

Podcast Episode 29: Patriarchal Blessings

QUESTION: Is my patriarchal blessing valid?

DENVER: Father's blessings scripturally had legitimacy because they were spoken through the gift of the Holy Ghost. Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called together his posterity in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there he bestowed his final blessing on them, and notwithstanding he was bowed down with great age, he rose up, and he prophesied what should befall his descendants to the end of time. That was the first patriarchal blessing. It was given by the power of the spirit, and it was prophecy. It would be appropriate to read out of that event "priesthood" and to read into that event "Holy Ghost, power of the Spirit, word of prophecy"—because a patriarchal blessing delivered with no benefit of the Spirit is just more ink on paper, but a blessing delivered by the power of the Spirit as a prophecy, is the word of the Lord, the mind of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation, which cannot be broken.

When Jacob called his kids before him to bestow his final blessing, when father Lehi called his kids before him to bestow his final blessing, it was a reenactment of the event that the first father, Adam, had enacted in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman in which someone (bowed down with great age, knowing that they are going to soon depart this world, having no personal investment in the outcome, intending only to say what is for the blessing and benefit through the Spirit of what will befall their children after them, things that they will not be around to witness) confirm by the spoken voice what it is that God has put into their hearts. It's given generally by someone like Lehi, like Jacob in Genesis 49 & 50 in the KJV. They are calling upon all of the experience that they've had with the kids throughout their lifetime, and then they're projecting forward by the power of the Spirit.

And some of what, in giving blessings by the power of the Spirit, is prophesied to befall a child may be surprising to the one filled with the Spirit. But generally that lifetime of experience with the child helps prepare the mind, the heart, and the connection of the father to heaven, in order to speak by the power of the Spirit concerning the child and what will befall the child. All of which, every bit of that, can occur with or without priesthood, every bit of that—which is another reason why we tend to associate, and therefore to limit, the power of the Spirit to influence any person without regard to rank, position, or office.

Deborah was a prophetess. If she was filled with the Spirit and she uttered a prophecy, then that was God speaking through her. That doesn't mean that she now gets to go preside in the High Priests group. If she's smart she'll stay the hell away from that High Priests group.

Take a look at Doctrine and Covenants 107, because in this we see that first Zion: *“Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth [his son], Enos [his grandson], Cainan [the son of Enos], Mahalaleel [son of Cainan], Jared [son of Mahalaleel], Enoch [son of Jared], and Methuselah [son of Enoch], who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing”* (verse 53). This is the original, first patriarchal blessing being given by Adam, he having summoned them there.

And as he's giving his last blessing, three years previous to his death, the Lord appeared unto them. So the Lord comes to dwell with these seven high priests and Adam. *“The Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him [Mich-a-el] Michael, the prince, the archangel. And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam...”* Ask yourself what comfort is it that the Lord ministers. He *“...said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever. And Adam stood up in the midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation. These things were all written in the book of Enoch, and are to be testified of in due time”* (D&C 107:54-57).

This is the original covenant. This is the first father. This is what was set in motion before the death of Adam, under the binding influence and ratification of the Holy Ghost (or the mind of God), in which Adam, under the influence of that Spirit, “predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.” This is the original covenant. This is the original father. Words spoken as a consequence of the influence of the Holy Spirit become the words of God. They will not fall to the ground unfulfilled.

Back in those days, I thought all you people had these things. And then there was the patriarchal blessing that I got which said, this is a quote, that “you will again be in the presence of your Father in Heaven while in the second estate.” That's in my patriarchal blessing. And I thought, well, of course; it belongs there. That's what we do, isn't it? I thought we were related to God in an intimate way because, well, the heavens were opened.

And therefore, it was not, to me, shocking when I encountered an angel. And I have encountered many of them. And all of them leave a vivid and permanent impression. I can tell you that it's

been nearly 40 years since the first time I met with an angel. And I can still close my eyes and see the scene this minute.

This stuff happens. My experiences matter only because I can testify that it happens. The content is nothing but voyeurism for you. *You* need to have a connection with heaven. The scriptures are the authorized accounts given to us that testify to these things. The *Lectures on Faith* are trying to set it forth in a comprehensive way so that we can all get it. But the gospel is supposed to be a living, breathing, miraculous thing in your life. Whether I'm saved or not doesn't matter. What matters is whether you are saved or not. And the way in which you become saved is by coming to know "eternal certainty," the last words in verse 56. And "eternal certainty" is about your salvation, so that you're not dependent upon someone else for your knowledge of God, but so that you can say in your own right, "I know."

Look, um, we're enacting ancient events. We're part of a process that began a long time ago and is going on still. You read, what is it, Genesis 49—the patriarchal blessings of the various patriarchs—you look at the lives of those men in the flesh. We're just reenacting them on a grander scale and with more of us, to be sure. But the patterns are there. The records of the prophets are not just history. As the *Book of Mormon* demonstrates very ably, it's not history. It's highly edited, very limited, highly selected (at one point they estimate less than one percent of their history even gets alluded to) material that has been selected on account of prophetic foreknowledge of our circumstance. And so it constitutes not merely a history, but a prophetic pattern in which they try to get us to see the process that we ought to be reenacting in our lives, to do the things that they did that brought them to know the Lord.

Nephi couldn't have been more plain if he had said, "Here's my guidebook. Here's my rule book. Here's my pattern-recognition sequence. You go and do likewise." He's trying to get us to get our hands around, as Joseph Smith put it, the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ involves the path to and through the veil into the presence of God, becoming joint heir, becoming a son of God. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* page 375, he refers to "sons of God who exalt themselves to be God even before they were born, and all can cry Abba, Father."

Joseph wanted us to take the religion that he restored to the earth rather seriously and to search into and contemplate both the heavens and the darkest abyss. In an—I don't want to use the word "evangelical," I'll use the "evangelistic"—In a proselytizing church, in a church in which, at any given moment, the largest segment of the adult population are novices, introductory novices to a faith—you should never expect the church to forfeit the interests of the novices, who rightly need to be fed and nurtured, for the interests of those who are maybe a little more mature and have a little more robust comprehension of what the Savior was trying to teach us all. And it's probably

rightly so that the Church makes no effort to really address that, and rightly so that you're left to your own. We have the scriptures. I mean, when the rich man said to Abraham in Christ's parable, "Well, send Lazarus back so he can warn my brothers," Abraham's response in Christ's parable was, "They have Moses, and they have the prophets, and if they won't believe them they won't believe Lazarus, even though one rised from the dead"—which is a very interesting foreshadowing of how people would treat the Lord.

Here's the problem: People do not believe Him even though He rose from the dead. Period. Today, us, you and I do not believe Him even though He rose from the dead. It was not intended to be a one-off event that occurred in the meridian of time. It was intended to be a gathering. I mean, the little seed grows up into the great mustard plant into which the birds—or, as Joseph put it, the angels—were intended to come and watch. It was intended to be a super structure for housing contact between the divine and the mortal. It was intended to be the moment of intersection between all that is in eternity and the life of the mortal. It was intended to be the journey into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God.

In the ordinances, as they have been restored in the temple today, everyone who enters in is expected to come to the veil possessing certain knowledge, capable of identifying themselves as having been true and faithful, and be received in an embrace and then welcomed into the presence of God. It's a normal and expected part of the ordinances, as they have been restored. Those ordinances are supposed to be teaching us something. They are the Lord's way of shouting in a multimedia presentation, "Here is how I did what I did and what I would like you to do in the process of you becoming like me—a son of God, a daughter of God, a member of the household of faith, and part of the church and kingdom of the Firstborn." You have to become the Firstborn. You have to become one with Him. You have to become part of that, not in an organized group-think kind of way; in an individual way in which you connect up with Holiness, in which you become a vessel of Holiness. You are someone to whom sacred things have been entrusted, and you become, in turn, sacred as the bearer of them.

The Law of Moses prescribed the death penalty for a variety of offenses. One of the ways to avoid the execution of the penalty was to go to one of the safe harbor cities. Another way was to go and to come in contact with the altar, because if you came in contact with the altar it was considered most holy. Things that are most holy communicate holiness; you can't profane them. If you come in contact with them and you are unholy, you don't make it unholy, it makes you holy because it is most sacred. Part of the rites in the temple are intended to communicate to you things that are most holy. They are intended to make you holy. They are intended to make you a suitable recipient for an audience. They are intended to make you a suitable companion for a walk down a dusty road with the risen Lord who is trying to get you to notice exactly who it is that speaks to you. It's intended to have you understand that He lives, and that He's willing to

associate with you. And that it's not, as Joseph Smith put it, relying on the words of an old book, the people who lived once long ago, that's going to save anyone. It's the dialogue that you engage in with Him now. It's the living, breathing, vital... He uses the figure of the living vine. And you have to connect to the living vine, and He's the vine, and you connect to it, and you get life through that. Words could not be more plain.

He's trying to get... I mean, what does it mean to be connected up with the vine and to derive sustenance from it? I mean, you have to be alive, which is not inert or an object that you move from there to there. If it's alive, it's going to grow. It's going to increase. It's going to improve. It's going to have connection with. It's going to have... Christ was extraordinary in His selection of the things that He wanted to use to communicate to us what He intended the gospel to be. And we read them and say, "That's cool. I'll pay my tithing. I'm connected. I got a card, I'm connected." Well, it's intended to be more than that, and the way that it becomes more than that is an individual journey in which you receive from Him and become a part of Him, and He does His best to try and use analogies and parables and stories to make it clear to us. And the history of the events that are recorded in scripture are intended to try and make it clear to us, but at the end of the day it's up to you to have the "aha moment" and realize He really is talking to and inviting *you*. *You*, individually, whoever you are, wherever you're at, whatever your confusion, whatever your doubts, whatever your uncertainties, He wants to talk to *you* about them.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver's talk entitled "Christ's Discourse on the Road to Emmaus," given in Fairview, UT on April 14, 2007;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #2 entitled "Faith," given in Idaho Falls, ID on September 28, 2013;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #4 entitled "Covenants," given in Centerville, UT on October 6, 2013; and
- His fireside talk entitled "Cursed, Denied Priesthood," given in Sandy, UT on January 7, 2018.