

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: GOD'S VISION FOR SOCIETY IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Jennifer C. Lane

The Lord has commanded us to seek “first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). Just what the kingdom consists of, however, has been hotly debated in Christian theology. A long line of Christian interpretation has emphasized the otherworldly nature of the kingdom, removed from temporal concerns. More recently, some have argued that Christ set out ethical demands in order to form a just and equitable society on earth.

As we seek to understand the “kingdom of God” in Matthew, we have a tremendous resource in the Book of Mormon’s Sermon at the Temple. Cross-textual examination and other parallel examples and teachings in latter-day scripture expand our understanding of the phrase. I argue that the Book of Mormon setting, combined with Restoration examples and teachings, resolves a seeming dichotomy between the kingdom of God as either a personal spiritual state or a social goal of human equity.

Jennifer C. Lane is an associate professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University—Hawaii.

TEXT AND INTERPRETATIONS

The phrase “seek ye first the kingdom of God” occurs approximately two-thirds of the way through the sermon as found in Matthew. The text is identical in the parallel account in 3 Nephi 13, with the absence of one phrase.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

~~(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)~~ [not in 3 Nephi 13] for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:31–33)

The deletion of the phrase “For after all these things do the Gentiles seek” makes perfect sense in a New World setting in which the goals of Nephite believers would not be set in contrast to those of the Gentiles. But, other than that phrase, it would not seem that the textual comparison of Matthew 6 and 3 Nephi 13 has much to offer in elucidating this point.

What we have instead is the Book of Mormon context of the Sermon at the Temple in relationship to Christ’s establishment of his Church and the profound changes that covenant and conversion wrought upon the Nephites and their society. We can develop a fuller appreciation of this contextual clarification of the Savior’s injunction to “seek . . . first the kingdom of God” with a sense of the debate over this question in Christian theological circles. As is so often the case with the Restoration, we have the answers but may not realize it because we do not even know what the questions are. The fuller meaning of the kingdom of God can stand out more clearly in the text of the Book of Mormon when we realize that it was lost.¹

Asking the questions. Starting in the early twentieth century, thoughtful Christian theologians were troubled by the disconnect they felt between the religion they were being taught and human suffering they saw around them. They began to ask what kind of kingdom Jesus came to establish. The idea that one could ignore human wretchedness and still consider oneself a good Christian increasingly grated on this new era of

theologians. While these concerns were not unique to the twentieth century and have echoes in calls for reform throughout Christian history, it was at this point that widespread theological shifts took place. While the scope of this paper prevents an elaboration of this point, it is essential to keep in mind that throughout much of Christian history the dominant view held that salvation and the kingdom of God were spiritual in nature, removed from people's physical well-being. Thus one could save a soul and leave the body in poverty. There had been efforts at different times to address concerns with poverty, the wealth of a particular church, or wealth distribution, but they often were seen as radical or heretical, threatening to challenge the social order that was divinely appointed.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, theologians began to reread biblical texts and rethink the message of Jesus and the kingdom. Rather than seeing the gospel message as calling for merely spiritual change, they insisted on the social implications of this call. Two of the most influential writers in shaping the twentieth-century shift toward an understanding of an earthly kingdom are Walter Rauschenbusch (*A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1917) and Albert Schweitzer (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1910). Their concerns both mirrored and influenced broad changes in how scripture was understood in the twentieth century. The Social Gospel movement, followed later by liberation theology, continues to have a very important voice in explaining the mission of Christ and Christianity, particularly among progressive, socially conscious Christians.

Rauschenbusch spoke in 1913 about his own struggles with Christianity as it was presented to him and how it did not address the material needs of human beings.

The church held down the social interest in me [referring to the goal of social justice]. It contradicted it; it opposed it; it held it down as far as it could. . . .

I now had that large social outlook, and how was I to combine the two things? I needed a unity of life—faith. A real religion always wanted unity. . . .

And so my desire was for a faith that would cover my whole life. And where was I to find it? The ordinary religious conception seemed to cover only some part of it. "Christ died for a sinner. He

can be saved again by justification. He can be regenerated. After that, he can be sanctified. Finally, he will die and go to heaven.” Yes, but where does the social question come in? Where does the matter come in of saving the world? That does not seem to have any place there, does it? And that was the real difficulty of my thought all the time—how to find a place, under the old religious conceptions, for this great task of changing the world and making it righteous; making it habitable; making it merciful; making it brotherly.²

These concerns led Rauschenbusch to develop the influential theological movement known as the Social Gospel. He comments that he found the unity he was seeking for as “the idea of the kingdom of God offered itself as the real solution for that problem. Here was a religious conception that embraced it all.”³ Rauschenbusch sought to expand upon Christ’s teachings about the kingdom of God, which he described as follows:

The kingdom of God, my friend, is a social conception. It is a conception for this life here of ours, because Jesus says: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” here. It is something that is here on this earth. . . . It cannot be lived out by you alone—you have to live it out with me, and with that brother sitting next to you. We together have to work it out. It is a matter of community life. The perfect community of men—that would be the kingdom of God! With God above them; with their brother next to them—clasping hands in fraternity, doing the work of justice—that is the kingdom of God!⁴

From this era, many Christian readers of this text and of the Sermon on the Mount in general have read Christ’s call for the establishment of the kingdom of God as a call to establish a just society, focusing on economic justice and equity.⁵ For some this equation of the “kingdom of God” and a just society has led to great disappointment because Christ called for and promised the establishment of the kingdom of God, which did not materialize.⁶

Traditional LDS interpretations. This sense of frustration tied to understanding the “kingdom of God” in temporal terms has generally not

been followed by LDS commentators because of the Restoration understanding of the kingdom of God as the Church on the earth, established through the delegation of priesthood keys. The Lord spoke unto the early Saints in this dispensation, clarifying the sense to which the Church and kingdom are synonymous: “Lift up your hearts and rejoice, for unto you the kingdom, or in other words, the keys of the church have been given” (D&C 42:69). We see the same parallel in section 90: “And this shall be your business and mission in all your lives, to preside in council, and set in order all the affairs of this church and kingdom” (D&C 90:16). The restoration of priesthood keys allows Christ’s servants to preside over his kingdom upon the earth, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In addition to acknowledging the Church on earth as the kingdom of God, we also frequently refer to the celestial kingdom as the “kingdom of God.” For example, “the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God” (1 Nephi 15:34). We know we are saved in the kingdom of God through repentance and faith (2 Nephi 9:23) and that through the grace of God we will be raised “from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that [we] may be received into the eternal kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 10:25). We also know that we must apply the Atonement in order to “have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white” (Alma 5:24). Both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants repeatedly equate salvation and the kingdom of God: “If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation” (D&C 6:13).

Is there more? But are the Church and personal salvation all that are meant by the “kingdom of God” in the Sermon on the Mount—or is there something more suggested here beyond our personal spiritual well-being and status in God’s Church and celestial realm? Clearly the identification of the “kingdom of God” as both Christ’s Church and celestial kingdom are very important doctrinal points that we want to preserve. It is, however, telling that, like Rauschenbusch, the early Saints in our dispensation saw themselves struggling against false ideas of God’s kingdom

that precluded a temporal dimension. President Wilford Woodruff commented: “Strangers and the Christian world marvel at the ‘Mormons’ talking about temporal things. Bless your souls, two-thirds of all the revelations given in this world rest upon the accomplishment of this temporal work. We have it to do, we can’t build up Zion sitting on a hemlock slab singing ourselves away to everlasting bliss. . . . This is the great dispensation in which the Zion of God must be built up, and we as Latter-day Saints have it to build.”⁷

Rauschenbusch’s dismay with a religious view that privileged the spiritual dimension of human life and ignored the realities of human suffering sought for resolution in a unity of vision, a vision of the kingdom of God on the earth.

Part of the underlying frustration that Rauschenbusch and other like-minded theologians may have been struggling with is the tendency toward a dichotomy of spirit and body in Christian thought. These Platonic-influenced visions that prioritized the welfare of the soul and minimized the importance of human physical desires and comforts had found expression in Christian thought and practice since the earliest Christian monks sought after the path of asceticism in their quest to follow an angelic life and subjugate the body. God was understood as spirit, so the things of most importance therefore must be the things of the spirit. Likewise, his kingdom could only be understood as a kingdom of spirit.

In seeking after the things of the spirit, the needs and comforts of the body were sacrificed as distracting. Marriage relationships, families, homes, wealth, and any human comforts were seen as temptations, luring away the spiritually minded from seeking a higher life. While the monastic and ascetic tradition continued throughout Christian history, the understandings of the human spirit as hindered by the body never took their fullest and most radical expression in most of Christian thought because the doctrine of the resurrection of the body was maintained. While God’s nature was understood as spirit, it was accepted by orthodox Christians that he had created the earth, and therefore it must be good. Likewise it was maintained that human beings were created in the image of God and they would regain their physical bodies in the Resurrection. The prioritizing of the spirit over the body, however, and the fundamental sense of

tension between the needs of the body and the spirit continued within the traditional religious viewpoint that was rejected by Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel movement he founded. Again, his concern was that

a real religion always wanted unity. . . .

And so my desire was for a faith that would cover my whole life. And where was I to find it? The ordinary religious conception seemed to cover only some part of it. "Christ died for a sinner. He can be saved again by justification. He can be regenerated. After that, he can be sanctified. Finally, he will die and go to heaven." Yes, but where does the social question come in? Where does the matter come in of saving the world? That does not seem to have any place there, does it?⁸

In the early twentieth century, a vision of the seeking the well-being of the spirit alone could not satisfy.

Restoration synthesis. The unity for which the Social Gospel theologians sought had been revealed to Joseph Smith decades before their writings. The theological premise of the dichotomy of spirit and body against which they struggled was fundamentally undermined by revelations given to Joseph Smith. He learned that God himself was embodied and that the soul was not just spirit, but rather spirit and body united together (see D&C 88:15). These theological insights into the unity of spirit and body have significant implications for the importance of the physical, embodied dimension of human existence. The religion of the Restoration could not focus on the well-being of the spirit alone but also bodily, temporal welfare in caring for the life of the soul. The implications of this vision are articulated by President Joseph F. Smith: "It was the doctrine of Joseph Smith, the original revelator of 'Mormonism,' that the spirit and the body constitute the soul of man. It has always been a cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints, that a religion which has not the power to save people temporally and make them prosperous and happy here, cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually, to exalt them in the life to come."⁹

This integrated view of temporal and spiritual salvation is a dramatic departure from the long-standing tradition of focusing on salvation as a spiritual concern, divorced from material concerns. This vision of

integrating the establishment of the Church on earth and the establishment of Zion, a temporal manifestation of the kingdom of God, is one of the featured messages of the torchbearer of the Restoration—the Book of Mormon.

The fuller meaning of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount teaching to seek first the kingdom of God is vividly illustrated in the Book of Mormon context of the Sermon at the Temple. Here we see the kind of society that is produced from people truly living the gospel, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This Zion society clearly includes a direct relationship with other people’s temporal situations rather than merely being limited to individual personal righteousness aside from the problems of the poor. From putting together the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12–14 and the establishment of Zion in 4 Nephi, we can learn that seeking first the kingdom of God will have a direct relationship on establishing a society of social justice and general economic well-being, where there will be “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM: AN ORDERED PROCESS

Our understanding of the doctrine of the kingdom of God as taught in the Sermon on the Mount finds additional clarity from both the social context of the Sermon at the Temple and also additional teachings in Restoration scripture. The dual dimension of the kingdom of God to include our spiritual conversion and addressing the temporal needs of others is clearly manifest in two important restoration descriptions of Zion, 4 Nephi and Moses 7. In addition to these narrative passages, which illustrate the ordered relationship of conversion and meeting the needs of others, we can see this principle explicitly taught in Jacob 2. After considering the implications of these Restoration insights on the fuller meaning of the kingdom of God, we can see how latter-day prophets and apostles have stressed the same integrated vision.

After the Savior established the Church in 3 Nephi, it took some time for the process of conversion to spread through the entire people. When we reach 4 Nephi, what we see is the end result of a great deal of work from the converted Saints to extend the spiritual and temporal blessings they enjoyed.

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. (4 Nephi 1:2–3; emphasis added)

As is well known, the conversion of the people changed their nature and their relationship with each other. A new kind of society, the society of a kingdom of God that Rauschenbusch envisioned, had developed among them. This kind of society without poor is explained as coming from a change of heart in individual people. It is significant that its participants are described as “heirs to the kingdom of God.”

And it came to pass that 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; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but *they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.*

And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land. (4 Nephi 1:15–18; emphasis added)

The kingdom of God was established among the Nephites in both temporal and spiritual ways. This vision of Zion as the kingdom of God on the earth is inspiring. It may seem so inspiring as to be beyond actual human aspiration, but the fact that the Lord shows us the pattern for seeking his kingdom in multiple sites in restoration scripture suggests

that he takes the establishment of Zion and the command to build the kingdom of God on the earth very seriously.

We see this same pattern of both personal conversion and social equity in the archetype of Zion, the city of Enoch in Moses 7. Here again, the scriptures teach a pattern that privileges neither the temporal nor the spiritual aspects of the kingdom. Instead it shows how they are inseparably connected—converted hearts reach out to others who have genuine needs and change the temporal conditions in which they find themselves.

The fear of the Lord was upon all nations, so great was the glory of the Lord, which was upon his people. And the Lord blessed the land, and they were blessed upon the mountains, and upon the high places, and did flourish.

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.

And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even ZION. (Moses 7:17–19; emphasis added)

The relationship between developing this personal change of heart and seeking for the good of others, working toward having no poor, is the shared feature of both the Nephite and city of Enoch narratives.

This integrated principle of the kingdom of God is clearly developed in Jacob 2. Here Jacob is speaking to a covenant people who are falling into the sin of pride and setting their hearts upon their riches. He knows that there are many who need temporal help, but his call is not simply about social justice or changing the world. Jacob knew that only people whose hearts are changed through the power of the Atonement of Christ will be able to fully realize the kingdom of God on the earth. Here we see one of the clearest teachings about the ordered relationship of spiritual and temporal efforts.

Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted. (Jacob 2:17–19; emphasis added)

Jacob understands that seeking for the kingdom of God will include blessing those in need, but tells them that “before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.” This might be taken to argue that the kingdom of God is separate from temporal and material concerns. I would argue that, instead, Jacob recognizes that there must be an ordered relationship in the spiritual and temporal dimensions of establishing the kingdom of God.

Jacob explains that seeking for the kingdom of God will lead to obtaining a “hope in Christ.” It is essential to understand this hope in Christ in order to see how it directly leads to temporal results in blessing the lives of others. The exact phrase is found only in 1 Corinthians 15:19, a passage which also touches on both mortal and postmortal dimensions of Christ’s role. In his witness of the reality of the Resurrection, Paul asserts that “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” This would suggest that hope in Christ does have implications for the afterlife and Resurrection and cannot be limited to a vision of a mortal kingdom of social justice alone. This connection between hope in Christ and personal assurances of a glorious resurrection are clear from Mormon’s commentary in Moroni 7: “And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise” (Moroni 7:41).

So, having established that hope in Christ is connected to the promise of a glorious resurrection through faith in him, what do we make of Jacob’s assertion that after obtaining a hope in Christ we will be seeking riches “for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted?” Isn’t obtaining a hope in Christ precisely about our own postmortal, celestial glory and thus falling right into the dichotomy Rauschenbusch observed: “‘Finally, he will die and go to heaven.’ Yes, but

where does the social question come in? Where does the matter come in of saving the world? That does not seem to have any place there, does it?”

If we were to see hope in Christ as merely a matter of preparing our own personal mansion on high, then we have fundamentally misunderstood the Restoration vision of the celestial kingdom and exaltation—we are subtly buying into the traditional view of heaven divorced from the life that we are living here. We are buying into a kind of dualism that can separate what we will get in eternal rewards from who we are with other people.

If we have this vision then we are missing out on what it means to be a celestial person here and now—someone who has received the divine nature through the Atonement of Christ, someone who is living to serve others just as God does (see Moses 1:39). In Moroni 7, Mormon clearly develops the relationship of faith in Christ, obtaining the hope of a glorious resurrection through that faith, and, ultimately, obtaining charity through the power of Christ as well. Without this charity, the pure love of Christ, we are nothing. Our faith and hope are vain. But with the grace of Christ and the gift of charity we “may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48). That is the hope—to be like him, to love like him, and to serve like him, now and throughout eternity.

Being filled with this love is part of the fruit of personal conversion that Jacob is asking us to seek first. He promises that if we seek first the kingdom of God—obtaining a hope in Christ—that the Atonement will produce a change of heart that will shape our desires. So that, if, after experiencing a change of heart through Christ, we do feel impressed to seek riches, our motives will be pure and consecrated to the building of the kingdom: “if ye seek them . . . ye *will* seek them for the intent to do good” (Jacob 2:19; emphasis added). This ordered sequence of seeking Christ first and then seeking to bless his children is not only wise, but essential. Seeking Christ first will finally be the only way that we will be able to experience a change profound enough to truly bless others without

our own interests crowding out the moral and ethical demands to care for our neighbors.

Jacob's teaching and the examples in 4 Nephi and Moses 7 highlight this connection between conversion and motivation. These integrated visions of the kingdom of God feature converted souls, having obtained a hope in Christ, who then focus on meeting the needs of those around them and changing their lives. This ordered relationship can inform our reading of "seeking first the kingdom of God" in the Sermon on the Mount. Jacob's injunction to "seek . . . for the kingdom of God" *before* seeking for riches directly parallels the Savior's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 6, the Savior acknowledges people's concerns about their own food and clothing (the things for which we seek riches) (v. 31) but admonishes them "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (v. 33). Christ is not saying that we and other people do not need food and clothing, but instead he is teaching that by seeking for him first we will then be able to live in the world with our needs and our brothers' and sisters' needs in a different way.

Christ's teaching about seeking first the kingdom of God is specifically prefaced by the question of what we love and serve the most. He emphasizes that we need to put him first: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Riches assure us comfort and security, and we need faith and charity to want to share them. As Christ rather than mammon increasingly becomes our master our relationship to riches changes: "after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good" (Jacob 2:19).

Isaiah prophesied of a day in which the Lord "will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Isaiah 13:12). That day occurred during the Zion of 4 Nephi and the city of Enoch. It can increasingly occur in our day as we are changed by obtaining a hope in Christ and then go about to change the world. This change is precisely the vision that President David O. McKay foresaw as the fruit of converted hearts: "There are those in the world who say that jealousy, enmity, [and] selfishness in men's hearts will always preclude the

establishing of the ideal society known as the Kingdom of God. No matter what doubters and scoffers say, the mission of the Church of Christ is to eliminate sin and wickedness from the hearts of men, and so transform society that peace and good-will will prevail on this earth.”¹⁰ The kingdom of God has been established with power and priesthood keys that allow hearts to be changed through the influence of the Atonement. Through these changes “the ideal society known as the Kingdom of God” can and will be established.

CONCLUSION

While we can and should have a great deal of admiration and support for people and movements who seek social justice and make tremendous sacrifices to serve and bless humanity, I believe that the scriptures teach that a social condition of having no poor cannot be our only goal. Likewise, this social condition of equality alone cannot be equated with the kingdom of God because we are told that seeking for the kingdom of God will produce *first* “a hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19). Seeking for the kingdom of God must first include seeking for Christ and to establish his righteousness.

On the other side of the coin, however, a social condition of having no poor cannot be separated from the kingdom of God because once we have “obtained a hope in Christ” we *will* seek to bless others lives in a material way. We cannot sit comfortably back and feel as though we have obtained the kingdom of God through our own spiritual relationship with the Lord and then not be concerned about others’ conditions. This is abundantly demonstrated in Moses 7 and 4 Nephi. In Zion societies in which people have personally lived the gospel and become of one heart and mind, having obtaining a hope in Christ, they then directly addressed the material needs of those around them.

When we realize this dimension of establishing the kingdom of God, we can expand our vision of how we can participate in the efforts to establish Zion in preparation for the Second Coming of the Savior: “Wherefore, *may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come*” (D&C 65:6; emphasis added). On expanding our vision of what we must to establish Zion and build the kingdom of God on the earth, Elder D. Todd Christofferson has reminded us that the Lord declares:

“In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld” (D&C 70:14; see also D&C 49:20; 78:5–7).

We control the disposition of our means and resources, but we account to God for this stewardship over earthly things. It is gratifying to witness your generosity as you contribute to fast offerings and humanitarian projects. Over the years, the suffering of millions has been alleviated, and countless others have been enabled to help themselves through the generosity of the Saints. Nevertheless, as we pursue the cause of Zion, each of us should prayerfully consider whether we are doing what we should and all that we should in the Lord’s eyes with respect to the poor and the needy.

We might ask ourselves, living as many of us do in societies that worship possessions and pleasures, whether we are remaining aloof from covetousness and the lust to acquire more and more of this world’s goods. Materialism is just one more manifestation of the idolatry and pride that characterize Babylon. Perhaps we can learn to be content with what is sufficient for our needs.¹¹

While we should not make the mistake of directly equating the kingdom of God with an ideal social and economic outcome alone, we should have a broader vision of what is involved in “seeking first the kingdom of God.” We need to see that seeking first the kingdom will extend beyond our own personal salvation, our hope in Christ, and lead us to work towards a Zion society in which “there [are] no poor among [us].” Our being saved through Christ will fill us with a desire to serve and bless others with mercy and compassion. President Hinckley reminded us: “You are good. But it is not enough just to be good. You must be good for something. You must contribute good to the world. The world must be a better place for your presence.”¹²

NOTES

- I. For me this insight came in reading Heather Hardy’s “‘And They Understood Me Not’: Third Nephi as a Fulfillment of Jesus’ Eschatological Prophecies,” address at Brigham Young University BYU Conference on Third Nephi,

- 2008; paper in author's possession. She makes the argument that the events of 4 Nephi show that Christ did establish his kingdom on the earth and that this prophecy was not simply about the last days. Her juxtaposition of the early-twentieth-century theologians and the question of the kingdom of God allowed me to read the Book of Mormon account of 4 Nephi with new eyes.
2. Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," in *The Social Gospel in America, 1870–1920*, ed. Robert T. Handy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 266–67.
 3. Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," 267.
 4. Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," 267.
 5. It is important to note in this context that Christ's call to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" could also be translated "his justice," as is found in the New English Bible. This additional sense of the term *dikaíosune* that we are used to reading as "righteousness" may not make sense in English, but can be grasped immediately in Romance languages where the term for God's righteousness and his justice will be identical: *justice, justicia, giustizia*. The Greek term *dikaíosune* denotes "the characteristics of the *dikaíos*: righteousness, uprightness, equity." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 196.
 6. In Mark 9:1, Christ said: "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." How to interpret the disappointment of both first-century audiences and modern scholars of the incomplete establishment of God's kingdom is treated in Hardy's discussion of 3 and 4 Nephi.
 7. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 16:268–69.
 8. Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," 266.
 9. Joseph F. Smith, "The Truth about Mormonism," *Out West* 23 (1905): 242, cited in Warner Woodruff, "A Dialogue on Liberation Theology: Response to Professor Brown," in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 229.
 10. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 23.
 11. D. Todd Christofferson, "Come to Zion," *Ensign*, November 2008, 39.
 12. "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign*, January 1998, 72; Brigham Young University devotional, September 17, 1996.