

## Podcast Episode 46: Charity, Part 1

### QUESTION: Why is charity the greatest of all?

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DENVER: Charity is sometimes viewed as this emotional or deeply-felt connection that seems unattainable vis-a-vis the stranger but something that is capable to be done for your wife or your husband or your children or your parents—someone that you are intimately connected with. But it doesn't appear from the example of Christ that his willingness to die on behalf of others meant that he had to feel emotionally connected with them in order to do so. When he forgave the Romans that were nailing him to the cross, that wasn't the kind of act that demonstrates the sort of emotional connection to the people that you would say made him love them in the way that we would traditionally define love. Instead it would be the sort of commitment, the determination to want to do good despite the opposition or hinderance of anyone else. The very people he went into the temple and provoked with his *Woe unto scribes and Pharisees* discourse, deliberately controlling the timing of their outrage so that he would be sacrificed at the appropriate time during the Passover, were people on whose behalf he also died. **He was committed to giving his life to others** as an act of charity, as an act of service, and as an act of kindness in a way that demonstrates what charity really is. It's a fixed determination to do something on the behalf of others. Whether they appreciate it, whether they love you in return or not, you're simply going to do what needs to be done.

The mistreatment that Nephi receives at the hands of his older brothers did not change whether or not he had charity towards his older brothers, even though he knew that for the safety of his own wife, children, offspring, and compadres, he needed to separate from his brothers—for the safety of others. That doesn't mean that Nephi ever had anything other than charity for them.

Charity is a determination to live a certain way and to not allow yourself to be overcome by the jealousies, envies, all the negative things that are so easy to excuse our kindness to others. In a very real sense, we try to see others in the same way that the Father sees them, even if they don't see us reciprocally the same way. Even if they despise and abuse us. Even if they speak all manner of evil against us falsely. If we are committed to living the kind of life that has charity, the pure love of Christ in it, that's a determination, that's a vigor, that's a resolution, that's a firm-fixed determination to abide a certain standard, where you are committed to the wellbeing of your fellow man even if your fellow man is not committed at all to you. You do it for the sake of righteousness. You don't do it for the sake of recognition.

Recognition rarely comes, except maybe posthumously, to the truly charitable. It's an approach and a value that you assign to the lives of others that allows you to do good to them even if they refuse to do good back to you. It's the only way that we can ever eradicate the kind of jealousies, envies, and strife that produce war, conflict, and injured feelings.

The world is plagued by the absence of charity and the best evidence of that is the presence of conflict, the presence of fighting, the presence of hurt feelings. If I have charity towards someone who despises and abuses me, then their attitude towards me is irrelevant. Even if they want to spend time berating me, I don't waste any time either considering or being motivated by that. I'm motivated by something else.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Well, why are they peacemakers? Because they are willing to charitably proceed in a world riddled with conflict. There's no room for envy in the charitable approach. It's not puffed up, it's not seeking its own. It's really trying to please God and to serve him. And not to serve himself. It is the greatest, because if we had charity, we could live in peace with one another. Even if we have any number of unresolved issues that exist between one another, we can still live in peace with one another. Even if we absolutely disagree on a number of issues we think are fundamental, we could still live in peace with one another—if we had charity.

Joseph Smith once remarked that the problem with councils and conferences is that we wouldn't agree to hold our disagreements long enough in order to reach a proper resolution. We have to be willing to allow for differences as we search for the solution. Sometimes the solution requires years of differing opinions, differing viewpoints, differing ways of approaching things. That's not evil. It's only evil when we allow that to crowd our hearts in such a way that we begin to envy and be jealous and be resentful and be hateful and to have our pride injured. If we are charitable, then we look upon even what we think are the shortcomings of someone else in a way that is tolerant and kindly. We think Zion is going to be the great peaceful community. and it surely will be. But that doesn't mean that the residents aren't going to have differing opinions.

Art, literature, great thought, very often— music, all the creative impulses very often are stimulated by a conflict that the person who is doing the creating is grappling with. Zion may not be a place in which there is the absence for the potential of conflict, but it will be a place where the potential for conflict is resisted because of the charitable impulse to abide peaceably with one another while we work on the things that separate us, that make us different. Our differences aren't evil. Our differences are something to be considered, thought about, to be explored, to be understood. Because charity is the peaceful means of

dealing with these diverse ways of understanding lives, of understanding why we're here, what we're trying to do, of understanding how we can be kindly towards one another. Sometimes, the kindest thing is a rebuke. Sometimes the kindest thing, in turn, is to carefully consider the rebuke, to not open your mouth in return, to think deeply about what was said and why it was said, and to allow the possibility that the person who expressed the rebuke did so out of love, out of kindness, out of their concern for you. Sometimes that rebuke is based on a wealth of misinformation and misunderstanding. So, instead of returning with another rebuke, telling the rebuker how stupid they are because they don't understand things, think about why they have their understanding and what can be done to overcome the gap between you and someone else. Zion is going to be, above all other things, a place that necessarily demands that people be charitable towards one another and kindly disposed to dealing with the misunderstandings, the differences of opinion, the different educational background, the different life experience backgrounds, that make for different opinions and different viewpoints. All of them are valuable, assuming you will charitably allow people to be where they are, and to help you understand them in their context, while they are kind enough to try and understand you in your context.

Verse 15, *And it came to pass there was no contention in the land because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. (4 Nephi 1:15 LE)*. This is now the third time that they mention *no contention*. They mention it back in verse 2, no disputation, no contentions among them. They mention it again in verse 13. And they mention it again in verse 15, and they talk about the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. Etching is hard work. There is absolutely no reason for redundancy. Therefore, you have to conclude, that while they thought they had gotten rid of contention, they found another level of harmony among them. And when they thought they had achieved a perfection of that harmony, they found yet another level of harmony among themselves. Three degrees! Well, that's interesting. Because of the love of God, which did dwell in the hearts of the people. The love of God. Faith, hope, charity, these three— Well, such irony. Here we have charity now where we have finally arrived at the point where there is such a fulsome elimination of the problem that you have to use the word, but you don't have to mean the same thing with it.

So, look what we got rid of in verse 16. There were no envyings. Well go back to that, "*Turn all ye gentiles...*" and repent of the crap that you are doing. And it says, in that long list of stuff, it associates "*and your priestcrafts and your envyings.*" Now I'm uncomfortable. Because if envyings get associated with priestcrafts, I don't like that at all. And yet, what a wonderful system we have. We have upward mobility in the church. We have your elders and an elders quorum president. And you have your wards, and you have your bishops. And you have your stake presidents that rule and reign over the bishops. And you have

your area presidents who rule and reign over your stake presidents. And you have your general authorities, and you have your first presiding authorities in the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency, and then you have your First Presidency, and then you have your president. And all along, scattered in there, there's lots and lots of opportunity. Lots of opportunity for envyings. Because we're suffering from the defect that the Savior noted among his own disciples about wanting those chief seats. A Savior who knelt and washed the feet, the most menial act that you can engage in in that society is dealing with the problem of disciples, an inner circle who want recognition, they want those seats. And he says, "Look, look, don't do that, don't even think about that. Go sit in the back of the room. Get called up." And I think about Nephi in the crowd at the temple Bountiful, and how the Lord had to call him up. Nephi wasn't up there saying, "The great and wonderful, His Holiness has appeared. I am here to introduce Him." Because all that is is a diversion of attention to the one. Like in the movie, *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer. Nephi did not make of himself Chaucer. He sat in the back, blended in with the crowd and required the Lord to call him up. Christ addressed this problem directly. I can't imagine dealing with the affliction; Neil Maxwell talked about it. He said, "Yeah, it's out there, but you just don't inhale." The way that my wife has characterized it, and I think it is the perfect characterization, is the curse of celebrity-dom. We turn them into celebrities. We want to turn them into Britney Spears. Because that's the ultimate end of celebrity-dom. It is hollow; it is stale; it is flat; and it is unprofitable. There is nothing to it. Why do you think Britney Spears is the mess that she is? Because fame and fortune is nothing. And I suspect those who enjoy the envy of position, who ultimately wind up in a position in which they are now there, they manage to weasel around those to where they thought it would be great, arrive at the point, look around and say, "Well, this is just like where I was! Nothing's changed." Because the change has to be a change internal to the person and not to mere geography or topography. Going from the third floor to the tenth floor doesn't change you. You're still that same hollow, miserable envious chap.

So, there's "*no envyings*," and there's no "*strifes*," and as a result of that, there are no political conventions. That's all a tumult is. It's just a lot of noise in a concentrated collection of folk in which we have a revival. We have a Republican Party break out, just all of the sudden. "*No tumults*." And despite all the rapid increase in the population and the familial life that is going on there, there is no whoredoms. Well, tumults, politics, and whoredoms go hand in hand. Well, if your going to have whoredoms, of course we are going to have it's corollary, lyings, because those go together. And there are "*no murders or any manner of lasciviousness*." Take that list and ask yourself, upon which of these things is our culture, is our society, is our economy based? This is the stuff we eat. This is our daily fare. This is who we are. This is the definition of us. This is us! "*Oh, ye gentiles!*" So we are here, and we're talking about Zion, and we are wondering why it's not here in full bloom at

this point. This garbage is in our DNA. We have a hard time even thinking in terms that would allow us to relate to these people. The plot lines of all of our great western stories involve this stuff.

*“Nor murders or any manner of lasciviousness.”* The story of the latter end of the Jaredites is full of whoredoms, lyings, murders and all manner of lasciviousness. The ultimate end of the Nephites is a repetition of that. And we don't learn from the patterns that we're shown that says, “Here's the road to hell, and here's the road to Zion.” And we march down the road to hell, and we talk about Zion.

So then it says, *“and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.”* To us, in our cultural setting, that seems really incongruent, because everything that drives us, everything that our economy is based upon, everything that our entertainment portrays in front of our minds is based upon these kinds of conflicts and tumults and envyings and whoredoms and *Desperate Housewives*... It's all tied into this stuff. But these people who have been separated from our common fare, there could not be a happier people than among all the children of God. Because there comes a point when you have separated yourself from the crap that your capacity to incorporate more and more truth and light allows you to say, “Well, this is more interesting than that was anyway.” There is something more engaging about truth and light. And there's something more fascinating about the things of eternity than there is about any of this stuff. We are all weak. We are all vulnerable. We are all carbon-based mud piles at the moment. And this carbon-based pile of mud around which my spirit has been wrapped into, it gets tired. It has appetites. It has weaknesses. But the reason they threw fasting in there was to subordinate that body, to teach it that the spirit is something that ought to be in control. There comes a point at which, if you have allowed the spirit to have it's way, you'll find that the things that are fascinating to this pile of mud that you walk around in are far less interesting than the things of the spirit. And whatever principle of intelligence you attain to in this life is going to rise with you. And if it does, then you are going to have so much the advantage in the world to come. Why is that? Because in the world to come, the crap that is here has no utility. It has no value. It's here to test you; it's here to try you; and it's here to give you an opportunity to overcome it. But it's not here for you to revel in. It's for you to dig yourself out from.

So there's *“no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites nor any manner of -ites. But they were all in one, the children of Christ and heirs of the Kingdom of God.”* I would suggest that the peace of Zion has much less to do with whether or not the outward hostilities of those who will be burned at His coming are fighting with one another and those inside the city are not taking up arms. But, it is rather the peace that comes as a

consequence of having shed your sins and being able to endure the presence of the Lord. Because these are those people who have let virtue garnish their thoughts unceasingly because “[their] bowels [have been] full of charity towards all men and to the household of faith.” Imagine that. Can you imagine that it is necessary that you have charity for those who are within your own household of faith. Can you imagine that I need to tolerate and even love those inside my own community of belief who think me an emissary of the devil? Who think me an apostate? Toward them, I must show charity? And “let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.” Because you see, if you are not so constituted within your own heart, where there can't be any lies—if within your heart you are not at peace in charity toward those who would, in the name of your own religion, despitely use you, then your confidence cannot wax strong in the presence of God. And all of this is connected to the doctrine of the priesthood. “Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews of heaven” (D&C 121:45). It will just condense there. Because when you do that, you reach dew point. See, if Neil Maxwell were here, he would write that down, and he would use it, too. I might send that to Cory, and say, “Hey, put it in his book, and give him credit.”

“The Holy Ghost [shall] be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth” (verse 46). I want a scepter! Because can't you use those things to bash people in the head and say, “Big me, little you?” Scepters have nothing to do with ruling and reigning. Scepters have to do with serving and kneeling. He who thought Himself the least kneeled and washed the dirt from the feet of those who, in every respect, He excelled. And He wanted to give them the chief seats. He didn't envy those He raised. He didn't envy those who presided over Him. He declared the truth, and He declared it boldly, because He knew what the truth was. To the extent that He could do so diplomatically, He did. But when the moment came and it was necessary to lay it out, it was He who chose the moment of the sacrifice. It was He who went up to Jerusalem to be crucified. And it was He who drove the fury that resulted in the sacrifice at the appropriate moment, because the fullness of time had come for the offering on that Passover. And He knew that. I talk about that in *Come, Let Us Adore Him*. Because when the time had come, the time had come.

The peace that is in Zion is the peace that Joseph is describing in the letter from Liberty jail from which I have been reading in D&C Section 121. It's in the account from Enoch as well. The statement that is made concerning the priesthood, Moses 6:7, “This same priesthood that was in the beginning shall be in the end of the world also.” That statement, when you put it together with the statements, “As it was in the the times of Noah, so also shall it be with the coming of the Son of Man.” Every time you encounter the existence of Zion, the Zion that we

read about, the first one had seven high priests within it. There was a residue associated with them who were righteous, but among them, you have the seven high priests. I have to assume that they each had families. And I have to assume that the families that were raised by these high priests in righteousness, I have to assume that that included multiple generations. And so, that collection of people were essentially seven families.

The Zion that was established by Enoch thereafter, we don't have any geographic description or numeric description apart from the statement that we get in the book of Jude, which is really quoting from an earlier text of Enoch about the return of Enoch with his ten thousands, with his ten thousands of angels. And so, if that is a representation—and those kinds of things are not particularly reliable, because ten thousands— Given the way in which the numeric compilations occurred in those days, the error, if there is one, is an overstatement, not an understatement. In other words, there would not be millions described as ten thousands, but there could be hundreds described as ten thousands. And then the area occupied apparently by Melchizedek and his city in an agrarian setting could have been located on something as small as 20 city blocks. The significance of Zion is not it's numerosity. The significance of Zion is it's spiritual endowment. It is the power of heaven and not the voting block. It's not that you have big numbers here that intimidate the ungodly. It's that even a handful are sufficient. Remember from the account of John that when they came to arrest the Savior and He declared, "I am He," the guards stumbled backwards and fell down. The imposing figure of the righteous Lord was enough to intimidate those who came with swords and with shields, protected and armed, and Him clothed only with the garments He had upon Him. At that moment, in that garden, in that presence confined to the person of one individual, there was Zion. I do not think the picture that we have in our head of the role, the mission, the ministry, and the purpose of the return of Elijah is necessarily the one that is accurate. Nor do I think that the role, the mission, the ministry, and the effort of Elijah is something from our past. Just as Joseph predicted the future return in January and in March of 1844, I think the role and mission of Elijah is intimately connected with the immediate return and opening up the capacity for the salvation of a group of people who will be greeted at the return of those that last went through that opening when they come and fall upon one another's necks, and they kiss one another. No rivalry, no disparity, no hierarchy. All things in common is rather difficult when you got big and little people; when you got important and wealthy, and you got obscure and poor; when you have those who are mighty and wonderful and those who are nothing.

Don't be cowards. Stand, and be valiant, no matter what it is. In the day of judgement, you will find yourself wanting, and in this life, you will find that you lack the power of godliness unless you obey the law upon which all blessings are predicated. You make sacrifices. You obey him. And to obey him is to find yourself oddly incongruent with everything about you.

Not about *you*. *About* you, meaning the external world in which you find yourself moving about within.

There is another verse in D&C Section 121. This would be one written in the year following the Joseph Smith testimony. This one is written— Joseph was sentenced to die on November 1st of 1838. The general who was supposed to carry the execution, rebelled, wouldn't do that. Joseph ultimately wound up being kept in prison in Liberty jail. While he is in Liberty jail, he writes a letter. We have taken out three excerpts from the letter, and we have canonized them, and section 121 is one of those three sections. I want you to look at verse 45. Verse 45, ask yourself whether this has something to do also with the power of godliness.

*“Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men and to the household of faith. And let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly. Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. And the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion and thy scepter, an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth. And thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion and without compulsory means. It shall flow unto thee forever and ever.”*

Oh, that I had the ability to declare it. This is in the middle of one of the three great principles by which God governs and shapes the universe itself. It is not through compulsory means. The only way in which God works is by inviting and enticing. You break yourself against the laws that are ordained. You condemn yourself by the things you bring upon yourself. God just is. And he is, to give you opportunity. And he opens opportunity to allow you to enter in if you are willing to enter in. But whether you are willing to enter in or not is predicated upon your own conduct, your own desires. And the best way to determine what your desires are are based upon what it is you do.

One of the greatest sins that the Lord says we are capable of, in a revelation that was given about the law of consecration—another notion that rears its ugly head only one time these days, and that is as you are making covenants in a temple. Take a look at D&C 70. This is about our failure to live the law of consecration, which brings us all under condemnation. Beginning at verse 14 of Section 70, *“Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the spirit shall be withheld. Now, this commandment I give unto my servants for their benefit while they remain, for a manifestation of my blessings upon their heads, and for a reward for their diligence and for their security; For food and for raiment; for an inheritance; for houses and for lands, in whatsoever circumstances I, the Lord, shall place them, and whithersoever I, the Lord, shall send them.”* Here we have, separate and apart from the description of Zion—they

are one heart, there are no poor among them, they are one people—a commandment that says, “In your temporal things, you are going to need to be equal. Otherwise the abundance of the manifestation of the spirit is going to be withheld.”

In a section about Zion— This is D&C 59 beginning at verse 18, the Lord has this to say: *“Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and use [by] man, both [made] to please the eye and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he has given all things unto man, for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgement, not to excess, neither by extortion.”* Or in other words, excess meaning wealth. Extortion meaning to compel the poor. “I am willing to give unto you some charitable thing if you will...” The poor are not to be extorted. Take the money that the Lord intended for the poor, and you administer it for the poor among you. If you try this experiment, and if there are those among who receives rather than gives, because they have not, then let me remind those who receive of another statement made in the revelations of this dispensation in D&C 42:42, *“Thou shall not be idle for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.”* If you are the beneficiary, not only should you be grateful, but do what you can, in turn. There is absolutely no reason to gather in order to fail again. We do not need another Jerusalem; we do not need another Rome; we do not need another Antioch; we do not need another Kirtland; we don't need another Jackson County. We don't need another Nauvoo, and we certainly don't need another Salt Lake. We need Zion!

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The foregoing comments by Denver Snuffer were recorded on November 24th, 2018, with additional excerpts taken from:

- Denver’s talk given at the “Zion Symposium” in Provo, Utah on February 23rd, 2008;
- Denver’s *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #1 entitled “Be of Good Cheer,” given in Boise, ID on September 10th, 2013; and
- Denver’s *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #6 entitled “Zion,” given in Grand Junction, CO on April 12th, 2014.