

Denver Snuffer Podcast 153: Persuasion, Part 3

This is the third part of a series about Persuasion, in which Denver discusses the role of persuasion in establishing Zion, how prophets have used persuasion in fulfilling their roles, and why no matter how good they otherwise might be, those who employ conflict, envy, strife, tumult and contention cannot be invited to the wedding of the Lamb.

DENVER: 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 Fourth chapter of Nephi. But before the Fourth chapter of Nephi picks up, the last verse of chapter 30 of Third 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 into the description that we're going to receive of 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 Fourth Nephi. In Fourth Nephi, [chapter 1] verse 2, it tells us that, all the people were *"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, you know, 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. Oh 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, you're a mess, **you**, not them, I mean it's not a matter of I 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 'em out.

So, after they manage not only to have the same faith and to eliminate from him 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 turf 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 encounter 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 fourth 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 eight chapters in 50 minutes.

When Joseph Smith restored Enoch's record (now found in Genesis), Joseph learned about the last days' Zion. It revealed, *And the Lord called his people Zion because they were of one heart, and...one mind, and [dwelt] in righteousness, and there [was] no poor among them* (Genesis 4:14 RE).

I do not believe this was their ancient goal, but it was a byproduct. Such a society cannot be organized but can be gathered. Individuals rarely are able to persuade one another through arguing to expose the other man's error.

Even among people who keep their eyes on the Lord and pay no heed to their neighbor's failure still must grow to become:

- People who refuse to judge and belittle others;
- Those who are humbled by the opportunity to build a house of God;
- Those who refuse to become an accuser.
- Even among humble people the Lord can use to restore His house, there will be many things on which to disagree. Therefore, we should ask ourselves:
 - What if I don't need to always be right?
 - What if you don't need to be wrong?
 - What if we don't need to debate?
 - Can people with different backgrounds be of one heart?
 - Can we have different ideas, value one another, and be of one mind?
 - Is it possible to disagree with one another about meanings of Scriptures and still dwell in righteousness?
 - Can we explore, consider, and respectfully discuss incomplete or inaccurate ideas?
 - What if *no poor among us* includes sharing the wealth of diverse and interesting ideas?

This path of sober, thoughtful, open welcoming of differences is the only way first steps can be taken. We cannot jump into Zion. We must crawl there on bended knee, asking the Lord to bring us there. He's given us a blueprint in the Answer and Covenant.

I am someone trying to understand and to teach truth with a recognition that the greatness of God dwarfs the capacity of any man to adequately convey to another. The best that we can do is to invite and to persuade and to say and to deliver constantly the message: Come, come and see for yourself. I believe that God will reveal Himself to everyone. The way in which He may reveal Himself at first may be very limited. It may be very small, but we ought to appreciate even that, and we ought to prize even that. By the time a person is given the opportunity to stand in the presence of God, they're not standing in the presence of God because God is trying to impress them or because God is trying to give them greater faith in Him. It's because, in all of the little ways in which God has previously revealed and made Himself known, the person has accepted with deep appreciation and humility and come to the recognition that we are all really, utterly dependent upon Him.

Within your family/within your marriage are you and your wife learning to use persuasion? Within your marriage are you and your husband learning to use gentleness in dealing with one another? Are the two of you, together, facing one another in all of the difficulties that come as a result of being married? Are you facing that together in meekness? Do you find that in all the relationship troubles, turmoils, and challenges what predominates is kindness? Is there a search for understanding that results in pure knowledge when it comes to a dilemma?

What the Lord wanted was to impart some intelligence about the scriptures so that understanding the scriptures they might be believing. And if they by being believing through understanding what the scriptures had to say about Him, they might then be able to move to where He would like them to go. He wanted them to understand how these things foreshadowed everything about His life.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

The Lord is going to leave them now. He's talked to them for seven miles, He's told them about the scriptures, and He's going to leave. He's going to leave unless something happens. They either constrain Him to stay with them and abide with them or He's gone. That ought to tell you something else about the Lord. If they hadn't constrained Him, He may very well have just left. Verse 29:

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.

That inspired a hymn, you know. So they have been walking, we don't know how long, but approximately seven miles, and the discourse says taken the better part of the day as they have walked. And towards evening they are getting ready to pull over. It may be that this was one of the reasons why Cleopas never attempted a reconstruction; it may have overwhelmed him even at the thought of trying to reduce to writing everything that was there, although that's the purpose of the Holy Ghost, to enable you to be able to do that. But we are the poorer for not having this talk preserved.

...And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake [it], and gave to them.

Now what does that sound like? Yes, it sounds like an ordinance. It sounds like the Lord has slipped seamlessly into the role of presiding High Priest and it sounds like, at the moment that He begins priestly officiating, these people are finally able to see what it is that's going on. The breaking of the bread is the signal to them for the opening of these disciples' eyes.

*And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, **Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?***

In *The Second Comforter* I wrote about their heart burning within them. Today I'd like to talk about the second part, which is not in that book: "While he opened the scriptures to us." I want to look at what would necessarily have been included in the talk that the Lord gave on the road to Emmaus as an example of what it is the Lord would have us understand, preparatory to our eyes being opened. We cannot now recreate that talk without revelation but we can, I think, isolate the things that are necessarily included within it in order for these people, who had just witnessed the events of the last few days, to understand. So what I want to do is turn to Moses and all the prophets and try and determine what was necessarily included in the Lord's remarks.

I'd like you to image as we do this a newly risen Lord in the throes of celebrating the resurrection, walking on a dusty back road and trying to persuade people that the scriptures testify of Him.

Some of the most interesting stuff I've ever been involved with are private conversations between me and my wife in which I am on the defense! Since I have no influence with her apart from being able to persuade, and since it is my constant requirement to persuade, to explain, it doesn't matter that there are some people out there who think I have some kind of big whammy influence. The truth of the matter is I believe it is absolutely required of me, every time, to persuade, to use gentleness and meekness, to demonstrate knowledge, and I do not cut myself any slack in requiring of me what I would expect of any man who advances a proposition and declares it to be true. One of the things my wife is constantly on the patrol for is: "Is this your opinion? Is this your best guess? Is this based on evidence that you've got, or does this come from the Lord? Because if it's any of those first things then shut up! But if it is that last thing, then help me understand, because that becomes touchy proposition and we want to be sure on that."

I do my best not to get any power over the flesh or, in other words, to put myself to the burden of persuasion. I've been trying to expound scriptures in everything that I've done, and I've been backed into a corner by the Lord on occasion and forced to say something that isn't just expounding scripture, and I hate that. I hate it when I'm put in that proposition. Because I would much rather tell you what is in the mind of the Lord using the body of scripture to persuade you so that, as one question asked over there: "Who are you?" that won't matter. It shouldn't matter. There is only one thing that matters: what does the Lord expect of us? What does the Lord expect of you? What does the Lord expect of me? Let's figure that out and then do that.

Which leads us then to the topic I intend to talk about tonight, which is The Mission of Elijah. We have a narrative on Elijah that you are welcome to accept. I'm going to explain only how I understand it. You are free to choose. You can "take the waters of life freely and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come." You don't need to come with me. You don't need to come with any man. You can be content as you are.

I observe the Sabbath as the day on which Christ was resurrected, as a symbol of his repair of the premature fall and the loss of the original day of rest, going back to the time of Adam and Eve. But yes, I keep the Sabbath. Now having said that, the original Christians would let you worship on Saturday and would let me worship on Sunday, because as long as you keep the doctrine of Christ and you accept the law of Christ we'll figure it out together over time and eventually one will persuade the other. Not perhaps by argument and debate but by the quiet example that persuades the heart that there's something more to be preferred in one than in the other.

Before asking if you have any questions, we have fourteen minutes before we have to wrap this up because we need to vacate this entire place on time, as I mentioned when we began. Let me end by saying that I do believe in the potential for the unity of Christians coming

together in one faith. I suspect that sitting here in this room, if every one of you were asked, “are you a Christian?” every one of you would respond, “yes.” And I suspect if I asked you to explain what denomination you were, that probably every one but you would tell you what’s wrong with your particular version of Christianity. I don’t think the measure of your Christianity is determined by whether or not I want to judge, condemn, dismiss, belittle, complain about, your version. The authenticity of your Christianity is reckoned in your heart and in your relationship with God, and if that’s authentic and if that’s sincere, how dare anyone question that? If I think I know more than you, and I have a better view of Jesus Christ and His atonement than do you, then I ought to assume the burden of persuading you. I ought to meekly tell you why you ought to have greater faith in something else; but to demand, and to insist, and to belittle, and to complain, quite frankly that’s exactly where early Christianity wound up when Christians were killing Christians because of doctrinal disputes. What kind of nonsense is that? Let’s not go there. Let’s accept one another as Christians, if any one of us says that they are a Christian, and then if you think you can improve their understanding, have at it, but let’s not dismiss, belittle, or discard.

The works of Abraham include all of these things:

- the seeking after righteousness;
- the willingness, indeed, the desire to receive commandments and to obey instructions, so that he might become a greater follower of righteousness;
- and then to go among those who were fallen and apostate (but who were attempting to mirror something they simply did not possess) and to bring to them news and light and truth and knowledge that could benefit them; so that what they were willing to receive, they could receive, but what they were not willing to receive did not need to be imposed upon them to their condemnation.

We have a delicate balance that we’re trying to achieve.

I mentioned all of the folks to whom I have presently spent my time attempting to persuade to accept greater light and truth. It’s a daunting effort. I began among the people that should **welcome** the idea that the Restoration (which is, obviously, incomplete) can and should move forward; and that if the original failure provoked divine ire for three and four generations, that they had now passed and the time had arrived in which it’s possible to now move forward. I went on from there to the Christians, and we’re now making efforts (me, primarily, behind the scenes) to reach out to the Lamanites (the remnant of Lehi) and to the Jews (the remnant that still identifies themselves with Israel). Don’t spare your own effort in that regard—because only a handful are laboring to accomplish what needs to be accomplished to fulfill the covenant.

So Joseph gets confronted with the dilemma of how you organize this thing. And Rigdon, who is trusted, and a confidante, and who has been provided to Joseph for good and sufficient reasons, to help Joseph in the new phase, gives the only kind of counsel one would expect from a restoration New Testament vantage point, and that is: Will Joseph inquire how that got structured, inquired how one might do that.

And so the form it takes is the form of a New Testament church. And Rigdon is looking for, and advising Joseph, and Joseph is praying for and undoubtedly having authentic revelations about how you rebuild a New Testament church.

And it didn't work.

And with time it managed to aggregate the very list of stuff I read you: popularity, influence, etc. It is the antithesis of *no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood* (D&C 121:41). Have priesthood? It's nothing. It's no power. It's no influence.

What do I do? Persuade, pure knowledge, invite, and entice—exactly as did the three men (Adam, Moses, and Christ), our Lord being chief of them, who held the greatest dominion in the history of mankind. That's what you do.

Christ taught this idea to the Nephites, which seems to be clearly taken from the Mother's wisdom:

And there shall be no disputations among you, as there hath hitherto been, neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there hath hitherto been. For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the Devil, who is the father of contention; and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger [against one] another, but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away. (3 Nephi 5:8 RE)

It requires strength to refrain from contention and disputes with froward and arrogant people. When we feel strongly that we are right or are firmly convinced someone else is wrong, it's difficult to bridle our tongue and meekly persuade without contention. But the Heavenly Mother possesses the strength required to look with compassion on our failings. She deals with Her offspring using good judgment and common sense. She is opposed to arrogance, and when we are arrogant, we offend Her.

How many religious arguments, even religious wars, have been caused because mankind is too weak to patiently reason together? The history of this world is a bold testimony of what weak and deceived men do when they reject wisdom.

At the time when Jesus Christ had living officials administering rites of the gospel, Paul was able to wrestle from heaven a dispensation. Using that dispensation, Paul became a dispensation head who did more, worked harder, and labored more abundantly in ministering to Christ's sheep and spreading the gospel than any other man we know of. Paul was not jealous of the others who knew Christ and had been called by Him to the ministry. But there is some evidence of fear and jealousy towards Paul for his success in obtaining an independent dispensation of the gospel.

Paul explained his diligence in spreading the gospel:

[I]n labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; of the Jews, five times received I forty save one; three times was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; three times I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; journeyings often, perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils by countrymen, perils by the heathen, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren; in weariness and labor, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; beside those things that are outside, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches. (NC 2 Cor.1:39).

Despite the opposition Paul experienced among believers and non-believers alike, he remained of a cheery disposition. "... I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content." (NC Phil. 1:6).

It is this kind of contentment that should be seen among people today. When God's people are stirred to anger with each other, then even God is against them. After the spot for a temple in Missouri was revealed, the people who went there polluted it by their jealousies and fighting. The unbelieving Missourians were used by God to expel them from the place they had hoped to build a temple. They were surprised the holy spot could be taken from them. After it was taken God explained why:

Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted and persecuted and cast out from the land of their inheritances, I the Lord have suffered the affliction to come upon them wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions, yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels. Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son, for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified. Behold, I say unto you, There were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them, therefore, by these things they polluted their inheritances. They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God, therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble. In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel, but in the day of their trouble, of necessity, they feel after me. (NC T&C 101:1-2.)

If the covenant with God is kept, then He will allow His house to be built. The covenant cannot be kept if there is jarring, contention, envy, strife, lustful and covetous desires. If we do the same as those who went before, we would pollute the ground again. I am thankful we do not yet have a place to pollute. It would be better to never gain a promised place for God's house than to take possession and pollute it.

The content Apostle Paul taught the believers of his day, "Let your consecrations be without covetousness, and be content with giving such things as you have; for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (NC Heb. 1:58).

If asked to carry a burden by God, do it willingly. If not asked, do not envy. Remember Alma's statement: *Behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish, for I ought to be content with*

the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me (Alma 15:12 RE). It is our common enemy who stirs us up to jealousy and envy rather than patience and meekness. Great works of God **fail because mankind will not wait on the Lord.**

To make the point clear for us, the record of these people explains: *There was no contention in the land because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people; and there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness* (4 Nephi 1:3 RE). All the negatives were missing because the love of God dwelt in their hearts.

Something else describes them: *And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God* (ibid). Consider those words carefully. You cannot be happier than by allowing the love of God to dwell in you. The happiest people who have ever lived did so by the profound peace they displayed, equality they shared, fairness they showed one another, and love of God in their hearts.

This is a description of our social opposites. Reviewing the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant, the Covenant, and the recent parable of the Master's House shows that the Lord is pleading for *us* to become *this*. It's not easy; it will require civilizing the uncivilized. However, it is necessary to become the wise virgins and the invited guests wearing the wedding garment.

Five of the virtuous virgins who were expecting the wedding party to arrive were, nevertheless, excluded. They were virgins like the others; but the others were allowed to enter, and they were not. They did not lack virginity. They did not lack notice. They were not surprised by an unexpected wedding party arriving. But they lacked "oil," which is a symbol of the Holy Ghost. They failed to acquire the necessary spirit with which to avoid conflict, envy, strife, tumult, and contention. To grow into the kind of people God will want us to welcome into His dwelling requires practice, experience, and effort. People have not done it. Devout religious people are not prepared to live in peace, with all things in common, with no poor among them. God is trying to create a civilization that does not yet exist.

It is a privilege for God to give guidance to help prepare His people. There has always been a promise from the Lord that those who inherit Zion will be given commandments from Him to follow. He declared:

Yea, blessed are they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel, for they shall receive for their reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth [it's] strength. And they...shall [also] be crowned with blessings from above, yea...with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time, [that] they...are faithful and diligent[ly] before me. (T&C 46:1)

Those who mock or criticize efforts to complete the Restoration are defining themselves as unworthy by their own words. No matter how good they may otherwise be, when they embrace conflict, envy, strife, tumult, and contention, they cannot be invited to the wedding of the Lamb.

The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's talk given at the "Zion Symposium" in Provo, Utah on February 23rd, 2008
- Denver's conference talk titled "The Heavens are Open", given in Hurricane, UT on March 22, 2020
- Denver's remarks given at the "Unity in Humanity" interfaith celebration, and online event held on June 7, 2020
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #9 titled "Marriage and Family" given in St. George, UT on July 26th, 2014
- Denver's talk titled "Christ's Discourse on the Road to Emmaus", given in Fairview Utah on April 14, 2007
- Denver's conference talk titled "Things to Keep Us Awake at Night" given in St. George, UT on March 19th, 2017
- His talk titled "The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered", given in Spanish Fork, UT on October 14th, 2011
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #2 given in Dallas, TX on October 19th, 2017
- Denver's conference talk titled "The Book of Mormon Holds the Covenant Pattern for the Full Restoration" given in Boise, ID on September 22, 2019
- Denver's remarks during the Conference Q&A session in St. George, UT on March 19th, 2017
- Denver's conference talk titled "Our Divine Parents" given in Gilbert, AZ on March 25th, 2018
- Denver's remarks titled "Keep the Covenant: Do the Work" given at the Remembering the Covenants Conference in Layton, UT on September 30, 2018
- Denver's general conference talk titled "Religion of the Fathers," presented at Aravada, Nevada on March 27, 2021
- Denver's conference talk titled "Civilization", given in Grand Junction, CO on April 21, 2019