

REDEMPTION

gā'al

My earliest memories of spiritual impressions come from times I was singing hymns, praying, or bearing my testimony. As I grew older and had additional opportunities to serve, I came to find additional personal revelation when preparing to give a talk, teach a lesson, or help someone with their questions. I first understood the witness in Alma 7 about Christ having taken upon himself our sins and sicknesses in just this way during my first year at BYU as a transfer student. I was living on campus in May Hall, and in conversation, a young woman down the hall had expressed her confusion about why Christ, a perfect and blameless person, had suffered. As I found and shared verses about Christ taking upon himself our pains and sicknesses, they came alive for me and I understood more of the breadth of Christ's Atonement.

Another memorable learning moment came when I was preparing a sacrament meeting talk the year after my mission. I was living in the Italian house near BYU campus, and I remembered a cupboard that had



As our Redeemer, Christ brings us out of bondage and allows us to begin a new life.

some tan-colored crepe paper used for decorations at parties. I wrapped it around my arm under my flowered dress and went to our sacrament meeting in the lobby of the engineering building. As I started my talk, I rolled up my sleeve. The crepe paper looked just like a wrapped bandage, and everyone stared. I asked the congregation if they would stop to ask if someone else had hurt me or if I had hurt myself before helping me if I came to them bleeding. I asked if they would limit giving care and healing only to people who deserved it. As I spoke, we all felt a witness of the mercy, love, and healing power of the Lord as we came to understand more fully that his redemption is offered to all.

Studying the scholarly literature on redemption in the Old Testament and the ancient Near East during my senior year, I realized that within the vocabulary of redemption was a very powerful idea. Very simply, to be redeemed is to be bought out of bondage. Even the English word carries this root concept of buying back. For example, bottles and cans are redeemed when they are returned in exchange for a payment. A similar term is *ransom*. At its core, *redemption* occurs when someone in captivity is released through the payment of a price.

Redemption from slavery was a widespread practice in the ancient world. People became slaves because they were captured in war and then

sold by their captors. Even more tragically, people also became slaves by selling themselves into bondage or by being sold by a family member because there was no other way to pay off a debt. However a person got into bondage, another person could act as a redeemer and pay the price to free them from bondage and slavery. Redemption wasn't for the worthy who had their lives together. Redemption was for those who were enslaved.

Christ is our Savior. Christ is our Redeemer. It is easy for us to blur distinctions between words that are so similar in many ways. The effect for us is the same—we were in trouble, and thanks to him, we are safe, we are saved, we are out of trouble. But, while saving is a good general-purpose word, it doesn't give any details about how the action was completed. For example, if someone is pulled from a flood or a burning building, they are saved. They needed help and someone stepped in to help them. So we can rightly say, with deep gratitude, that Jesus Christ is our Savior and the Savior of the world.

The Old Testament concept of redemption offers us additional nuance and specificity about salvation. Redemption is a subset of salvation. The term *redeem* focuses on how we are saved and what we are being saved from. *Redemption* emphasizes that we are saved from slavery through the payment of a price. To say that Christ is our Redeemer emphasizes that he paid to buy us out of bondage. The gospel message behind this is taught very eloquently by Peter when he explained that “ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation [or conduct] received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). The Book of Mormon joins the New Testament in pointing to the spiritual meaning of *redemption* and the witness that Jesus Christ is Jehovah, the Redeemer of Israel.

THE REDEEMER OF ISRAEL

One place where the message of the Lord's role as the Redeemer is taught most clearly is in the record of Abinadi's short ministry. “I would that ye

should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). The immensity of the witness that Abinadi gave dawned on me one Sunday evening in December the year before my mission. I was bundled up and walking to the Provo Tabernacle to attend the Adventsingen, an evening of Christmas music and scripture. As I walked, I sang to myself the Christmas carol “Once in David’s Royal City.” While singing the second verse, I received a witness of the love and condescension manifest in the coming of Jehovah to earth to save us.

He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all,
 And his shelter was a stable,
 And his cradle was a stall;
 With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
 Lived on earth our Savior holy.¹

His humility to become mortal and vulnerable became very real to me at that moment. When we recognize our need for a Redeemer, we are humbled by his humility to come down to earth in a human body to feel our pains and to suffer for us.

Abinadi taught the priests of King Noah that it was through the ransom price of the Lord Jehovah’s own suffering that we have the opportunity for redemption. The priests, however, were confident that their own obedience was the source of their salvation. Abinadi first reminded them of their failure to keep the commandments of the law of Moses, underlining their need for a redeemer. He then shared the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53, which points to the sacrifice of Christ, the one who would be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities,” “brought as a lamb to the slaughter” as the Lord “laid on him the iniquities of us all” (53:5–7). This is how the Lord redeemed his people. “For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished” (Mosiah 15:19). This wit-

ness of Jesus Christ as Jehovah, the Redeemer of Israel, runs throughout the Book of Mormon, but because of our unfamiliarity with the ancient concepts behind redemption it is easy to miss the witness that we are receiving in the Book of Mormon as well as in the Bible.

To more fully appreciate the witness of all these books of scripture, we have to return to ancient words. In ancient Israel the action of redeeming from bondage could be expressed with two different Hebrew verbs. The first, *pādāh*, is related to words for *redeem* in other Semitic languages. It reflects the general practice of redeeming that was widespread in the ancient Near East. But there is a verb that is found only in Hebrew; *gā'al*. The person who acts to redeem in this sense is a *gō'el*. The best translation of *gō'el* is “kinsman-redeemer.” The kind of redemption that is described by *gā'al* and done by the *gō'el* is not generic. It could not be done by anyone for anyone. It is based on familial relationship. The *gō'el* was the oldest male member of an extended family who had the familial obligation to restore that which had become unbalanced. The *gō'el* redeemed family members who had become enslaved for whatever reason. Maybe they had been captured. Maybe they had sold themselves or had been sold into slavery. The *gō'el* was there to make things right and to bring family members back to their rightful place.

The Lord Jehovah is known throughout the Old Testament as the *gō'el*, the Redeemer of Israel. The children of Israel knew that they could count on him to deliver them and bring them out of bondage. They knew that he wasn't just any god, he was Jehovah, their God, the Father of their salvation. They knew that his redemption grew out of the family relationship formed through the covenants they had made. “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isaiah 63:16). The covenant relationship with the Lord as their spiritual father was stronger than even their sense of descent from their famed ancestors, Abraham and Jacob/Israel. They knew their *gō'el*, the Kinsman-Redeemer of Israel, would never forget them.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were reminded that the Lord's role as Redeemer (*gō'ēl*) extended from the covenants that he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. The descendants of Israel had been in captivity in Egypt for hundreds of years and had forgotten the Lord, but he had not forgotten them. The children of Israel are told that "*because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt*" (Deuteronomy 7:8; emphasis added). The Lord remembers his people. He remembers his covenant promises and covenant relationship.

The Lord's covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the foundation of the story of the house of Israel. But the covenants with the patriarchs are not the only covenants in the Old Testament. After the children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt, they collectively made a covenant with Jehovah at Mount Sinai. We know this covenant especially well because it is associated with the law of Moses and the Ten Commandments.

A large portion of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy is dedicated to laying out and explaining the relationship of the Lord and Israel that is expressed in the law of Moses. The demands of this covenant relationship were elaborate. Many of these chapters are so nuanced and detailed that we can't even get through them. They detail obligations that were critical for their covenant relationship but that are foreign to us. This is where it can help to really step back and think about the big picture. We know from modern-day revelation that through Moses, the Lord had invited Israel to enter into the Melchizedek Priesthood covenants of the patriarchs, but they refused his invitation. He did still enter into a covenant with all the house of Israel, but it was a lesser, Levitical Priesthood covenant (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–26).

But, even with a lesser covenant, the children of Israel were still the Lord's covenant people. They also received blessings from the covenants made earlier with their fathers. In Exodus 6:4–8 the Lord reminded them that it was because of his covenant relationship with the patriarchs

that he delivered them out of bondage. He started with the covenant basis for his act of redemption: “And *I have also established my covenant with them* [the patriarchs], to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.” The promises associated with this covenant also extended to the descendants of the patriarchs. The Lord continued, “And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and *I have remembered my covenant*. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and *I will redeem you with a stretched out arm*, and with great judgments.” The covenant was the basis for his role as the Redeemer of Israel.

The Lord then promised that he would allow all the people of Israel to covenant with him. “*And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God*; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:4–8; emphasis added). The Lord’s faithfulness to act as Israel’s Kinsman-Redeemer was because of his earlier covenant relationship with the patriarchs.

The children of Israel were in bondage. They were Egyptian slaves. They were not doing anything that made them special or worthy. We have every reason to think that they were living, thinking, and worshipping like the Egyptians in whose land they had dwelt for centuries. But the Lord remembered his covenant relationship. He remembered his covenant promises to the patriarchs. He was faithful and delivered the Israelites out of captivity. Once they were delivered, he offered them the opportunity to covenant with him themselves.

While they didn’t have the faith to enter into the full Melchizedek Priesthood covenants of the patriarchs (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–26), the Lord’s faithfulness to earlier covenant relationships gave the children of Israel confidence to enter into a covenant relationship

with him—the law of Moses. They saw that he fulfilled the promises he had made, and they had confidence he would fulfill his promises in this new relationship with them.

LOOKING TO THE REDEEMER

The understanding of the Lord Jehovah as the Redeemer of Israel not only pervades the Old Testament, but it is a foundational concept for Lehi and his family in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon record makes it clear that redemption was associated with the future coming of the Redeemer. Lehi's initial revelation and preaching were rejected because he, like the other prophets, told the inhabitants of Jerusalem that they needed to repent and that they needed redemption. He "manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" and they responded by being "angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away" (1 Nephi 1:19–20). The message that we need redeeming can often be taken as an insult rather than as a message of hope.

We can see how Lehi's witness of the Redeemer was consistent, even when it was not well received. Lehi's first prophecies to his family also focused on the coming of a Redeemer. Lehi "spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world. Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:5–6). Lehi had a clear vision of the Redeemer as the hope of Israel and of the world.

Redemption was also an important concept for Nephi from our earliest encounters with him. Nephi recounted the biblical story of the redemption of Israel to help his brothers increase their faith. He wanted them to have confidence that the Lord was their Redeemer. He wanted them to trust that the Redeemer of Israel would help them in their challenge to get the plates. "Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us

be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?" (1 Nephi 4:1).

Having been chased out by Laban, the brothers were experiencing their own kind of bondage. They despaired and felt powerless to keep the command to obtain the plates, but Nephi encouraged them to remember the power of the Lord. He knew they needed greater trust in the Lord to have the courage to be faithful to his commandments. "Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea" (1 Nephi 4:2). Nephi believed that they had the same claim on the Lord's help as did the ancient Israelites, and so he was full of faith that there would also be divine intervention in their own time of helplessness. "Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 4:3).

Over and over again, Nephi referred back to the account of the redemption of Israel from bondage in Egypt to give hope and courage to his brothers who were struggling. When they did not want to work at building a ship, Nephi drew these connections to the ancient Israelites at the time of Moses to help them see the need for action. "Do ye believe that our fathers, who were the children of Israel, would have been led away out of the hands of the Egyptians if they had not hearkened unto the words of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 17:23). Nephi wanted them to see the connection between faith in the Redeemer and obedience to his commands.

Nephi particularly focused on the idea that the ancient Israelites had to participate in their redemption. If they hadn't had the faith to listen to the words of the Lord through Moses, they would not have been led out of the hands of the Egyptians. Nephi reminded Laman and Lemuel "that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne" (1 Nephi 17:25). Nephi recounted again how the Lord brought them out of bondage, divided the

waters of the Red Sea, drowned the armies of Pharaoh, fed them with manna, and brought water out of the rock for them. Nephi was likely reminding Laman and Lemuel of the help they had received thus far on their journey from Jerusalem, but he also emphasized that the ancient Israelites had turned from their relationship with their Redeemer, even though he had delivered them and been so attentive to their needs. “And notwithstanding they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God” (1 Nephi 17:30). Relationships have two sides, and these stories warn us that we must live in those relationships for them to be alive for us.

Nephi’s relationship with the Lord Jehovah had become increasingly personal through the years as he continued to exercise faith and to have his own revelatory experiences. Nephi not only learned that Jehovah was the Redeemer of Israel and took courage from accounts of previous redemptive acts, but he also saw this redeeming power in his own life as he was faithful to his covenant relationship.

Nephi clearly understood that Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord was what made him their Kinsman-Redeemer. Nephi explained this concept to Laman and Lemuel, saying, “And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them [the Israelites] out of the land of Egypt” (1 Nephi 17:40). Covenants create a new family relationship. In ancient Israel redemption was the responsibility of the Kinsman-Redeemer. The Lord Jehovah was the Redeemer of Israel because of the covenants he had made with the patriarchs, and he brought the children of Israel out of bondage. Like Nephi, we can come to appreciate how the Lord is also our personal Redeemer because of the covenants we have made. As we grow to love and trust him, we will look to him for our own redemption.

OUR REDEMPTION

But even though we look to him for our redemption and promise to obey him, we still get into trouble. We are stuck and are sometimes even in bondage, just like the Israelites. Even after their initial deliverance, the Israelites had many opportunities to look to the Lord as their Kinsman-Redeemer throughout their history. There were many times that they were lost, threatened, or in captivity. A poignant expression of looking to the Lord as Kinsman-Redeemer in times of help is found in Psalm 74:1–2. Here the Psalmist cries out: “O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed.” This plea reflects the desperate feeling of being in bondage—feeling cast off from the Lord’s presence. But it also recalls and relies on the memory of the Lord’s redemption of and covenant relationship with Israel.

Remembering that we *have* been redeemed in the past increases our confidence that we *will* be redeemed from present and future troubles. Our bondage will usually not be external, but will rather be captivity to the natural man in us. Satan wants us to believe that our weaknesses are our true nature and that we can’t leave this condition of spiritual bondage. Knowing that the Lord is our Kinsman-Redeemer gives us confidence to ask for help, even when we are the ones that have sold ourselves into bondage. “For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money” (3 Nephi 20:38; Isaiah 52:3). Even Nephi, who had lived a life of covenant faithfulness, struggled with his own weaknesses and failures. Even he needed to remember that he had been redeemed from the natural man in him and could be redeemed again when he failed to live up to expectations.

In the psalm of Nephi we see Nephi wrestling with his feeling of failure and helplessness to do and be what he knew that he should: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And

when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Nephi understood covenants and lived out his covenants. But he was also human and weak. He didn’t always live up to every promise that he made and every loving, noble impulse that he felt. He sometimes gave way to other feelings, which he then regretted. He could have sunk down into despair when he looked at the things he had done wrong or left undone. He experienced the feeling of being captive to the “temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me,” but Nephi knew that because of his covenant relationship with the Lord, he wasn’t dependent on his own strength alone.

The turning point in the psalm of Nephi is Nephi’s looking up from feeling imprisoned by his sinful state to trust in the freedom offered by his Redeemer. Nephi did not hide from himself—or from us—the experience of being trapped by his past choices and his own weakness. “And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted” (2 Nephi 4:19). “I know in whom I have trusted.” Nephi had exercised faith in his Redeemer previously, and he exercised that faith again. By remembering the redeeming love and power of the Lord, Nephi was freed from the bondage of his own despair and regained hope that he could do and be more than he could by himself. “My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep. He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh. He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me” (2 Nephi 4:20–22).

Nephi knew that his prayers for deliverance had been heard in the past, and he knew that they would continue to be heard. The Lord remembers his people. Because he remembered his relationship with the Lord, Nephi had courage to walk away from the captivity of despairing that he could never be what he needed to be. “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul” (2 Nephi 4:28). Nephi realized that he needed to wake up to the reality of the Redeemer that was bigger than his own weakness. He

realized that the Lord's power and grace transcended his own mistakes and personal struggles. He chose to focus on gratitude for redeeming love and redeeming power rather than to despair at his own past or at his own weak nature. "Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (2 Nephi 4:30).

It is critical that we see this internal shift in Nephi from the captivity of despair to the hope and joy of redemption as a result of faith in the Redeemer. Nephi didn't cheer himself up by telling himself that what he had done (or left undone) didn't matter. He didn't try to convince himself that he was better than he thought he was. This account is not about positive self-image or positive thinking. It is a brutally honest struggle to abandon the despair over our own spiritual captivity to the natural man by beginning to exercise faith in the Redeemer. We can actually see Nephi's prayer for redemption in the text: "O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?" (2 Nephi 4:31). Nephi knew that he didn't just need redeeming from what he had done, but from who he was. Christ has come to bring us out of the bondage of guilt from past choices and also from the bondage of a fallen nature that will keep us repeating sinful choices. Nephi recognized the power of the natural man part of himself, that part of our fallen nature that can keep pulling us back into spiritual bondage, and called out for redeeming help to have a change of heart so that he "may shake at the appearance of sin."

TRUSTING OUR REDEEMER

Looking to our covenant relationship with the Lord by calling out for him to redeem us can provide peace and hope in our darkest times. These dark times may come when things are not working out in our circumstances. They may come when we are filled with regret. They also come when we are struggling to be more and to be better. The covenant promises give us confidence that the fires we go through will have a sanctifying

power. Because of our covenant relationship with the One who can cause all things to work together for our good, we can experience reality differently (see Romans 8:28). As we come to know “the greatness of God” we can trust that “he shall consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain” (2 Nephi 2:2).

This divine promise of redemption is expressed in the powerful text of the hymn “How Firm a Foundation.” In the scripture behind this text, Isaiah 43:1–3, we can see how the redemption and covenant relationship of Israel serve as a source of comfort for present fears: “But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.* When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour” (Isaiah 43:1–3; emphasis added). Here again the redemption of Israel is connected with covenant relationship. We see both the giving of a name and the sense of belonging between the Lord and Israel: “I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” (Isaiah 43:1). When we fear the water of our trials will overflow us and that we will be burned by the fire of our experiences, we can look to these promises. We can trust in this relationship.

Remembering that the covenant relationship itself is the source of our confidence can help us have hope no matter where we are on the covenant path. Our confidence does not need to be that we have never made mistakes. Our confidence does not need to be in our flawless character or perfectly reliable nature. If we tried to base our confidence in our own perfection then we would be lying to God and ourselves. Christ makes covenants with us so we know that we can put our trust in him even when we are at our weakest. He is there for us when we have completely blown it.

We don’t need to get ourselves out of trouble and cleaned up in order to ask for help. We can be flawed and weak and stuck. We can admit to

ourselves that that we are “encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset [us]” (2 Nephi 4:18). We can acknowledge that we are bound down by habits and desires that are trapping and limiting us because that is what redemption is for. We can ask for and receive redemption no matter what our problems are.

In fact, until we can admit that we are in bondage to the natural man in us, we will never know how much we need a Redeemer. As long as our confidence is in ourselves, we will actually find the idea of needing redemption an insult. This is exactly what happened in John 8 when the Lord told those who believed on him that “if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). These believers took the idea that they needed freeing as a slight to their good name and impeccable character. “We are not the slaves of any man!” they responded. “We don’t need to be made free.” By refusing to see that they were in spiritual bondage and needed a Redeemer, they missed the opportunity to receive the freedom they were being offered.

I know how tempting it is to think of oneself as good and to think that the Atonement is for other people, the people who have made poor choices and who haven’t had the discipline to live worthy lives. If we pay our tithing, keep the Word of Wisdom, go to church on Sunday, and generally try keep the commandments, it’s easy to fall into the self-perception of the Pharisee who prayed to God, thanking him that he was “not as other men are” (Luke 18:11). But in that parable, it was the publican whom Christ praised. It was the publican who could not lift up his eyes to heaven but prayed that God would be merciful to him—a sinner—who went away justified and not the self-righteous Pharisee.

For me it was not until I took President Benson’s challenge to read the Book of Mormon every day that I had the courage to see myself as a sinner, one who needed a Redeemer. Before that it was easy to see the bad things that I avoided and the good things that I did. I patted myself on the back, thanking God that I was “not as other men are.” The irony is that the witness of redemption that runs through the Book of Mormon

comes with an equally clear witness of our lost and fallen state as human beings. It's not a pretty picture when we start to look more closely at why we do what we do and find pride, selfishness, and fear mingled in with outwardly praiseworthy lives. It's not a pretty picture when we start to look at the good things we have left undone out of fear or lack of love. The more we see, the more tempted we are to despair and feel that we are stuck, that we can't change. But that lie about our state is just as hurtful as the lie that we are fine and don't need to change. Neither is true because both deny the reality of Christ's redemption.

In the American folk hymn "What Wondrous Love Is This," one verse describes how it feels to exercise faith in redemption. "When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown, Christ laid aside His crown for my soul."² Getting a witness of the redemption of Christ must come as we are "sinking down beneath God's righteous frown." We have to be willing to admit that we are in bondage to know that we need redemption. At the same time, until we trust that we have a Redeemer, it is almost impossible to break through the self-deceptions that comfort us into thinking either that what we are doing isn't a problem or that it's just the way we are and so there is nothing that we can do about it. We have to face the justice of God and "acknowledge . . . that all his judgments are just" (Alma 12:15) and that we really have "sold [ourselves] for naught" (3 Nephi 20:38) in order to embrace the gift of Christ's redeeming power. We must admit we are in captivity before we can look to our Redeemer for help.

THE SONG OF REDEEMING LOVE

When we feel hope that we can be forgiven and change, then we begin to feel those chains fall. This freedom causes us to sing the "song of redeeming love." Alma asked the people in Zarahemla that if they had "felt to sing the song of redeeming love, . . . [could they] feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). Staying in a relationship with Christ where we don't just *know* in the abstract that he is our Redeemer but instead actually *feel* to sing the song of redeeming love requires being redeemed on a regular basis.

This is not to advocate that we fall back into the same patterns of behavior that Christ ransomed us from. Far from it. That would be hoping to be redeemed in our sins rather than being redeemed from them (see Helaman 5:10). Christ gave himself as a ransom so that we could walk in a life of freedom from sin. But the process of recognizing and repenting of being fallen and ungodly people is not a onetime experience. It is a lifelong experience.

While sanctification requires daily repentance, we keep repenting of different kinds of things as we move closer to Christ. Living a life of faith and daily repentance is living out our covenant relationship with Christ. He doesn't need us to pretend that we are perfect and that we don't need redeeming anymore. He has power to fully bring us out of the captivity and power of Satan, and he will give us power to stay out of the chains of the evil one and to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). As we come to know him more fully through our covenant relationship, we come to know the Truth—our Redeemer—that makes us free.

This is the truth that that can give us power to fight off the temptation to think that we can never change, that this is just the way we are. The redemption of Christ is the ultimate truth that can break any chain that would bind us down to destruction. The covenants that we make with him are our source of confidence that we are never permanently stuck or in bondage. With Nephi, we can "know in whom [we] have trusted" and fight off the feeling that we are permanently trapped by whatever kinds of chains and weaknesses are keeping us from living lives of holiness.

Christ's witness to us is that he has paid the price of our redemption. If we are still in bondage, it is not because the door of the prison is still locked. Even when we still feel the dark chill of that prison, we must exercise faith in the redemption of him who created us and step out of the chains and into the light. Each act of humble obedience and contrite repentance is an exercise of faith in Christ's redemption. He has provided the means by which we can exercise faith unto redemption. We can look to him and live.

Once we feel our burden of guilt and regret lifted and we begin to walk free from the sense of ourselves as forever trapped by our past and our own weakness, what is next? What does the Lord expect of us when we have left our own bondage, our own “Egypt”? The account of the Israelites again points the way.

When Moses was called to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, the Lord explained, “Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). As slaves in Egypt, Israel was serving an Egyptian master; however, after Jehovah freed them from bondage, they were to serve him as their new master. Living to serve God becomes an expression of our gratitude and a form of worship.

NOTES

1. Cecil F. Alexander, “Once in Royal David’s City,” in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 205.
2. “What Wondrous Love Is This,” in *The Hymnal 1982 Companion*, vol 3b, ed. Raymond F. Glover (New York: Church Hymnal, 1990), 826–27.