



## Practice Virtue and Holiness

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Many years ago, while teaching early morning seminary, we were discussing the war in heaven. In the 12th chapter of the Book of Revelation John teaches us that,

7 ...there was a war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in the heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

I asked my students to allow the Holy Ghost to part the veil enough for them to see themselves there. This was not an exercise of the imagination, the hope was that it would be an exercise of “revelation.” I invited them to consider where they stood and how they stood. I invited them to

feel once again what they had felt before. After I had them share some of their own personal revelation, encompassed with feelings, I said, “now, let’s read what happens next and ask yourself, ‘why now?’”

10 And I (we) heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

After reading this verse, I asked my students, “why now?” What had kept the heavens from decreeing the coming “salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ.?” “Why now, what had happened?”

Suddenly, a fourteen-year-old freshman raised his hand, and with a voice of perfect confidence and assurance said, “I know why!” (I will be honest with you, I thought to myself, “really, tell us!”) So I said, “share with us!” His answer was revelatory,

“Brother Riggins, the reason why it could not have been declared previously is that with Satan and his angels, their pollution and accusations and their opposition to agency and God’s plan, we were not a Zion society. We were not of one heart!”

That day, from that young man, I felt and learned that I had participated in the establishment of Zion once before. From those verses I learned that the establishment of Zion would never take place in a peaceful setting; the adversary has declared war on us. The Spirit reinforced in my mind and heart that by the “blood of lamb,” through his enabling and sanctifying power, I did and can succeed. I understood how important my testimony had been and would be in overcoming the adversary; testimony that had been developed through study, faith, and experience. And, I knew, that I had to decide if I was willing to destroy the natural man; to die for the cause. The invitation is to all of us, “seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 11:6; 12:6; 14:6).

You have beat that  
opposition before.

## Do we have Zion in our view constantly?

There is evidence that God, in his perfect parenting style, and as a perfect teacher and coach, provides situations, circumstances, and time for his children to “practice” establishing Zion.

In the 38th section of the Doctrine and Covenants we read...

23 But, verily I say unto you, teach one another according to the office wherewith I have appointed you;

24 And let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practice virtue and holiness before me.

25 And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself. (D&C 38:23-25)

Just eight sections later the Lord reinforces the same idea,

31 And again, I say unto you, all things must be done in the name of Christ, whatsoever you do in the Spirit;

32 And ye must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessings ye are blessed with.

33 And ye must practice virtue and holiness before me continually. Even so. Amen. (D&C 46:31-33)

It is fascinating to consider the facts that teaching one another, esteeming a brother as oneself,

practicing virtue and holiness, doing all things in the name of Christ, and giving thanks unto God in the Spirit are all attributes of a Zion society. It is also interesting to note that there is a direct correlation between “again” and the concept of “practice.”

In multiple sections of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord speaks of “exercising” faith in him, of “exercising” our gifts, of “exercising” prayers of faith. If we look closely, we see that the virtues that He wants us to “practice” or “exercise” are inherent in Zion people. It is evident, that the Lord allows us to “practice” and to “exercise” becoming Zion-type people and Zion-type institutions; whether it be

the home, the ward, or the university. It is also evident that God provides us “practice” and “exercise” times.

Consider these four well-known facts about Zion. I call these “the bullet point facts” because in many cases, these bullet points are all we know about Zion. For now, they will suffice!

“And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of...” (Moses 7:18)

- One heart
- One mind
- Dwelt in righteousness
- There was no poor among them

With that list in place, consider some things that we do under the Lord’s direction, and ask yourself, “How do these activities provide ‘practice’ and ‘exercise’ time for me to know how Zion functions, how Zion feels, and how Zion becomes?”

- Singing hymns
- Prayers (Private, public, family, companionship, etc.)
- The administration of the sacrament
- Making covenants
- Temple attendance
- Marriage
- The Family
- Family, Ward, Stake, and organizational councils
- Missions
- Church universities

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

“The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; . . . but . . . we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory; . . .

. . . We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”

The Prophet Brigham Young declared: “The work of building up Zion is in every sense a practical work; it is not a mere theory.

A theoretical religion amounts to very little real good or advantage to any person. To possess an inheritance in

Zion or in Jerusalem only in theory – only in imagination – would be the same as having no inheritance at all. It is necessary to get a deed of it, to make an inheritance practical, substantial and profitable. I have Zion in my view constantly. We are not going to wait for angels, or for Enoch and his company to come and build up Zion, but we are going to build it.”

From the 1828 Noah Webster Dictionary we get these phenomenal definitions of the word “practical.”

- Pertaining to practice or action
- Capable of practice or active use
- That may be used in practice; that may be applied to use
- That reduces his knowledge or theories to actual use
- Derived from practice or experience

How bad do we want Zion? Is the building of Zion our greatest object? Do we have Zion in our view constantly? Do we wake up in the morning with the idea that our every effort will be the building of Zion? Do we recognize and identify the practical work involved in building Zion?

As we review historical evidence of those who have made an effort to seek for, “bring forth and establish the cause of Zion,” we find that the details and evidence of the “practical work involved in building Zion” are not abundant. The reality is that we only have the details of one group of people who became “Zion.” We find the account in Moses chapters 7 and 8. However, the account can be a little problematic for those who study it because we have what the Lord and Enoch taught and we have the end-product, but the battles and the “practical work” in between are not abundantly detailed.

I have a young, 14-year-old friend who recently told me that he was going to be the next LeBron James. I suggested that to really appreciate LeBron James, the super star, it’s important to know what the coaches taught him, and then see the practical work: the practices, exercises, work, blood, sweat and tears that were paid through the process of going from novice to superstar. So, it is with the cause of establishing Zion. But since we don’t have all of the details, we have to extrapolate.

We have the accounts of three groups of people in the Book of Mormon who were close to becoming a Zion people but did not reach the status. However, what they did and how they did it is worthy of study and emulation. The description given of each is worth the reach,

“And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.” (2 Nephi 5:27)

“But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni...” (Alma 50:23)

“...Surely there could not be a happier people who had been created by the hand of God.” (4 Nephi 1:16)

I learned that the establishment of Zion would never take place in a peaceful setting; the adversary has declared war on us.

As we compare the experiences of each, we discover similar “practices” and “exercises” necessary to establish a Zion people and a “City of Holiness, even Zion” (Moses 7:19).

- The centrality of Jesus Christ and His atonement
- The place of the Lord’s prophets
- The importance of the Holy Ghost and revelation
- The necessity of ordained and consecrated priests and teachers
- The effect of teaching and learning
- The need for repentance
- The administration of ordinances in making covenants
- The attention given to temples
- The impact of consecration
- The exigency of obedience to judgements, statues, and commandments
- The focus on the scriptures
- The hate for sin and the preparation to fight against it

- The working of gift of justification to have the Lord with them
- The people’s willingness and submission to “walk with him.”

We are also blessed to have the account of Peter and the ancient saints who strived and made an effort to establish a Zion society, (Acts 2, 3), and of course we have modern day Church history, wherein we have details of the efforts made by the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to establish Zion. Of great interest, we have the words of the Lord exposing their follies and his explanation as to why they failed. One of the explanations given by the Lord that relates to practice, exercise, and us as a university is worth considering.

June of 1834 was a trying time in Church History, especially in the “exercise” of establishing Zion. Doctrine and Covenants section 105, given on Fishing River, Missouri, begins with what might be referred to as a “major spanking” to all of the Saints who were “practicing” becoming a Zion people. After the Lord chastises them, He discloses the consequences. Within those consequences can be seen reasoning for our existence as a Church sponsored university and what we are to “practice” and “exercise.”

9 Therefore, in consequence of the transgressions of my people, it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion.

10 That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands.

11 And this cannot be brought to pass until mine elders are endowed with power from on high.

12 For behold, I have prepared a great endowment and blessing to be poured out upon them, inasmuch as they are faithful and continue in humility before me.

13 Therefore it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season, for the redemption of Zion. (D&C 105:9-13)

It is clear and understood that the “redemption of Zion” of which the Lord is speaking is “the center place” in Independence, Missouri. Nevertheless, we know that “the little season” continues. We know that it wasn’t the Saints of the 1800’s or 1900’s who would “redeem Zion.” However, we also know that the Lord has, since the restoration of the Gospel, allowed the Saint to “practice” and “exercise” bringing forth and establishing the cause of Zion.

The temples have been built and are being built! The “prepared endowment and blessing” is being “poured out” like never before in the history of the world. But, what about the self-preparation, the teaching, the experience, the faithfulness, the continued humility, the learning of duty?

We know that temples were established for the “salvation of Zion...for a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry...that they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine...” (D&C 97:11-14). But if the temple was all that was necessary, why did the prophets of God establish the School of the Prophets, the School of the Elders, the School of Zion, the University of the City of Nauvoo, the University of Deseret, the Brigham Young Academy, etc.? It seems clear, simple and obvious from verses 10, and 12, that Zion needs a faithful, humble, educated, and experienced people (See also D&C 88:74-80; 109:14-15; 93:36-37). This need would be fulfilled through an organized, Christ-driven, educational system.

That is why we are here at BYU-Idaho. Can we see our role in the “practice” and “exercise” involved in developing a Zion people? Our student population comes to BYU-Idaho “endowed with power from high” at a rate that has never been experienced. The Prophet Joseph Smith pleaded with God that those who worship in the temple be “granted” with desires to “be taught out of the best books...seek learning even by study, and also by faith,” that they “grow up” in Him, and “receive a fullness of the Holy Ghost...be organized according to [His} laws, and be prepared to obtain every needful thing...” (D&C 109:14-15). Can we think of a greater student body, (or faculty), endowed with the desire to “be prepared...and know more perfectly concerning their duty,” to be “taught more perfectly,” and to “have experience?” We may not always recognize our role, and we may not always recognize the

“practice” and “exercise” sessions, but evidence is all about us that the “practice” and “exercise” is working.

### Caveat number 1: “...of one accord.”

Thursday, January 10, 2019; it was the second day of class of this semester. The class treats the second half of the New Testament. The assigned reading for that day was Acts chapters 1 and 2. I invite my students to come to class with a five-question quiz related to the reading assignment for that day. After the students had traded quizzes, completed them, and discussed them, I asked the students to “tell on a neighbor;” to share an intriguing question that the whole class should consider. A young woman raised her hand and shared a question that another classmate had written. The question read something like this, “what does it mean in Acts 1:14 that ‘these all continued in one accord?’”

A young man raised his hand and gave us the definition of the word “accord” from the 1828 edition of Webster’s Dictionary, “Agreement, harmony of mind; consent or concurrence of opinions of wills.” He then continued, “being of ‘one accord’ is a pre-requisite for establishing a Zion society. Last night as I was studying, all six of my roommates were in the living room. Each had a phone in their hand, and each was doing their ‘own thing.’ Though we were together we were not of “one accord;” we had nothing in agreement, no harmony of mind existed, and we had nothing in common. I realized that we are so far away from becoming a Zion people! We had an apartment council meeting”

A wonderful example of pureness of heart!

### Caveat Number 2: “And there shall be no disputation among you...”

As part of my classes, I assign two students each class period to present thoughts and ideas as part of a class devotional. On January 28th, in my Book of Mormon class, our lesson was entitled “Exposing the Adversary &

the Enemies of Christ.” One of the young ladies stood up, talked about being a convert to the Church, made some comments from 3 Nephi 11:28-29 dealing with disputation and 2 Nephi 26:23-33 that deals with the fact that God does not work in darkness and that He has commanded that “all men should have charity, which charity is love.” Then she said, “we decided as an apartment that we want to follow this counsel. So as part of our ‘provident living’ lesson, we wrote an apartment proclamation.

“Provident Living: A Proclamation to Apt. 117”

“We, the members and residents of Birch Plaza apartment 117, solemnly declare that we are modern day disciples of Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We proclaim that, as daughters of God, we hold a unique responsibility to uphold and defend this Gospel from the fiery darts of Satan, and we know that His Plan for us provides the means to do so. From this day forward, we commit to the above mentioned calling in the following manner:

We will refuse to take part in any activity or action that conjures negativity in any way. We understand that utilizing our Father’s Plan in our lives requires standing in Holy Places and doing so involves refraining from participating in anything that drives the Spirit away. As we work to avoid instigating negativity on a daily basis, we will develop a sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit.

We will also commit to cleanse our lives of any negative influence from social media. As part of this commitment, we have decided to participate in a one week fast from any media source that allows the Adversary to influence our lives in a negative manner. We understand that media has many good uses and qualities, but we also know that limiting ourselves from unnecessary usage and inappropriate materials allows us more time to commit to the Lord and His commandments.

In addition, We will strive to remove any music from our lives that drives away the Spirit. Music can invite and uplift people in many ways and We refuse to abuse that privilege

Zion needs a faithful, humble, educated, and experienced people. This need would be fulfilled through an organized, Christ-driven, educational system.

by using music in a way that is not conducive to standing in Holy Places.

We declare that each and every one of us are fully capable and willing to fulfill these commitments to the best of our ability and We will continue to encourage each other to do so in every aspect of our lives.”

These are just a few roommates who understand what it means to “seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 11:6).

### Caveat Number 3: “That is the way the Savior teaches.”

I am participating in the “Progressing Teacher” class being offered this semester. (As a side note, it is a class where we get to practice becoming Zion people). As part of that class we were given the opportunity to read a book and gather with those who are reading the same book at least three times during the semester. We had our first meeting over lunch in Rob Eaton’s office on January 25th. Had I known what I know now I would have taken a picture of that gathering. Except for Rob Eaton, I did not know any of the other three participants three weeks ago. Let me introduce you to my new friends. Samuel Smith is a curriculum developer, Jared Bowden is a Chemist and teaches in the Chemistry Department, and Matt Dredge is a veterinarian and teaches in Animal Science; brilliant minds!

We were discussing the first three chapters of the book “Make it Stick.” Since I teach religion I see the world from that perspective. As our good friend Chris Mann said when he first met me, “Oh, you are one of those guys for whom it’s always Sunday!” I was listening intently as these scientists considered how the concepts we were discussing would be valuable in their classes. Suddenly, Jared made a comment concerning the learning and teaching principles that we were discussing that changed the entire discussion, “That is the way the Savior teaches.” I was in awe as I listened to how they, (these wonderful scientists), tie God, the Plan of Salvation, the atonement of Jesus Christ, etc. to what they teach. As I walked away, I thought, “that is why we exist as a university.” A small vision of Zion! I hope they are still here when my grandchildren begin to attend!

### Caveat Number 4: “...decisions... must be by the unanimous voice...”

I participate as a member of the “Cornerstone Alignment” committee in the Religion Department. We have been working on re-developing our Religion Department outcomes to align with the Institutional Outcomes for almost a year. We have met, discussed, prayed, involved the entire faculty and then again we met some more. We have “practiced” and “exercised!” They say that “perfect practice makes perfect!” After months of discussion, on January 18, 2019, the miracle took place. Once again we met, but something was different. Very few times in either family, professional, or ecclesiastical responsibilities have I felt the unity and the reality of the mind of the Lord being made manifest

(D&C 107:27, 30-31). Months of discussions came together and in a one-hour period of time the job was done. Every decision was made by the “unanimous” voice of the group. A sweet taste of Zion.

Look around you with new eyes. Pray that you may have eyes to see and ears to hear. You will see the evidence of the “practice” and “exercise” sessions being carried out by the employees and students of BYU-Idaho. Zion will not be established in a day, but it will be established. The building and establishment of Zion will always have opposition; remember that you have beat that opposition before. The Savior and his atoning sacrifice, “the blood of Lamb,” gave us the impetus to establish Zion once, therefore, apply it to your life daily. The “word of their (our) testimonies” is built upon study, knowledge, faith, experience, teaching, and the Holy Ghost; practice and exercise and invite others to follow. Be willing to “mortify the deeds of the body,” to “put off the natural man,” to “yield to the enticing of the Holy Ghost” and to “become as a child” (Mosiah 3:19). In so doing, you will give others hope. Practice virtue and holiness and your “dominion shall be an everlasting dominion” that will flow unto you forever and ever without compulsory means (D&C 121:46). Keep practicing and exercising. ❖