

The Will of God
Men's Retreat
Morgan, UT
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I wondered at the venue until I realized it's a room full of horny animals.

...with some taxidermy, also.

There's a Lecture on Faith thing that we read—we pass over—and I want to look at it a little more carefully. This is from Lecture on Faith number six, and it's paragraphs five and six:

For a man to lay down his all, his character and reputation, his honor and applause, his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life also, counting all things but filth and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, requires more than mere belief, or supposition that he is doing the will of God, but actual knowledge, realizing that when these sufferings are ended he will enter into Eternal rest and be a partaker of the glory of God.

For unless a person does know that he is walking according to the will of God, it would be offering an insult to the dignity of the Creator were he to say that he would be a partaker of his glory when he should be done with [all] things of this life. But when he has this knowledge, and most assuredly knows that he is doing the will of God, his confidence can be equally strong that he will be a partaker of the glory of God.¹

See, I think there is this enormous desire to suppose that we're doing something, and what we're doing is good, and what we're doing is justified in God's eyes, and that He's going to—at the end—dispense for us some grandiose and wholly disproportionate reward for the trivialities that we have accomplished or done or said while we were here. But the solemnity of the last talk you just heard and the literal meaning of the words I just read from Lectures on Faith do not brook permissive, sloppy, casual following of the Almighty. It's imposing upon us something that is beyond supposition and beyond hope: it's knowledge.

So how do you obtain the ability to know—to actually know—that God is giving to you a message or giving to you an assignment or requesting some action be taken by you, not based upon your vague impression, not based upon your hope, not because you think it might be a good thing if you were to do this, but knowledge? How do you obtain that?

So let me read to you from the letter that was written in/from Liberty Jail when Joseph had been held prisoner. This was long into the imprisonment; he wouldn't be freed until after the lessons were learned that resulted in this letter. And when this letter got written and

¹ All Scripture references in this talk cite to the Restoration Edition of Scripture, including Covenant of Christ (CE).

sent out, it was almost a matter of “the work has been accomplished, the reflection has been obtained; the achievement of penetrating into the minds of Joseph and those that were fellow prisoners: what needed to be learned”—and now he could be released. So what did he learn? Well, listen to some of what he put into the letter. This is from T&C 138. I’m going to read from part of paragraph 17 and then all of 18:

...we would suggest the propriety of being aware of an aspiring spirit, which spirit has oftentimes urged men forward to make foul speeches, and influence the church to reject milder counsels, and has eventually been the means of bringing much death and sorrow upon the church. We would say, Be aware of pride also, for well and truly has the wise man said that pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall...

He’s saying this reflection about people who had been influential within the church and had held actual offices—including members of the Twelve, members of the local presidency, members of the high council in the area—that had betrayed and sent the church into the Missouri War and subsequently the surrender of Joseph Smith and others into captivity. “The propriety of being aware of an aspiring spirit...urg[ing] men forward to make...[bad] influence.” He goes on to say in the next paragraph,

*A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination be aware 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. Your mind, O man, if you will lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of eternal expanse. You must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God than the vain imagination of the human heart? None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. (Emphasis added)*

You know, we think about Joseph Smith’s remarkable achievements, but take one step back and think for a moment that Joseph had an encounter when he was (depending upon which dating you put to it) either 14 or maybe as much as 17 years old (but let’s say 14) when he encountered the First Vision. And then it was years later; he wouldn’t actually write the account that we have in Scripture (both LDS and our Scripture, because we have a couple of versions) that the visitation included *many other things...which I cannot write at this time* (JSH 2:5). So he has this experience, and in every account that he has ever given to us, the account is incomplete.

Nevertheless, he’d been reflecting upon it, and it was years before he then prayed to try and find out about his “state and standing before God” because he—due to his native cheery temperament—often engaged in the kind of cheerful behavior that was unbecoming what he viewed as a “dignified character representing God.” So he—years of reflection—then he prays, and after he prays, the room suddenly begins to get lighter and brighter, and finally a personage shows up whose countenance was above the noonday sun and who taught him for some time, reasoning from Scripture, not about Joseph’s state and standing (because I think that becomes self-evident when the ministering angel showed up), but to tell him

about the work of God and what God wanted—not what Joseph wanted; what God wanted. And then he goes on, after opening the Scriptures to him, to withdrawing and leaving Joseph alone.

Now, Joseph is somewhat thunderstruck and reflecting when the thing repeats itself again. And after repeating the first part of the lesson, he then elaborates and expands and adds yet more information and then withdraws, and Joseph's again left to himself. And then, yet a third time, the angel returns and rehearses what he has said before, and adds yet more information, and tells him there's a hill nearby where there are some records. And he sends Joseph on a mission to find that—not at that moment, but by commission, by obligation.

So Joseph finds it's occupied the whole night, and in the morning returns to labor with his father; only he finds himself so drained that he can't perform the work. And he goes—his father sends him home—he goes to leave, and he collapses on his way. The angel returns and again teaches him, tells him to go tell his father, which he does, and then he goes to find the plates.

All of this—all of this—had some profound effect on the understanding, the reflection, and the grasp that Joseph had that something was about to happen, that he would be involved, but that the thing that was to happen was far more important—and the message was far more important—than telling Joseph, “You're an important little lad, and you occupy the admiration of Heaven.” In fact, Joseph's condition is almost incidental. Heaven's got something to be achieved; Joseph is going to be involved; he needs to know something in order to equip him to be able to do what it is that Heaven needs to have done.

And so Joseph goes, and he locates, and he finds the plates; and he's about to grab them, and he's not only forbidden, he's struck down. He's not allowed to touch. The thing that will occupy a principal part of the mission that Joseph will occupy that first year, he's not allowed to touch, and he's dismissed—with a commission to come back the next year.

And so he returns again, and he receives further instruction; but he doesn't get the plates, and he's dismissed, and he's sent away again. And he comes back the next year, and he receives further instruction; he meets the same messenger. And he is again dismissed without possession of the plates, each year given some responsibility of something to take care of in the interim.

And then finally, after four years of this, with his wife in tow, Joseph returns and is given the plates—only because he had fulfilled a requirement that he return in the image of God, male and female. And so Joseph and Emma are entrusted with possession of the plates.

All of this—all of this—occurs before he ever attempts to begin the translation process. He'd even been given possession of the Urim and Thummim; he had looked into it (based upon command), he had seen things; all of this before he was entrusted with the translation of the Book of Mormon. *The things of God are of deep import, and **time**, and **experience**, and **careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts** can only find them out* (supra, emphasis added).

Well, we have this interesting statement about Jesus Christ given to us in what is T&C 93. (You should be able to remember this one because it was also once Doctrine and Covenants 93.) This is concerning John's testimony about Jesus Christ, so this is him speaking about Jesus Christ:

I, John, saw that he [meaning Christ] received not...the fullness at the first, but received grace for grace. And he received not...the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace until he received a fullness, and thus he was called, the Son of God, because he received not of the fullness at first...

Then there's this really curious statement about Jesus Christ and the description we've been given:

I give...you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fullness. (T&C 93:4,7)

So we are supposed to learn from the example of Jesus Christ to know who we worship, what we worship, and how we should worship.

I want to read to you another description of what Jesus Christ did and was and accomplished. Oh, this is the Book of Mormon version instead of the Covenant of Christ. I'll read it, too, in a moment:

*...after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led...even as Isaiah said, As a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Yea, even so shall he be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject unto death, the **will** [the WILL] of the Son being swallowed up in the **will** of the Father. (Mosiah 8:7, emphasis added)*

In the Covenant of Christ: *...the **Son's will submitting entirely to the Father's will.*** So when we read the New Testament, Jesus tells us repeatedly what it meant for Him to obey the Father. He's describing, in prophecy, about His death and then about what comes after His death, and about judgment, and so on; and concerning the resurrection, first, and then what He says about Himself:

...they who have done good, in the resurrection of the just, ...they who have done evil, in the resurrection of the unjust; and shall...be judged of the Son of Man. For...

...and this is the description:

*...for as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just. [But] I can of my own self do nothing, because **I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who has sent me.** (John 5:5, emphasis added)*

Well, Jesus also said, *I have many things to say and to judge of you, but he that sent me is true and I speak to the world those things which **I have heard of him.** ...**I do nothing of myself.** But as my Father has taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; the*

*Father has not left me alone, for I do always those things that please **him*** (John 6:13, emphasis added). *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but [of] the Father that dwells in me. **He does the works**. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me* (John 9:7, emphasis added). Then, when Jesus appeared to the Nephites, this is how Jesus introduced Himself as a resurrected being to the Nephites that He had appeared in a miraculous appearance to the group that gathered at the temple in Bountiful:

*Behold, I am Jesus Christ, of whom the prophets testified should come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drank out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which **I have suffered the will of the Father** in all things from the beginning.* (3 Nephi 5:4, emphasis added)

So Jesus Christ clarifies that He of His own self was nothing. It was only the Father. It was the Father who did the works. It was the Father who gave the commandments. It was the Father that told Him what to say. It was the Father's words that He was speaking. It was not Christ taking upon Himself the prerogative to do what it was that He did in His mission and ministry here.

So if we move from Christ and what Christ did to the earlier (perhaps second most respected) character in all of Scripture, Enoch, and we look at Enoch, we read this about him:

*And the Lord said unto Enoch, Go forth and do as I have commanded you and no man shall pierce you. Open your mouth and it shall be filled; **I will give you** utterance. For all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seems **me** good. Say unto this people, Choose this day to serve the Lord God who made you. Behold, my spirit is upon you; wherefore, all your words will **I** justify. And the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course, and you shall abide in me, and I in you. Therefore, walk with me.* (Genesis 4:2, emphasis added)

So the secret behind his astonishing accomplishments is not that Enoch was "all that." It's that God was "all that" and told Enoch exactly what to do, exactly what to say, just as He would later tell Jesus Christ exactly what to do, exactly what to say, so that God the Father could accomplish the work of redeeming souls through Jesus Christ and of saving those from the upcoming flood in the days of Enoch.

So then we have this about Enoch: *...he spoke the word of the Lord [he spoke the word of the Lord!], and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled — even according to his command...*

Okay, I'm going to put names here instead of pronouns:

...and [Enoch] spoke the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled — even according to [the Lord's] command—

...not Enoch. The Lord's command.

*...and the rivers of water were turned out of their course, and the roar of lions was heard out of the wilderness. And all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of...language which **God had given him.** (Genesis 4:13, emphasis added)*

There's power in the words of God. There's no power in the words of any man at any time in any generation—and Jesus Himself made it clear it was the Father's work.

Now, this is a description in the context of Melchizedek's life, but this is a description of a covenant God had made earlier with Enoch, but it appears in the context of a description of Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis, and so it's referring back to Enoch as an earlier event:

For God, having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself that everyone being ordained after this Order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course, to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God, to do all things according to [God's] will, according to his [God's] command subdue principalities and powers; and this by the will of the Son of God which was from before the foundation of the world. (Genesis 7:19)

So in the case of perhaps the two greatest characters, we have a clear statement that Jesus did what Jesus did because He was meticulously, scrupulously following what the Father told Him to do, and He spoke the words the Father gave to Him. And Enoch likewise did exactly the same thing. Understand, when Enoch was first approached by the Lord, he said, "I'm but a lad and slow of speech." He didn't feel himself to be the ideal character to be accomplishing anything, much less stand in the presence of God. And yet, the Lord used Enoch to accomplish that.

And if you're making a hierarchy (and some would substitute the next character for Enoch, but certainly within the same ambit), you put Moses up there because look: What did Moses achieve? Moses tore down the greatest empire that existed on Earth by going and visiting them with plagues. But if you read carefully the account, there wasn't a single thing that Moses did that the Lord didn't require him to go and to do and to say what was sent and what was done. In fact, Moses (in the account) makes it pretty darn clear that he didn't even view himself as a suitable candidate for any of this. So what do we get in the Book of Numbers as a description of Moses the great, the lawgiver—the guy whose statue appears not only in Rome, but in Washington, D.C. and in London as the great lawgiver—Moses, the imposing father of multiple religions: *Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men who were upon the face of the earth* (Numbers 7:22). It almost seems completely incongruent that you would have a man that brings the world's strongest empire to its knees, and yet he's the meekest man upon the face of the Earth.

There's an account in... I want to use the Covenant of Christ. There's an account (in Helaman) of Nephi, son of Helaman, who was entrusted by the Lord with the sealing power to be able to command the elements; and this is what the Lord said to him when he is called and given the commission:

*You are blessed, Nephi, because of the things you've done. I've seen how you've tirelessly declared the word I gave...to this people. You haven't been afraid of them and haven't tried to save your own life, but have tried to learn My will and to keep My commandments. Now because you've done this so tirelessly, I'll bless you forever. And I'll make you powerful in word and deed, in faith and works, so that all things will happen to you as you ask, since **you won't ask anything contrary to My will.** (Helaman 3:19 CE, emphasis added)*

And he goes, and he causes a drought, which results in a war that was then underway being incapable of being perpetuated because of the word of the Lord.

So what about us? This was a revelation that was given in 1831, pretty early on. It's in the T&C section 36:

*And again, truly I say unto you, ...I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you. For he that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, [nevertheless] he's [the] least and the servant of all. Wherefore, he is possessor of all things, for all things are subject unto him both...Heaven and on...earth: the life and the light, the spirit and the power, sent forth by the **will of the Father** through Jesus Christ, his Son. But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin. And if you are purified and cleansed from all sin, you shall ask whatever you will in the name of Jesus [Christ], and it shall be done. But know this, **it shall be given you what you shall ask.** (T&C 36:5, emphasis added)*

So you can ask for anything, and God will do it—but God will tell you what you're to ask for. We tend to think that great empowered characters in Scripture were given the kind of authority that the Gentiles long to exercise over one another; that you get to heal promiscuously whomever you would want to heal; that you get to cause whatever you would like to see happen; you get to have your prayers answered and your vain ambition gratified; and you get to have wealth and power and influence and notoriety. You don't get any of that stuff! You don't even get to keep your own life. You don't get to say anything you want to say. You don't get to teach anything you want to teach—even if it is given unto you to know the mysteries of God, you're *laid under a strict command that [you] **shall not impart** — only according to the heed and diligence [that others] give* (Alma 9:3, emphasis added). Everything when it comes to the things of God are more serious, are more confined, are more regulated than I suppose most now living could ever imagine.

It was God the Father that accomplished, through Jesus Christ, the Atonement; it was Jesus Christ who begged at the end for the cup to be taken from Him—nevertheless, not His will but the Father's will be done; how hard to bear, you know not. He submitted. The only way for a godly man—which was what I was asked to address—the only way a godly man can exist is in subordination to the will of the Father. Period. You may be able to keep your sense of humor, and you may be able to be irreverent on occasion; you just can't piss Him off.

Thirty-two... I'm gonna read that. Yeah. See, there's... *It is given to some to have [miracles] to be healed, ...[it is given to others] to have faith to heal. ...given the working of miracles,*

...others...given to prophecy, ...others [to] discerning of spirits. ...some to speak with tongues (T&C 32:5), but all these things are done according to the will of God. So on occasion we get to be present when a miracle happens, and on occasion we get to be a participant—but by voicing the will of God. And in voicing the will of God, a miracle occurs, but the miracle does not happen because we have power; it happens because the power of God was employed to accomplish God's will, and we were permitted to be present at the moment when it happened.

Well, there are some things that were forbidden from teaching, but there are also some things in which people cannot be taught: They can't be taught because they can't hear, and they can't hear because they have their own agenda. They're more troubled and interested by vain and foolish questions than they are interested in being taught about something that would matter.

The moment we live in is really serious, and in the moment, we have challenges that we're facing which combine throughout the world in order to try and prevent the overthrow of the kingdom that has been established here by "the God of this world." He enjoys such overwhelming influence and cultural power and wealth that everywhere you look, there is very little hope of salvation; there is very little sober-minded appreciation of the things of God; there's very little understanding. We're called upon to break against that and establish something which, in the history of the world, has been achieved only on two occasions—and the second one was directly related to and derivative from the covenant that existed before the flood, which allowed Shem (on the other side of the flood) to finish the work and hand it off to Abraham and then lay hold upon the promise that he deferred from being able to join Enoch and avoid the flood. So really, when you get right down to it, it happened once, and it happened once in two stages.

And so now here we are again, getting ready to accomplish it again with us/with this group—with this group that includes such insufferable stupidity that there's some kind of vandalism going on in a bathroom here, during a men's retreat. What do you think the odds are that you're not going to ignite like a match-head if you're that sort of character when the Lord appears in His glory? What makes you think that your light-mindedness and your foolishness and your evil speaking of the Lord (and evil speaking of others that He has, on occasion, asked tasks to be performed by), what makes you think that the Lord will look lightly upon any of that? How sober and how serious ought we to be? In saying that, I'm not saying we need to be humorless, because a lot of the things that are most difficult to bear are born with a sense of humor. Christ was not just affable; He had a sense of humor. We read Him as this, you know, Baptist minister instead of the character that He really was. That incident—you've probably seen it portrayed in *The Chosen*—but in that, they turned it into some gripping moment. When He was shown the coin, you know: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" And He asked for a coin, and He looks at the image, you know: "Whose name and image is on this?" That comment was actually a wry joke; the people who were present laughed. It was funny. "Well, give him back his stuff!" That was light-hearted, and we turn it into—particularly in *The Chosen*—we turn it into something other than it was.

Look, accomplishing the will of God is not to be done haphazardly, insincerely, and without deliberate, careful, solemn thought. I don't blame people for their light-heartedness, which I

believe to be a good thing. But I think light-mindedness is another thing. It really does take focused attention and hard pursuit to accomplish the things that God has accomplished, on occasion, through others. There's never been a great man. There have been a number of great servants who have faithfully done what the Lord has asked; and the Lord, through faithful servants, has accomplished remarkable things.

So now, here's the rub: He's going to accomplish really remarkable things before the Second Coming. You can be part of that if you'll just measure up, if you'll just submit to His will, if you'll just carefully, solemnly—not perfunctorily, not rapidly, not quickly—if you'll just soberly and carefully approach learning the will of God (because you can't do anything that conforms to God's will if you don't understand what the will of God to be).

We have a set of the greatest Scriptures that have ever been entrusted into any generation since Father Adam's Book of Remembrance—but we got 'em. How much time do you spend searching and parsing them? You know, I think it was a profound and inspiring event when the bishop and the Sunday School president came over to my house in Pleasant Grove on the first day of the ninth year, following a commission that a ministry would begin, and so, “[I] must prepare.” And I became then a gospel doctrine teacher, and I taught the four standard works through, over and over and over again, in Pleasant Grove and Alpine and Sandy, Utah, in multiple wards. I never escaped the role of the gospel doctrine teacher; it just hung over me like, uh, like flies on a cow, now that I think about it. It just was persistent. It required me, and... And I get easily bored; I would not teach the same lesson twice. It's like, I hate the idea of giving the same talk twice; if I don't change the talk, if I don't change the lesson, it bores me. And so I searched deeper and deeper into the material every time I went through the standard works until when they asked me to become a graduate institute teacher for the law students at the University of Utah, and they said, “For graduate institute, there is no curriculum; the teacher gets to teach whatever they want.” I picked up the Book of Mormon, and for two-and-a-half years—they asked me to teach for a year; at the end of the year, they asked me to stay on another year; at the end of that year, they asked me to keep going, and I agreed, at that point, to keep going until they called a new teacher, and they never did, so I quit after two-and-a-half years of that, and they had to call someone—but for two-and-a-half years I taught the Book of Mormon. I think we got into the start of Second Nephi after two-and-a-half years of studying the Book of Mormon, beginning in the first verse, because what I have learned is: For the Book of Mormon/Covenant of Christ, for that book, the more you bring to read the text, the more that text is going to tell you. You can find shocking material inside the Covenant of Christ if you'll bring enough with you to employ when you read the text. It is a fountain to be drunk from; it's a Urim and Thummim; it's an ongoing revelation. But it requires careful and solemn and ponderous thought to find it out.

I believe every one of you is capable of it, particularly the younger people who still, at this point in life, have an opportunity to set a course that is more sober-minded than the course that many of the fathers here have set for themselves. I think there is remarkable things to be accomplished, frightening things to be done, extraordinary enemies to be defeated. But I can tell you (based upon a recent flood in Nepal), I can tell you that the forces of nature can overwhelm anything that any military on Earth can throw at it, if the forces of nature are

employed by the Almighty to accomplish His protection. I think in the revelation to us, the Lord has referred to what He intends to do to protect the people of Zion: I think He calls it a “pavilion,” which, you know, sounds as if it might be somewhat flimsy. But if the pavilion is just a safe space over which God’s hand looks, and if outside the pavilion what you have looks like what happened in Nepal, it’s okay to just be protected by a mere pavilion provided by God.

My, um, all the women in my family—my daughters, my daughters-in-law, my wife—all the women have a book club where they read some oftentimes scandalous material, and then they have a meeting once a month (on Zoom). And they were holding a book club meeting, and I interrupted onto the screen of the Zoom where they were holding it in the family room, I interrupted and said hi to all the ladies out there in the family, and someone asked how I was doing. I said, “Oh, just having a horrible week. I just got back from kayaking in Nepal.” There wasn’t a single chuckle, and I thought, “Oh, it’s too early; it’s just...”

Anyway, look: We’ve got an unachievable, absolutely impossible assignment that we’re supposed to fulfill, and it is utterly, completely hopeless to think we can. The only reason that it is going to be accomplished is because the Scriptures tell us with God all things are possible; we just need to have God’s will fulfilled by us. With that, it’ll happen, can be done. It’s not only possible (because of what the Lord has told us), it is inevitable. So the question is: Will you or won’t you submit to the will of God and participate? Or will you instead choose to be swept away, because sweeping away is certainly also prophesied and on the agenda.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.