

Podcast Episode 23: Growing Zion

QUESTION: How will Zion get started, and how will it grow to fill all of North and South America and, eventually, the world?

DENVER: The finish line is Zion. There is no moment of separation between either restoration or apostasy. You're actively involved in one, or you are actively beginning the other. It is either restoration, or it is apostasy. There is not a second's hesitation between those two. You can't hold onto something. If you try to hold onto something, that's called apostasy-- because it doesn't work that way. So, if we want an institution, we can keep all of [D&C] 107, or we can create something that is modeled on anything that is organizational or hierarchical.

If the objective is only Zion or nothing else, then the attributes of Zion are one heart, one mind, and all things in common. Most people think of all things in common as an economic proposition. I think the economic proposition will follow, in natural order, if you have all things in common based upon these first two and coming to an understanding about that.

I believe the only way you get to have Zion-- and ultimately to have Zion overcome the world-- is that you have a small gathering in which a group of people (who are sufficiently contrite and humble and willing to be taught) gather together in a place where a temple gets built. And they work out all of the differences that exist between them so that the division, the backbiting, the jealousies, the clamor, and all of that wind up being resolved. And after they get it right, which will take some while, then you take another family and you bring them in, and you disrupt the order of things, and you create chaos until they figure out how to do it, which will probably (with the first time you expand this) be a formidable problem. And then you bring in another family, and you go through the chaos again because you have expanded the group-- except you've now learned how to do it because you've been through it once. And so the second time you do it, it's a little easier. And then you bring in a third family, except now you become reasonably adept, and you may even begin to identify the major interpersonal conflict issues that happen as you transition from out there to in here, and you repeat this process until this body is big enough to split.

And then you take half of whatever this is, and you move it into another group, and you leave half behind. And then these people take one family, and these people take one family, and the pace has just doubled. But you brought with you the competency from that group and the learning from that group over to this one, and so the satellite begins to pursue and work through

the problems. And you repeat that, and you repeat that, as you bring them aboard. And eventually you get to the point that-- where once again you can create satellites. Except now, you have four different communities into which you bring people, and you teach them the new way of life-- all of which is predicated upon what happened.

And the challenge for Zion is always the first one: The seed. You'll never get anywhere unless you get the first one done. If you can get over that hurdle, everything else will happen in course, and the rate at which this grows is geometric as soon as you reach the point that you've divided it once. From then on, everything will follow until the whole of North and South America is filled with Zion.

So what we need is to establish something that gives people enough understanding so that as this moves incrementally forward, we wind up in a position where what's going to eventually begin as a single, very small seed-- there isn't a text that can be used to bludgeon us out of pursuit of the only principles upon which it is possible to construct Zion, because we're too fixated on institutionalism, hierarchical governance, and distracted by everything that we should not be distracted by, and left in an unequal position where we cannot be of one heart, one mind, and all things in common.

The three greatest holders of dominion in the history of the world were Christ and Adam and Moses-- none of whom exercised inappropriate control, dominion, or compulsion, but all of whom had some fairly important things to say. But there's a difference between Christ having fairly important things to say, on the one hand, and Christ saying, "I'm King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and I'm going to issue my edicts." Everything He did, He did by persuasion, by long-suffering, by meekness, by pure knowledge, and by demonstrating that there is a better, a higher, a more noble way in order to behave or to solve any given problem.

Adam was so respected by his posterity, that although Cain murdered Abel to secure the birthright, he never dreamed of touching his father Adam, because he recognized in Adam that there was something there that commanded his respect.

In order to get from where the people were at the time of Enoch or where the people were at the time of Melchizedek, their only claim in getting people to that point was that they were teachers and preachers of righteousness. There is no indication anywhere in scripture that either of them had a hierarchy. Now, there was enough respect shown to Melchizedek that they called him the Prince of Peace, and they called him the King of Salem, but Joseph Smith clarified that those are simply descriptors of their respect for what the man had done or said or taught. Because he didn't own the land, and the only thing that they focused on in all the preaching and teaching was the

idea of repentance. That's it. That's the message: "Gotta repent." And that was enough, eventually, to get people to say, "Alright, we're in agreement."

None of them attempted to metastasize Zion. The prophecy for the last one is that it's going to fill the whole earth. But the challenge is to get the first one. If you can get the first one in, and bring in others, eventually you can fill the whole earth. And they might have been able to do the same thing, except both of them fled. The third one is not going to flee. The third one is here in order to prepare the way for the return.

So all of those kinds of issues (which are on the table when you begin looking at the great revelation on Priesthood) take you back to what the eight verses talk about-- what happened in the valley of Adam-Ondi-Ahman, which is an event that is supposed to happen again. Except this time, the place in which Adam will be in the presence of Son Ahman is going to be in the temple, a re-creation of the sacred space in which Adam was originally put when his government was established. And in that sacred place when that takes place, the government-- the right of dominion which was handed Adam in the beginning-- has to be surrendered back, in turn, to Adam, who surrenders that right back to Christ. So that when Christ comes, He's not overthrowing any legitimate government, but He's exercising the right of the original government-- a right which He has given to a sequence of people to whom that right properly belongs, from whom (because His house is a house of order) it must be returned faithfully in order for the end to mirror the beginning. And the journey back to the start gets accomplished in the way that it was originally set up to be accomplished.

And all of this has enormous doctrinal implications on a whole bunch of fronts and drives what ultimately demands a temple. Because much of what implements the program can only be had in a place where God and angels and mortals are able to mingle with one other.

And in the world, there is not sufficient sacred space prepared so that the Lord can come and visit with people. Hence the need very often for people to be "caught up," because being caught up removes you from a place where everything is perverse and profane and polluted. And God can cleanse a place, and has done so, in order to meet with men on occasion. But this Zion and this temple is not intended to be a temporary nexus. It is intended to be the connecting point from which the actual return is going to be staged-- the connecting point of the fiery corridor that will allow a return that's going to unleash fire on the earth that will destroy the wicked and reclaim it as the Lord's property, and what have you.

And I can tell you what my present understanding is as long as you don't hold me to it. Because as things change, things change. And the Lord reacts to what's going on at this instant, and so what's going on then may be a little different then.

In all of the restoration Mormon groups that exist-- from the Community of Christ in its present form to any of the fundamentalist groups-- the way in which the structure of the people has been organized is with a top-down system, in which you have some function that takes place at the very top of this, and that's what radiates down to fill and to control the entirety of whatever group it is. And we know this doesn't work. If this kind of a system could be fixed by putting a righteous man at the top, then we could have fixed Catholicism, and we didn't need a new church. This organization has its inherent flaws.

In addition, the fundamental problem with this is that you have an inequality that is structurally built into the system, and you can't escape that. It just is. I mean, to look at that is to know that what you've developed is a model in which there is inequality. The only way in which you can have equality is if everyone is regarded to be on the same level. There's no higher, and there's no lower-- there is only one.

If you look at the example of the Savior who came to minister, the way in which the Savior ministered, literally, was to put Himself below and then to labor to raise everyone else. In fact, if you're looking at the model of the Savior-- if you're going to draw a connecting line, the connecting line would turn this entire model upside down. Because He knelt to serve, and He knelt to raise, and He served beneath everyone else. And His objective was to treat them all as if they were those to whom He came to minister. And He didn't assume a different role.

In fact, if you pay close attention to the relics of what we have leftover of the post-apostolic era, the Christian churches (that got established by the apostles that knew Christ) were built like this. They had exactly the same look and feel as the fellowships that we have. They met in homes. On occasion, they would go into someone else's synagogue or someone else's facility to teach. But they were a home-based, level community in which everyone was on an equal footing. And the bishops were elected by the common consent to serve temporarily. It would be like electing someone to be president or bishop or Grand Poobah of the upcoming Boise conference who then serves in whatever that role is until the conference ends, and at the end of that, they drop back into-- and their purpose is simply to facilitate something. Their purpose isn't to, "Great me, little you."

So, the model of Zion, in my view, has to be a model that assumes the equality of the participants. In my view, at this point in history, there can only be one definition of success, and that is the New Jerusalem, Zion, and the return of the Lord. If success is defined as getting a movement going, we have every different flavor of movement. The infinite variety of religious errors is inexhaustible. The proof of doing, believing, and acting in the way that pleases the Lord, satisfies the covenants that got made long ago to other people, and achieves what the fulfillment

of all the ages anticipate, is the New Jerusalem, Zion, and the return of the Lord. If we define success as anything other than that, then we're really looking for the wrong thing-- which again is one of the reasons why I really don't think numbers matter.

Now if you want to see with clarity what the imagination of mankind gives you for a dystopian future, all you have to do is watch TV or go to any movie, because they are propounding a view of a dystopian future that ranges from Mad Max to The Maze Runner. But they all have the same thing and that's that we're all going to die ugly, horrid deaths, and it's our own fault. That's the theme of our adversary.

So the question is, given where we are now (which is not Zion, and at some points even in this process, as the scripture incoming email demonstrates dutifully, we're not anything like it)-- the problem we have is in envisioning what-- I mean, with some realistic degree of appreciation for the challenge-- envisioning what it would take to get us from where we are to "there." And if I were to draw one thing that represents an indispensable accoutrement for the accomplishment of it, I would say that the one thing that's required has to be the temple. Without a temple to ground the society, to provide the basis for the structure of a new society, a differently ordered one-- I mean, this is the prophecy: *"...the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law"* (2 Nephi 12:2-3).

See, you have to have this in order to learn something. And what it is that you learn there is so valuable that those who come and receive it regard what they have been given as a law.

I don't know how many times in scripture the Lord says, "Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor yet hath it entered into the heart of man, what great things the Lord has prepared for you." And how often does He tell us that there are things that have been kept hid from the foundation of the world that He would like to give. And then we have the prophecy that says, the time is going to come when you're not going to need to say to me, and I'm not going to need to say to you, "Know ye the Lord," for everyone will know Him, from the least to the greatest.

A temple serves as the basis for orienting a society that gets built around, and centered in, the temple. It's a different way of living. It's a different way of thinking. It's a different way that reorients you-- instead of to this, orients you to that.

Let's go learn about the path of God. You have to have this in order to structure a society around this. And I don't think it's going to be easy. I think that when you get this, and you manage to establish that, and to get one of them, that what you have is only a seed.

Let's assume that (and I'm just going to pick entirely arbitrary numbers; these don't mean anything except to illustrate a point)-- let's assume that the ideal community consists of a minimum of 100 families. Okay? And let's assume that in your first seed you manage to get 25 families to come together. And you work out all of your social, economic, interpersonal-- all of your challenges. And it takes a while. But your ideal community is 100, not 25. As soon as you settled down and you figured it out, and then you bring in your next family, and you disrupt the order of things. And it takes a while for the new people to be acclimated into this, because they bring with them all of the dreadful things that the first 25 have managed to shed because they haven't gone through that process. So, now you are back having your old nightmares again, because you've got a foreigner in your midst, and they're reminding you of all those things you used to love and prefer and want. And it's Uglyville again. But eventually you settle down, and you acclimate them, and so you bring in another. And the whole nightmare starts over again, except you've been through this once before, and you learned a few lessons last time. Except these people are weird, and these people were not, and so they brought a new bundle of crap. And so you've got to work that through. But you are a little better at it. And you bring in another. Same thing repeats itself. And you have to work it through, but you're gaining skills. And another. And another. And another, until finally you've reached your ideal community of 100. And so now you have 100 people in your ideal community in size, and you've worked through all of the problem-solving that goes along with it.

Fifty of them stay there, and 50 of them move nearby, because you're still going to need the temple in order to teach. And now you bring in a new family to disrupt the two communities, except now you're doing it twice as fast, and you've adapted because you learned from your earlier experience how to problem-solve, and the pace at which you increase these communities expands because you're more adept, and you have a cultural background, and you know how these "foreign people" need to be dealt with in turning them into citizens of this differently oriented, differently governed, differently situated community in which coming to one heart and to regarding one another as equals is the rule of the day-- some of whom have strongly held religious views that you have to overcome in order to make them become equal. And when you finally have grown this group, you divide them again, all of them situated around the temple. But now the seed has grown, and the pace at which it begins to expand is four times (in effect because you're adept, four times and then some)-- more quickly than what happened when you grew the first community. And eventually this grows to fill the whole world. And the pace at which this grows after a tipping point is remarkable.

The challenge is right there. The world has never managed to get right there. Never. And that includes communities of monks, nunneries-- that includes ascetic people, Walden Pond. Everyone who has tried Utopia, everyone who has envisioned Utopia, has failed because they haven't had the seed that is constructed around the mountain of the Lord's House with the law that will go forth out of Zion. Because Zion is differently situated.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver's extemporaneous remarks given at a Scripture Committee Meeting on April 19, 2017; and
- Denver's extemporaneous remarks given at a meeting of the Covenant of Christ Conference organizing committee in Burley, Idaho on May 13, 2017.