

Podcast 136: Commune with Christ, Part 1

This is the first part of a special series where Denver addresses the question, "How can I commune with Christ?"

— — — —

DENVER: I got an inquiry asking: "I am interested in any thought you would be willing to share about why we were willing to sacrifice to come to this earth. I don't think that this earth is the only place in all of creation where one can learn to return to the presence of the Lord, so what is the purpose of the righteous in the preexistence coming here? Why not take an 'easier' route and go to a different terrestrial mortal state?"

Because we saw great benefit in coming. In fact, the opportunity was greeted with shouts of joy. (Job 38: 4-7.) Perspective from here is not the same as perspective from above. There is a required opposition in "all things." (2 Ne. 2: 11.) To ascend you must first descend. The path to the highest state runs through the lowest. (See, e.g., Moses 1: 18-20; see also JS-H 1: 15-17.) You will not see the Father and Son (D&C 76: 20-21) without also seeing the fallen angel cast out for rebellion (D&C 76: 25-26). Nor will you behold the Celestial Kingdom (D&C 76: 50-58) without also seeing the horror of outer darkness (D&C 76: 44-48).

To comprehend you must become acquainted with both glory and darkness. You cannot receive the one without also the other. Joseph put it this way: "Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God." (TPJS, p. 137.) You do not get to behold glory without also beholding the darkest abyss. There is a parallel to comprehension, a symmetry to understanding.

You came here to increase your understanding of truth, and to broaden your capacity to appreciate what is good. For that, you wanted and now are receiving, exposure to the brackets which allow your comprehension to expand.

You will eventually leave here. But you will depart with an expanded capacity which could come in no other way.

Read the perils through which Abraham passed, and know this was necessary for him to become the Father of the Righteous. There is no path back to heaven apart from walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Your understanding of eternal life will come from suffering death. Your appreciation of eternal glory will come from having been first composed of the decaying dust of this earth.

You wanted this. You shouted for joy when it was offered.

I read this before, and it belongs again right here. This is Joseph Smith, writing from confinement in Liberty jail. This is after Joseph has been confined in the Liberty Jail and had months of opportunity to reflect upon what it was that had gone on among the Saints while he was still free and living among them:

The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God. (A letter to the church signed by Joseph Smith Jr. and four others on 20 March 1839, from Liberty Jail, Clay County, Missouri; see also T&C 138:18-19)

Don't waste your time when you're with one another! Learn, study, testify, search the scriptures. Worship God.

That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. And again, verily I say unto you, and I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you; He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all. (D&C 50:2-26; see also T&C 36:1-5)

This is what we should be. This is how we should teach. This is how we should edify one another. This is how we should be preparing our children. This is what we should lay hold upon: truth, light, understanding, edifying, growing in knowledge of the principles of truth. You should not waste another three-hour block of time fiddling around with nonsense, because you don't have permission from God to do that. Preach the principles. And if you don't think you know enough to do anything else, get together and read the scriptures out loud. In the early church, when they... In this dispensation, when they got together, one of the things that they regularly did was they got together, and everyone prayed in turn. Everyone prayed. And the meeting would last until all had prayed. They called it a "Prayer Meeting," oddly enough. One of the early brethren didn't like that. He didn't feel like he could pray vocally around other people. There's a section in the Doctrine and Covenants admonishing him in a revelation that he needs to pray.

If you don't have any wisdom to impart to one another, get together and pray; get together and read the scriptures.

The work of salvation is not achieved by your ignorance and indifference. And the Gospel of Christ is not limited to making you feel better about yourself. Quite frankly, my wife and I marvel, all the time, at how unprepared and unworthy she and I feel in everything that has gone on. But—I know God. And therefore, because I know God, I am confident that you can know Him, too—absolutely confident that you can know Him, too; and that He will speak to any one of you, just as He spoke to Joseph Smith; and that He will answer any earnest seeker. No one is sent away disappointed.

Do you think the Lord, who would not turn away the blind and the halt, the crippled and the leprous— Do you think the Lord who, seeing the widow whose only son was being carried away dead and was moved with compassion to restore the life of that young man, so that she (in that circumstance, in that culture, in that environment)—she now had future security because she had a son to look out for her—Do you think that that Lord doesn't intend to answer the prayers of the earnest seeker?

My suspicion is that God has answered, and you've turned a deaf ear to much of what you've looked for because you want something other than the answers He's already given in the material that sits in front of you, unexamined. My suspicion is that if you would spend time looking into the revelations given us by the Prophet Joseph Smith (and studying the history, however perilous that may prove to be to you), that you will conclude that God's already had an answer to the inquiry that you've made, and that with a little effort, you can find it. And when you find it, you'll hear the voice of God saying, "There it is. Now was that so hard? [audience laughter] Why don't you keep going and see what else is in there for you." Because this stuff was given to us at the price of the life of a 38 1/2 year old young man and his older brother, whose blood was shed in order to restore what we now have in our possession. And we take it lightly, and we look away.

I could write my own Gospel. I could bear my own testimony. I could invent a new narrative about our Lord if it were necessary to do so. But I'll tell you, the only thing that is necessary is to open the scriptures and read them and to tell you: the things that we've looked at tonight are true—like Jacob.

In fact, if you go all the way back to Jacob chapter 6: And now, behold, my brethren, as I said unto you that I would prophesy, behold, this is my prophecy—that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive-tree, must surely come to pass (Jacob 6:1; see also Jacob 4:1 RE).

So here's the words of my prophecy: that the things that we have looked at this evening, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith—the seer named Joseph, the son of a father named Joseph—fulfilled the promise of Joseph of Egypt, and they are all true. And I know them to be true. And you can know them to be true, too. But the price you have to pay in order to gain that knowledge is to pay some attention to what it was that was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Otherwise, they're just something gathering dust on a shelf. Don't read them as if you're trying to vindicate the religion that you think that you already understand. Don't read them as if you're trying to defend your current group of preferred doctrines. Read them as if you are as ignorant of the will of God as the convert is that you hope to make living somewhere in Florida or New Guinea or Guatemala. Because the truth of the matter is that we have been devolving in our understanding, from the day of Joseph Smith until today, at an ever accelerating rate. And what we have left, Enoch called “gross darkness.”

I bear testimony that Joseph was a prophet. I bear testimony that our Lord lived and lives. I'm one of those who can say that I'm a witness of that. I have seen His suffering. I have heard His voice. He doesn't intend that I be a solitary witness of Him or Joseph be one. He intends for everyone of you to rise up and do as James bids you to do: if you lack wisdom, ask God. He gives to you—He gives to all of us—liberally. He's real. It is His work to bring this stuff to pass. The only thing that we can do is to offer to be a servant. And I am confident that I'm a poor one of those. But I am His servant. And I serve Him—however poorly, however offensively, however inadequately. He intends to call (in the plural) servants to fulfill what needs to be done in the last days. He does intend to bring again Zion. That will be His—and not a man's—work.

There is a great work left undone. The field has been abandoned and there is no harvesting taking place. We are all required to repent first, then to learn something before we attempt to teach others.

In doing the work I have been asked to do, I am relaying what I have been instructed needs to be taught to this generation at this time for the Lord's promises to be fulfilled. That requires time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thought to be given to the Lord's design. Although I do not consider myself equal to the task, I am nevertheless doing what little I am able to do as part of the Lord's work.

To the best of my ability, I seek only to lay out what should be noted about our present challenges. I do my best to avoid a fanciful, or flowery or heated imagination in discussing salvation. While others may do so, I do not intend to trifle with the souls of men.

Joseph Smith's counsel is appropriate and guides my thought on these things: “A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination beware of; because the things of God are of deep

import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity-thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men." (TPJS p. 137.) I have never trifled with men's souls.

I have never given any one permission to speak for me, use my name to support their cause, or advocate using me as their source to make their ideas or teachings credible. If someone has a good idea, it should stand on its own. It should be reasonable. If an idea is so weak and fanciful, then associating my name, Joseph Smith's name, or some general authority's name with it should not overcome the weakness of the idea. I do not believe in citing any authority other than scripture and Joseph Smith. Check the books I've written and talks I've given. Check my blog. There you can find what is true, taken from the authority of scripture. It is self-evident and capable of standing on its own. The truth I advocate is so self-supporting that I need to make no claim to authority.

Yes, doubt everything other than truth taken from the scriptures. They are the standard by which I teach.

Because this generation does not understand their precarious situation, they are unable to repent. But it is only repentance which can save some few souls. People are so quickly and easily drawn away from the challenge to repent before God into some other vain and foolish track. That is necessary, however, because in Joseph's day we failed in Kirtland, failed again in Missouri, failed in Nauvoo and then lost Joseph. In Brigham's day we failed in Salt Lake. The effort to save great numbers has not and will not work. There have always been comparatively few who have the patience and devotion to allow the Lord to do His work. Men and women charge into the upward pass and are slain by the beast who guards the way generation after generation, while God works patiently to save some few. In the meantime, if great numbers can be persuaded to wander off or charge impatiently, then so be it. Had they remained, they would have spoiled what lies at the top of the mountain. It is better, therefore, that they be taken in their vanity than to bring it with them into a society where such things would be ruinous.

King Benjamin is a more important topic for today than ever. But I get a flood of emails and comments asking about other, ridiculously extraneous things propounded by others using my name for credibility. You should already know enough to determine on your own the significance or insignificance of these side show issues. If you do not, then you deserve your confusion. You are on trial here. You must grow to stand on your own. Do not be dependent on me or any man for your knowledge of the truth. You must be able, by the power of the light given to you, to decide between truth and error, between what comes from God and

what is of men and devils. If you are unable to determine that for yourself, then relying on others will never qualify you to enter into the Lord's rest.

We have gotten to the reaction of King Benjamin's people to his sermon. They were brought to repentance. But we have not yet taken a look at the overall setting wherein King Benjamin taught. Nephi established a line of prophet/priests to whom was given the charge to teach the people. That line's work is recorded in the Small Plates of Nephi. At about the same distance in time from Nephi as we find ourselves from Joseph Smith, we read on the Small Plates of Nephi: "I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy..." (Omni 1: 11.) I've discussed this in Eighteen Verses.

The prophetic line ended in silence. Whole generations record only one verse, admitting their failure; then the Book of Mormon reignites with King Benjamin. After generations of dissipating the light and falling into darkness, he represents the return of the prophetic. He is a symbol of restoration, a type of how God reclaims His people when they err. By his day, the people were overcome again, and needed return to the faith that could save them.

But King Benjamin did not operate on his own. He taught only what had been given to him to teach by an angel. (Mosiah 2: 2-4; see also Mosiah 4: 1.) Because God renewed His covenant with King Benjamin, it was through King Benjamin that the people could once again make an acceptable covenant with God. The purpose of sending the angel to King Benjamin was not to offer him alone salvation, but to offer once again a valid covenant through which others could repent. (Mosiah 5: 5-7.)

This is how the Gospel works. Even the chosen people of Lehi and his son Nephi brought to the promised land failed to abide the conditions of the covenant. But God did not abandon them. When enough generations had passed to allow the Lord's hand to be revealed, then the Lord acted. The heavens were opened, the covenant was offered again, and souls were saved.

This is a great type. The Book of Mormon is far more relevant for our day than we imagine. It is a blueprint for how our own history is unfolding. It is a sobering lesson in how to fail and how to wait for the Lord to reclaim and redeem us.

We ignore or misunderstand the content of The Book of Mormon at the peril of our own salvation. When we do, then no one can be saved.

Increasing light inside our spirits lets us understand this creation. The search for truth is the search for light. In a dark room, many things are hidden from our sight by the darkness. Eyes cannot help you in darkness. You can feel carefully, and slowly with patience and

effort, you can discover chairs, and bookcases, and other things in the darkness. Yet you will not understand any colors, nor fully comprehend what is hidden in the darkness.

But in the same room, with the help of light, you can see everything. Even the colors of the objects are easily understood. There are many reasons why we do not see this creation clearly. There are many forms of darkness.

The standard of truth for today is the 1,000 year record of the people who migrated to the Americas. That record was revealed and translated in 1830. All truth from every part of the world should be measured by that record. Having a record does not mean you understand it. Like Lance who saw only what he expected to see in the forest, and like James who also saw only what he expected, we also read the The Book of Mormon to see what we want to see. You have different minds, a different culture, and different ideas in you. When you read our sacred books you see, understand, and interpret them from your vantage point. You can see what we do not. In the search for truth, we can help one another to see more of what is really there and to notice what is hidden from one point of view. The most accurate book of truth is still not fully understood.

We must all be willing to accept light when the gods offer it to us. The Book of Mormon tells us: “he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word. And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until they know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries.”

In verse 11 of the Seventh Lecture, in the middle there: And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. This is long before Nauvoo. Joseph is declaring the possibility of unification between God and man—the oneness of God and man. This is foreshadowing teachings that he will give in the King Follett Discourse, and it’s right there in the Lectures on Faith. The same is true in paragraph 13: He wanted his disciples, even all of them, to be as himself and [as] the Father: for as he and the Father were one, so they might be one with them.

This is marvelous language. It’s in the 1835 scriptures (that have been eliminated as a result of a committee in 1921—and it was removed without a vote of the saints, and therefore, I would suggest it belongs in your scriptures still).

Paragraph 15:

The glory which the Father and the Son have is because they are just and holy beings; and that if they were lacking in one attribute or perfection which they have, the glory which they have never could be enjoyed by them, for it requires them to be precisely what they are in order to enjoy it. [There's that word again—"precisely". 16:] These teachings of the Saviour [most] clearly show unto us the nature of salvation, and what he proposed unto the human family when he proposed to save them—That he proposed to make them like unto himself; and he was like the Father, the great prototype of all saved beings: And for any portion of the human family to be assimilated into their likeness is to be saved; and to be unlike them is to be destroyed: and on this hinge turns the door of salvation. (Emphasis added)

No human can be saved until that human is like God. There is so much you can do, in this world, that affords you the opportunity to be like God. There are mothers over here with little children. There's a child crying in the distance that has a mother with him. Every infant comes into this world in a condition of profound need. There isn't a mother alive who hasn't held a needy infant and not experienced the love of God because that child's existence is dependent upon her. Keep in mind that these opportunities exist everywhere—everywhere.

Still... (this is a long paragraph. This is paragraph 17, about—I don't know—a third of the way down):

It was a system of faith—it begins with faith, and continues by faith. And every blessing which is obtained in relation to it is the effect of faith, whether it pertains to this life or that which is to come. To this all the revelations of God bear witness. If there were children of promise, they were the effects of faith, not even the Saviour of the world excepted [the Savior was produced as an act of faith]... And through the whole history of the scheme of life and salvation, it is a matter of faith: every man received according to his faith — according as his faith was, so were his blessings and privileges, and nothing was withheld from him when his faith was sufficient to receive it.

This is the way in which God is no respecter of persons. This is the way in which you—if you will lay down your ignorance, if you will repent and turn to God—this is the way in which you can find yourself, also, the inheritor of blessings and privileges which God will not withhold from anyone who understands and gathers to themselves the light and the truth that comes through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

By their faith they could obtain Heavenly visions, the ministering of angels, have knowledge of the spirits of just men made perfect, of the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, of God the judge of all, of Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and become familiar with the third heavens, see and hear things which were not only unutterable, but were unlawful to utter. (ibid)

Later, Joseph Smith made a comment about—Paul said he knew a man who was caught up to the third heaven, but I know a man who was caught up to the seventh heaven (see DHC, volume 5). I'll give you the cite on that in the transcript. It is sufficient, however, if you commune with those beings.

Paragraph 18:

How were they to obtain the knowledge of God? (for there is a great difference between believing in God and knowing him: knowledge implies more than faith. And notice, that all things that pertain to life and godliness, were given through the knowledge of God;) the answer is given, through faith they were to obtain this knowledge; and having power by faith to obtain the knowledge of God, they could...obtain all other things which pertain to life and godliness. (Emphasis added)

It is knowledge that saves. Consequently, it is knowledge that you need to repent and obtain. "Knowledge saves a man," said Joseph Smith. "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge," said Joseph Smith (DHC, 4:588, 10 April 1842). Knowledge and salvation; knowledge and repentance—they are all related. But knowledge is not given so that you can take prideful advantage of the fact that you possess something. If you have it, it is given to make you a minister, a servant, someone the Lord might be able to employ in order to raise up others. Because if you can't elevate others, then you've failed in your effort to be like Him. He came to serve. You serve, too.

20: *To obtain the faith— and this is a ways into that paragraph, Because to obtain the faith by which he could enjoy the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, he had to suffer the loss of all things: this is the reason that the Former Day Saints knew more, and understood more of heaven, and...heavenly things than all others beside, because this information is the effect of faith—to be obtained by no other means. ...where faith is, there will the knowledge of God...also, with all things which pertain thereto—revelations, visions, and dreams, as well as every...necessary thing in order that the possessors of faith may be perfected and obtain salvation; for God must change, otherwise faith will prevail with him. And he who possesses it will, through it, obtain all necessary knowledge and wisdom, until he shall know God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has sent: whom to know is eternal life.*

That's the purpose of the Gospel—to give you knowledge. Therefore, the way to get knowledge is to repent. It's to search into, lay hold upon, and obtain for yourself knowledge that saves—not mere theory; not mere recitations of "these symbols in the temple endowment stand for this eight items, and that stands for this, and this stands for that." Trivia is not light and truth. Light and truth will exalt you. Trivia can make you prideful.

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's blog post entitled "Why Here," originally posted January 11, 2012 and subsequently recorded on February 13, 2021;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #10 entitled "Preserving the Restoration" given in Mesa, AZ on September 9th, 2014;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #4 entitled "Covenants" given in Centerville, UT on October 6th, 2013;
- Denver's blog post entitled "Themes, Truth and Scripture," originally posted March 12, 2014 and subsequently recorded on February 16, 2021;
- Denver's talk entitled "The Search for Truth", presented October 4, 2020 during the Search for Truth online event, originating from Kurayoshi, Japan; and
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #3 entitled "Repentance" given in Logan, UT on September 29th, 2013.