

Podcast 130: Being Harmless, Part 1

This is Part 1 of a special series on being harmless.

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NARRATOR: In the Restoration Edition of the Scriptures we find these references to being harmless:

Matthew 5:3

Be therefore wise servants and as harmless as doves.

Philippians 1:8

Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation — among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life....

Alma 12:14

Now Ammon being wise yet harmless, he said unto Lamoni, Wilt thou hearken unto my words if I tell thee by what power I do these things?

Today Denver discusses what it means to be harmless and how that is manifested; how being harmless is related to being gentle, kind, meek, forgiving, wise, and easy to be entreated, and how, when, and where that matters the most; how all of this is a reflection of a condition of the heart; and how one who is harmless approaches others, and approaches God, especially when it may be most difficult to do.

DENVER: There's an incident that I think... One word... One word in this incident really explains a great deal of what I have been talking about in this last installment. This is an event that occurs within the Book of Mormon that may seem otherwise quite puzzling. But now that we've looked at the Ether chapter 3 material and we go back and we look at this incident, it suddenly begins to have a connection to it.

This is in Alma chapter 22; it involves Lamoni's father, the king. I want you to look at the father, beginning in verse 17 of Alma chapter 22:

*And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even [did he] prostrate himself upon the earth, **and cried**, [and cried] mightily, saying ... (Alma 22:17)*

It's not the words of the prayer that provoked or gathered the attention of heaven (though the prayer is in fact needed, relevant, and exactly what the Lord answered). It's what came before.

This is the king. This is the king that can have people killed if he chooses to do so. This is the one who—**like God**—among his people exercises the power of life and death. This is the one who can exact from them taxes. This is the one who has absolutely no reason to do what he's doing here. But look what he does. He prostrates himself upon the ground, and he "cries out mightily." He doesn't pray. He mirrors exactly what the brother of Jared did when he approached God in the depths of humility and in the sincerity of his heart, showing absolutely his appreciation for the difference between himself, on the one hand, and God, on the other.

Don't mistake me, I do not think it is necessary to physically engage in this kind of display. When the display is an extension of what is in the heart, that is absolutely fine. But when what is in the heart is right, it doesn't matter how it's displayed because God looketh on the inner man. This King was so overtaken by what he had heard that he was not ashamed to prostrate himself in front of the missionaries. He was not ashamed to cry out in the depths of humility. He didn't care who saw it. He didn't do this for to be seen. He didn't care that he was being seen. He did this because, at that moment, that was what he was: he was seeking grace from the throne of grace.

*O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and **if** there is a God, and **if** thou art God... (ibid, vs. 18, emphasis added)*

Do you see this? This isn't someone who's certain. This is someone who is convicted of his own inadequacy. It may not be that you don't know enough; it may actually be that you know too much that's wrong. It may be that what you lack...It's all gonna be erased and started over anyway. If you could gaze into heaven for five minutes, you'd realize that people that have been writing about this stuff since the beginning of time (who haven't gazed into heaven) don't know what they're talking about. The suppositions and the connections and the ideas that get floated around are not only false, many of them are offensive to God. They're not right. The board's gonna be erased. God's gonna re-order it. You're gonna see things in a completely different light when it happens. It's not that you're brilliant and a shining light of knowledge. It's what's in your heart, and how has your heart been prepared, and if your heart is open to receive.

I will give away all my sins to know thee, ...that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead. (ibid; see also Alma 13:10 RE)

And then look what happens when he recovers—because as he was struck as if he were dead, he's converted. The Lord ministers to him! And in verse 23:

*...the king stood forth, and began to minister unto them. And he did minister **unto them**, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord. (ibid, vs. 23, emphasis added; see also Alma 13:12 RE)*

This is what happens when converted to the Lord. You **can't stand** to look about you and see other people who are left in the dark. You want to **invite them**, rather as Nathaniel was invited, "Come and see for yourself." **You** come to the Lord; **you** come, and see for yourself. This little bit of **skeptical** praying, *if [there's] a God, ...if thou art God, will [you] make [your]self known to me*—**that worked**—not because this is a magic incantation...

Those folks who go through ceremonies think that ceremonies have some powerful mojo, some compelling voodoo. But the purpose of the ceremony is to teach you a **precept**. The **precept** is what you ought to find within your heart. Rites and ordinances are intended to testify to a greater truth. It was anciently among the Jews; it is an Aaronic priesthood function to turn around and look at the ordinances as if it were an end in itself. It is **not** an end in itself. It is intended to be a symbol reminding you of some great truth concerning our God.

Capstone of the ceremonies that were restored through Joseph—involving a dialogue between you and the Lord in which you're brought back into His presence, and then, following that, you're taken away, and you're sealed for eternity — those are lofty concepts. They are powerfully portrayed in the ordinances and the rites. They are intended to convey to you the reality that all of this is possible because God does, in fact, intend to preserve you and all of those associations that you prize, so long as they're worthy.

Don't think that you lack the faith! If **this** king, with **this** prayer, can go to God and can ask and get an answer—that's not the impediment. **The impediment is the pride of your heart, the hardness of your heart, the self-reliance that you think that you own, the traditions that bind you down, the arrogance of your heart, the unwillingness to cry-out mightily to God, and then to be open to receiving an answer.** This was enough, and you too can do enough.

The Lord tells a story in Mark. This is Mark chapter 9. In...Beginning at verse 17, there's this fellow who comes to Christ and says,

Master, I have brought...thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; [the spirit overtakes him]: and he foam[s at the mouth], [he] gnash[es]...his teeth...I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; ...they could not. [And Christ says], O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? [they brought

*the boy unto Him and He] saw him, straightway the spirit [tore] him; and he fell on the ground, ...wallowed foaming. ...he asked [the] father, How long [has it been] since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it...[casteth] him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on [him], and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. ...straightway the father of the child cried out, [**cried out**] and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. (Mark 9:17-24; see also Mark 5:8-9 RE)*

Help thou mine unbelief. You don't need **more** of what you already have. Why are you here?

(Well, most of you. Some have come only to criticize and gather information. Some of you—in the hardness of your heart—are going to come to the point where, in the day of judgment, you will look back on this moment and realize, “I damned myself by the hardness of my heart and the bitterness of my soul because I came to judge a man whose heart was right before God, and mine was not.” Your heart will be broken in **that** day.)

But look at this man whose heart was broken on this day. He cried out: *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* I have a desire; I have a willingness, but it is so fragile! It is so frail. I don't think it's enough!

That's not the problem. Cry out! Ask Him! Remember, His disciples who'd been following Him, His disciples who were His faithful followers—His disciples **couldn't fix** this boy. And they'd given up everything to come and follow Him.

Jesus healed him. After the incident the disciples came to Him and said, *Why could [we not] cast him out? [Christ answered to] **them**, This kind can come forth by nothing, but...prayer and fasting.* (Mark 9:28-29, emphasis added; see also Mark 5:11 RE)

Why do you have to be afflicted by prayer and fasting (if you're a follower of the Lord) in order to get to the point that you can accomplish this??

Because **you** don't fall prostrate, crying out with tears. If this man, in this condition, can say, *I believe, help thou mine unbelief...* If this man can do this and have the Lord on his behalf work a miracle, **you too** can believe enough; **you too** can accomplish what you desire; **you too** can come to Him.

Matthew covers the same incident, but in Matthew he picks up...This is Matthew chapter 17, beginning at verse 19:

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. How be it this kind [come] not out but by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17:19-21; see also Matthew 9:7 RE)

Faith as a grain of mustard seed was what the Lord said they needed. The defect does not consist in the absence of faith in the Lord. The defect consists in the arrogance and hardness of the heart that prevents you from crying out, in the realistic and anguish of your heart, looking to God who is trying to bring you to Him. That “depths of humility,” that status of being someone who is utterly harmless, that condition in which you present no threat to the righteous (you are harmless as a dove; you seek only the betterment of others)—that is who God is and what you must become in order for God to be able to redeem you to be like Him. That’s **you voluntarily changing to be that person by your submission to Him**—because there is no reason to give to the proud, the vain, and the warlike the ability to torment and to afflict others. There is every reason to give to someone who would ultimately be willing to “give the rain to fall on the righteous and the wicked and make the sun to shine on both the righteous and the wicked” the power of God, because the power of godliness consists in this kind of a heart—and in this kind of a heart, God can accomplish anything.

As Nephi paraphrased Isaiah in the concluding chapter of Nephi’s use of Isaiah and his material, he left out a phrase that appears in Isaiah 29 and I believe he did it very wittingly. I believe he did it so that as you look at the material, you’ll ask yourself why did he leave that out? And you’ll think about the omission. “*And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed.*” He left out “the vision of all.” Well, you’re talking about Zion here, yesterday and today, and as is usual any time you get to a substantive topic that’s worth paying a lot attention to, the Book of Mormon has something to say. In fact, while it doesn’t comment at extraordinary length, the substance of what it has to say on this subject is really quite startling, and that is described for us in 4 Nephi.

But before 4 Nephi picks up, the last verse of Chapter 30 of 3 Nephi is a precaution to us -- that are going to inherit this book, which Mormon made sure was inserted at this point in the narrative. What’s remarkable as you look at that verse is how it then ties in to the description of what we’re going to receive about the practice of Zion among those in the Book of Mormon:

Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel (3 Nephi, 30: 2).

Keep in mind that list of defects as we look into the things that are right and proper in the Zion that we find in 4 Nephi. In 4 Nephi, verse 2, it tells us that, *"the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites* [and that's all good and well, but it goes on to say] *and there were no contentions and disputations among them* [which you have to add, because if you've been to any gospel doctrine class or any High Priest group meeting, or any Elders Quorum or Relief Society, there's always that fellow or gal or group, who have an incapacity to depart from contention. So it's not just being converted, see they're narrowing it down, you get converted, but then you reach at some point a unanimity or an agreement upon what the Gospel really means. And, well take a look around] *"O ye Gentiles, turn from your wicked ways,"* and ask yourself, ok confine it to your own ward, to your own quorum to your own Relief Society group, to your own Stake, confine to whatever you want it to be confined to - are there no contentions or disputations among them?

It's a serious defect, it's a serious challenge and it's one that we aren't meeting very well, and it's one of the reasons why we tend to neglect the Book of Mormon, because the Book of Mormon is always stepping on our toes. The relentless message of the Book of Mormon is - hey repent, you suck, you're just a mess, YOU, not them, I mean it's not a matter of I've got religion, I'm safe, I've got a recommend, I'm on the IN club, I can get into those buildings that other people can't - that doesn't matter, you still, you've got to repent. You're a defective item incapable of resonating at the right frequency and receiving the Spirit of the Lord and finding -- not contention, but love in bringing people together and coming to become ONE. You can be absolutely in disagreement over a doctrine, and lovingly, and gently, and patiently persuade them to come unto Christ. Or, you can hold a Council, and kick them out.

So, after they manage not only to have the same faith and to eliminate from them contentions and disputations, then they go on and, *"every man did deal justly one with another."* See, there's a difference between mercy and justice. Justice is a tougher standard. We don't want justice. We want a merciful Redeemer, who will come in and who will make up for our defects. But this is saying, *"Every man* [Me, inside me, this is the stuff we're talking about], *did deal justly* [the higher standard] *with one another."* You don't have to

give me mercy, because I'm going to give YOU justice. I'm going to be tougher on myself. It is fair that I do this for you. Oh no, no, you don't have to do that. No, no, no, the standard by which they are evaluating their conduct internal to themselves is the more difficult standard. They're going to deal justly with one another. I will break my heart, I will break my wallet, I will break my life before I will not deal justly with you and give you everything that you're entitled to. See, it's putting the shoe on the other foot and it's not the more relaxed and kindly and gentle standard, because when they're dealing with one another they want to deal justly [a real problem for all those car dealers among us].

So after we fixed the religious diversity and we fixed the contentions and the disputation and we've grown enough now that we're willing to treat ourselves as the one upon whom justice has reign, then they get to the point that they had all things common among them. Anytime in the Book of Mormon, they're ticking off a list and they do it everywhere in the Book of Mormon, this and this and this, and this-- generally what the writer is doing, because they've had a lot of time to reflect upon it and they're etching on metal plates, which is a difficult thing to do, they are being extraordinarily careful with the material that they're committing to you. So when you count a list, you ought to look at it and say to yourself, is this a progression? Is what they're doing is telling you here is how you get from one point to another and we've encountered that already in 4 Nephi, you encounter it throughout. The Book of Mormon is a manual on how to return to God and we read it like, well, like we do in gospel doctrine, when we're cover 8 chapters in 50 minutes.

So now that we've gotten to the point that we're able to do these things, then and only then did they have all things common among them. Therefore, [and this is as a logical result of what happened before], as an inevitability, there were no rich and there were no poor, and there were no bond, and there were no free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. This is NOT a description of a socio-economic order alone. The foundation of Zion shows up here yet again - it's the heavenly gift. It's the presence and the abundance of the things of the Spirit. It's not that we have now solved the social-welfare state, because the social-welfare state is the arm of flesh effort to try and imitate something that we all, in our gut, think is probably a fair thing to do, to have everyone be on an equal plane and have every one deal with one another so that there are no rich and poor, or bond or free, but it doesn't work and it doesn't work, because to get where you need to get in order for the things to work, it has to be the heavenly gift. It has to be people in harmony with each other, because they are in harmony with the Lord. By getting in harmony with the Lord you find that, well, YOU are a lot more tolerable to others and others are suddenly more tolerable to you. Even defective others are more tolerable to you, if you're in harmony with the Lord. Because if you can see them as the Lord sees them -- they are beautiful, they are wonderful! Everyone you have ever met is a child of your Heavenly Father and if you

can get the heavenly gift then you stop seeing things through the lens of this world and you start seeing things as they really are.

Right now, the hearts of this nation — the hearts of this people — are harder, are more strident, are more resistant to — I mean, look, what's the tool? Gentleness, meekness, and persuasion — that's the tool. That's what you get to use. Why do you think the Savior took a beating and forgave them? I mean, he shows you the tool. He revolutionized the world, ultimately, simply because he was unwilling to return to brutality anything other than the kindness and the forgiveness that broke the hearts of anyone who hears the story of who this man was.

When He appears, you need to be like Him. Lay down the burden of guilt; lay down the burden of sin. Stop focusing on that stuff, and become like Him. And you become like Him by doing His works. And you do His works by serving others, by ministering to the needs of others. And when you do that, it is a natural by-product of that process, ordained by laws established before the foundation of the world, that light and truth will grow within you. You will **have** compassion when you minister **with** compassion to the needs of others. Your heart will open to—and receive within it—light and truth when your conduct reflects the same conduct as a merciful and holy and just God, whom you claim to worship. Worship Him by imitating Him. Worship Him by doing His works. Worship Him by making a living sacrifice. Set aside the junk that occupies you, and go do something that is holy for someone else. However mundane and trivial it may seem to you, when you relieve the suffering of other people, something changes in you. You become different. You become better. You become more like our Lord—because when you give whatever it is you giveaway, you get more in return. But make sure that what you give goes to relieve the suffering of others. **Relieve the suffering of others.**

You're going to have to finish that path. You're going to have to rise up. If you expect to be in His presence when He returns — and He is coming in judgment — then **you're** going to have to be like Him; because if you are not like Him, you will not be able to endure His presence. Take it seriously. Study it through. Seek to be like Him whom you worship. It is possible—not while you're carrying a load of sins that trouble you and worry you and distract you, but that's what the Lord will remove from you. He can take all of that away, but it is entirely up to you to choose **then** to do something to draw nearer to Him. He can't do that because that would violate your free will. **You** have to choose to be like Him. Although He may remove all of the stains upon you, you have to go forward and not stain yourself again, because He can't stop you from doing that. You're free to choose. Therefore, choose the better part.

The atonement isn't like Tinkerbell spreading some magic dust that will make you rise up. The atonement will erase your sins and mistakes, but **you** must rise up. **You** must acquire those virtues. The glory of God **is** intelligence. And repentance requires you to acquire that intelligence — that glory of God. And you acquire it by the things that you do in His name and for His sake. And those that are here with you in need, they represent Him. And when you do it to even the least of them, He will credit that as having been done for Him. And no good deed will be gone unnoticed with Him. He even notices when the sparrows fall. So is He not going to notice when your knee bends with compassion, praying for His mercy for someone that has offended you? And when you pray for those who have offended you, do you think for one moment that that doesn't change your own heart?

The reason to rejoice and be exceedingly glad when they “say all manner of evil against you falsely” is because it affords you the opportunity, with compassion (like our Lord, who forgave even those who were in the act of killing Him — not their brutality, but their ignorance; because when the day arrives that they see things aright finally, and they realize what offense they gave out — they had no intention of offending their Redeemer. They were carrying out the execution of a criminal. And so, He had compassion on them for their ignorance)—

You have compassion for all those around you who are ignorant. If you think you know a little more than them, then use gentleness and meekness to persuade them. Sometimes, what you try to persuade them of is going to offend them. Couple it with your own testimony of the truth. Don't let them simply go away offended. Let them know that when you give offense (and you surely will give offense), let them know that you did it because of your love for them, your love of God, and your faith in the things that God is doing. When you offend, do it kindly and while bearing testimony of the truth and with the compassion that should hail from a possession of greater light and truth or intelligence. They don't know what they're doing. They don't understand it yet. So help them.

The Lord is going to take care of the abominations that are out there. Our responsibility is to invite people to see a better way, to conceive of a higher and more noble way to live life. Our job isn't to rebuke and condemn and to belittle.

There are really two forces at work in all of creation. One force is generative, creative, and positive. It fabricates new things. It is ongoingly surprising and life-filled and wonderful. What's opposed to that are the forces of degeneration, decay, negativity, entropy, destruction. There isn't enough being done in order to bring that positivity, that creativity, that newness into this world. Even though children are born every day, and life starts over all new again with the birth of every new child, our minds are preoccupied by the forces of negativity and what opposes us. I could spend all day every day responding to negative

arguments and negative comments, and if I were to do that I wouldn't get anything new done, covered, accomplished, or out there.

When we take a message out to people about the restoration of the Gospel, the work of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, the offering of the Covenant, the expected coming Zion, there is no reason to deal with the criticism. It's going to collapse on its own. Here's a great bit of advice: If the criticism level would condemn Jesus Christ, then the criticism is the problem, not the object of the criticism.

Now understand, (this is secondhand, because I don't go there and do this) but my wife informed me that in some Facebook group there was complaining about the Prayer for the Covenant because that was "praying for to be seen of men." It's public. Okay, when Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our Father who art in heaven*", he did it publicly. It got reduced to writing. It's the most widely read prayer in all of western society. So if you are going to condemn, on that basis, the Prayer for the Covenant, you are going to have to condemn the Lord's Prayer and in turn condemn the Lord. If you can resolve criticism leveled at you by applying the test and saying, "Jesus would have failed that test, too," then you don't even need to respond to the criticism. But if they level criticism at you, and you look at it and say, "Jesus would have passed that and I would fail," then it's time to start saying, "Well, okay, then I need to clean up something in my own life." Because all of us deserve some level, we merit some level, of criticism and condemnation. We're just not perfect.

It's really hard to sit inside your own life and to be realistic about your own personal failings. We always tend to apply tests that are given in scripture outwardly and to say, "As long as I use persuasion and pure knowledge then I can beat you into submission and never yield the argument because I am doing what was said is the criteria." Gentleness—okay, I won't yell at you. Meekness—okay, I'll be polite enough to let you say what you have to say, I won't interrupt. Love unfeigned—okay, I love ya brother, I LOVE ya brother. Persuasion—okay, when I get my opportunity to present mine I'm going for the brass ring.

Wait a minute. What if that's God trying to get through to you? What if the way in which God is trying to persuade you is by the meekness of the humble Lord who speaks to us in plain humility; who comes to us, not to try and overawe us, but comes to us saying: "You are me in embryo. I know what it took for me to become the Son of God, and I know you can do it, too." What if the Lord is your greatest cheerleader, and he wants nothing more than to try and get you to be more like Him. You can't be more like Him when the center of everything is yourself and you never self-examine. We all deserve criticism.

D&C section 1, verse 31: *For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance* (see also T&C 54:5). So, contrast that with "I cannot look at myself without the

enormous latitude of allowance because I'm very forgiving of myself." You would be better off saying, "I will recognize, I will admit, and I will hold myself to every failing that I am prone to make. But as for all the rest of you, I don't see anything wrong with any of you. I can't detect a flaw in the least, because I'm gonna judge you with the standard by which I would like to be measured, which is: I take no offense; I freely forgive."

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #8 entitled "A Broken Heart" given in Las Vegas, NV on July 25th, 2014;
- His talk given at the "Zion Symposium" in Provo, Utah on February 23rd, 2008
- Denver's fireside talk entitled "Constitutional Apostasy", given in Highland, UT on June 7th, 2013;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #3 entitled "Repentance" given in Logan, UT on September 29th, 2013;
- His comments at the "Unity in Christ" conference in Utah County, UT on July 30, 2017; and
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #6 entitled "Zion" given in Grand Junction, CO on April 12th, 2014