twice a year. Daily. We remember that manna never lasted overnight. It was a daily task to gather enough to live on for that day. It was therefore built into each day's routine. They did not forget to do it, or get too busy to do it. Why? Because when you get hungry you don't forget to eat. If you did forget to eat each day or were prevented from eating as prisoners in concentration camps were, you would starve and eventually die.

We see this process in an anorexic person. In this form of sickness a person has a morbid fear of eating that eventually kills them. What happens to an anorexic's body, just as surely happens to the spirit of a person who refuses to "feast on the words of Christ," (2 Nephi 32:3). The problem is that we can see this happening to a person who refuses to eat, but the equivalent spiritual sickness is hidden from the casual observer. A person may be suffering this form of spiritual starvation and still continue to function in ways that make them appear to be on the same path as their brothers and sisters in the gospel. But starvation of spirit is just as real and devastating as physical deprivation and will eventually manifest itself to all. We are surprised when someone we know "suddenly" leaves a temple marriage for a worldly temptation. Such tragedies are never really sudden to God, but only suddenly revealed to others.

God's testing process is always, as this experience of the Israelites and manna was, to "see what is in our hearts." The Israelites did not meet their test very well. They grew bored with the same old Manna every day. They remembered the delicious things the world of Egypt had to offer and they found themselves longing for them. "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic!" (Numbers 11:5) The Lord lost patience with their ungrateful whining and vowed that none of that generation that longed for Egypt would enter the Promised Land. We must be careful not to fall victim to the same longing for the stimulating and exciting "things of the world." We must "lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better." (D&C 25:10)

As my sainted Grandma was always reminding me, "You need to feed your spirit." She was exactly right. We must not put off spending time with the Lord in the scriptures. If we do not develop the taste for the Lord's Manna, we will go after other things and we will put off the study of the scriptures until they mean very little to us. Rationalizations will abound. We are so busy. Doing good things of course. We are going to get around to it. We believe in doing it. We will get back to it when life gets calmer.

GOD REBUKES THE SAINTS

We have all said these things to ourselves. The trouble is, these rationalizations show what is in our hearts. One has to feel some sympathy for the early members of the church who were trying to carve out a living on the frontier, often in the midst of severe persecution. The workload of each day was daunting. We can hardly imagine life in which homemaking meant boiling water for bathing and washing clothes, gathering food without grocery stores or fast food restaurants, and building homes from the ground up, starting with chopping down the trees. But in the midst of all these extenuating circumstances that incline us to want to "cut some slack" for these saints, the Lord issued a severe rebuke to the church in Doctrine and Covenants 84, a revelation given in 1832.

The whole church was "under condemnation" for "treating lightly the things you have received...even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given." (v55-57) They were commanded to repent and remember their covenants by bearing testimony to the world of these scriptures, since that is the reason that God sent them to our generation, so that we could testify to the world that God has spoken from heaven once again and that all men and women need to repent. The way to do this is to "treasure up in your minds continually the words of life," (v 85) so that you would be an effective witness of God's word in this world.

In 1986 the prophet Ezra Taft Benson issued a ringing challenge to the Latter-day Saints in a conference address. He said, "If the early Saints were rebuked for treating the Book of Mormon lightly, are we under any less condemnation if we do the same?" (November Ensign 1986) Of course, the challenge is

to every generation, to shake ourselves awake from the hypnotic sleep that the things of the world seem to induce so easily, and realize anew what our true treasures are.

We must especially teach the children and young people of the church, in our capacity as their teachers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, friends, etc., that the scriptures are of inestimable value in our lives and in their lives. We must give them a taste for these precious words because it will surely take clinging to the word of God to make it through the mists of darkness of the last days. I remember a friend of my grandmother's who self-published a little book of spiritual thoughts and experiences for her family. She entitled it "Delicious to Me." The Lord and his word had truly become delicious to this godly woman. How apt a title, as we seek to lead the next generation to feast on God's word rather than the junk food of media entertainment, the fast food of the internet, and the poison of false philosophies.

THE POWER OF THE WORD

Section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants gives us a stunning realization of the power inherent in God's word. We read here that when the words of God are relayed from one person to another by "preaching" them in a missionary or pulpit setting, or teaching them in a classroom or home setting, and the Holy Ghost is present, then a marvelous series of spiritual effects takes place like ripples from a stone cast into a pond. When the Spirit bears witness to the word of God, whether it is spoken by a missionary, apostle, mother or home teacher, then D&C 50 says it is "preached by the Spirit of truth and received by the Spirit of truth." In other words, there is someone else in the room! The mission of the Holy Ghost is to testify, and when we speak the words of God, or bear testimony, then the Holy Ghost has material He can work with. He can add a living spiritual dimension to the conversation that moves people and works on their hearts.

Through the mediation of the Holy Ghost, the "preacher" and the "hearer" understand one another—a great blessing in and of itself—and rejoice together and are edified, which means built up and strengthened by the spirit. Every parent and speaker wants these things to happen to those they teach. The keys are to teach from the word of God and make sure the Holy Ghost is there. No matter how many wonderful stories you tell or how beautiful the table decoration or how clever the handout you make or the visual aid you present, nothing is more able to touch hearts than the spirit of God testifying to the truth of the word of God.

Paul says in the New Testament, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) The word of God is indispensable. It is upon this base that faith is built. Our lives and our words must be a constant reflection of God's word to a world badly in need of a witness of the truth.

To be an effective convincer of men, you must first be convinced yourself. When the word of God becomes our treasure, "A good woman out of the good treasure of [her] heart bringeth forth that which is good; (and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil): for of the abundance of the heart her mouth speaketh." (Luke 6:45) And why does scripture keep referring to itself as treasure? Because God's word is of inestimable value. Because His word is life-giving and light-bringing. If you had some secret herbal elixir that could give life to people whose batteries were running down and give light to those who were confused and in darkness, you would be an instant millionaire. But because the word of God acts on us spiritually rather than physically, it tends to be ignored. If we could see 5 years of physical wrinkles fall away from reading the scriptures everyday, people would become fanatical scripture readers. But these things work on the inner person, in an unseen realm.

Nevertheless these are spiritual *realities*. I remember a sister in my ward showing me a letter from her missionary son. In the letter he told of a German sister in his little branch who faithfully read her scriptures and served the Lord. The Lord and his word were her treasure. One day, all day long, people in her town and in various stores she entered, said to her in one way or another, "There is a light in your face. You are literally glowing. Why?" She was embarrassed by their attention. But the light of God is real. When Moses came down off the mountain his face shone. Just because we can't usually see the reality of spiritual things, doesn't mean that they are not every bit as real as physical things.

If we do not learn to treasure the things of God in this life, we will learn to our horror that we have sought the wrong things. For those of us living in the last days we would do well to remember what happens to earthly treasures in the end: James says that rich men will weep and howl for the miseries that shall befall them in the last days, when they realize the worthlessness of their treasures of gold and silver,

for “Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” (James 5:3)

GROWING CLOSE TO CHRIST THROUGH HIS WORD

We read in D&C 84:52 “whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me.” The reverse would also be true, namely, whoso receiveth the voice of the Lord *is* acquainted with that voice and *is* of Christ. It is especially true of the Doctrine and Covenants as a book of scripture that reading it enables us to hear the Lord speaking to us. In every section that identifies the speaker or giver of the revelation, that person is always the Lord Jesus Christ.¹

Neal Maxwell said, “If asked which book of scripture provides the most frequent chance to “listen” to the Lord talking, most individuals would at first think of the New Testament. The New Testament *is* a marvelous collection of the deeds and ...doctrines of the Messiah. But in the Doctrine and Covenants we receive the voice as well as the word of the Lord. We can almost “hear” him talking. Words like these sink into one’s marrow as well as into one’s mind, for the majesty and power of the Lord are so evident².”

Reading these sections gives one the undeniable feeling and knowledge that Jesus Christ is intimately aware of each person who has made covenants with him and become thereby his son or daughter. Of particular interest to us as women is Section 25, the revelation given to Emma Smith and according to its last verse, to all. (“And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my voice unto all.”) He addresses Emma as his daughter, saying, “...for verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom.” The Lord expresses to Emma things that are of particular relevance to her life, revealing how thoroughly God knows her needs and situation. He also expresses principles that have meaning for every sister, encouraging us to “learn much” and “seek for the things of a better [world].” We are to “murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen,” a bit of advice that could have pretty wide application to women in the church. We are told, through Emma, to “go with [our husband] at the time of his going.” Wives should “console” their husbands in a spirit of meekness. All women should “lift up [their] hearts and rejoice and cleave unto the covenants which [they] have made.” Certainly the Lord respects us as women. Emma Smith was told to “expound scriptures, and to exhort the church,” which are not assignments which would be given if women were considered by the Lord to be second-class citizens in his kingdom.

We also get a glimpse of how close the Savior can be to us when we read the words spoken to Oliver Cowdery in Doctrine & Covenants Section 6: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I am the light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. 22 Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon *the night that you cried unto me in your heart*, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. 23 *Did I not speak peace to your mind* concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? 24 And now, behold, you have received a witness; for if I have told you things which no man knoweth have you not received a witness?...36 Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.” (D&C 6:21-24, 36) Christ is as close as our own thoughts and fully aware of what is in our hearts.

As we read the words of Christ in the Doctrine & Covenants, we remember again that another meaning of the “Word of God” is that it is one of the *names* of the Lord. Jesus is the Logos (Greek), the Living Word that is the perfect representation to the world of the Father who sent him. “Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for *he was the Word*, even the messenger of salvation--The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men.” (D&C 93:8-9)

Thus when we study daily the word of God in the scriptures, we are in effect, clinging to the rod of iron, or holding on to Christ himself. We are “coming unto Him” who is the redeemer of Israel, our Savior, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We are feasting on the Bread of Life that can give us everlasting life. Manna indeed.

¹ The only exception are those sections-- 102, 109, 113, 123, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 134, 135—which are prayers, items of instruction, declarations, letters or minutes of meetings. These are not given as words spoken by the mouth of the Lord, though we consider them inspired.

² Neal Maxwell quote from: Ensign, Dec 1974, p 4.