

SITTING ENTHRONED

yāšab

Sitting down is a powerful expression of stability and permanence. It is made even more powerful with the Hebrew verb *yāšab* (pronounced *yashab*) that, in connection with kings and deity, means “sitting enthroned.” Kings and queens take the throne when they receive the right to rule. The Holy of Holies in the temple was essentially Jehovah’s throne room on earth. “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Psalm 11:4). Amulek’s vision that “the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out” (Alma 34:36) may give us hope that someday things will be settled and fixed and permanent in our relationship with the Lord. We will have arrived! We will have endured to the end in our covenant keeping! We will be able to “to sit with [Christ] in [his] throne, even as [he] also overcame, and [is] set down with [his] Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

But the same vision of sitting down in the kingdom, to go no more out, might also lead us to despair that we’ll never arrive. While we want to



Christ's redemption assures us that through covenant faithfulness we can sit down with him on his throne and receive all that the Father hath. He has promised that "whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall; . . . they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy" (Moses 7:53).

live out our covenant with lives of obedience and to seek for lives of holiness, we can easily feel that our efforts are too erratic. We know the times we fail to listen to promptings. We know the times we say impatient and unkind things that we wish we could take back. We each know our personal weaknesses and struggles that seem to drag us down and lead us to repent yet again in an effort to find peace and be free.

When I was a young girl, I learned the steps of repentance. My parents and Primary leaders taught me that the steps included recognizing we did something wrong, apologizing, and never doing it again. I very clearly remember sitting in our kitchen after a scolding and being taught about this. I remember how much that idea of repentance puzzled me. I thought and thought but was stumped. When I hit my younger brother, I could see that it was wrong. I knew I could apologize to him, and I did. But I just couldn't fathom never doing it again. My sense of self was based entirely on my feelings and actions of that age of my life. I couldn't see myself being or becoming a person who wouldn't have an inclination to punch or tease or hassle him.

I look back now and smile at myself. It seems so silly to think that I would always be that childish, impulsive, and bossy older sister. I'm not

perfect, but I honestly have no desires to hit my younger brother. Yes, he is now about eight inches taller than I am and the father of five sons, but that is not the explanation. We are friends. I love him. I might sometimes still be the bossy older sister, but I hope even that has mellowed with the years. We are still sister and brother, but our relationship is dramatically different than it was during the years in which my sister and I would throw the big beanbag chair over him and then jump on him. He survived. My sister and I repented. We all grew up together. Each, in our way and with our own experiences, learned about the redeeming love of the Lord and felt a change of heart. We all still read the Book of Mormon and seek to build the kingdom. Our relationship as siblings has an added dimension because we share a love for the Lord as well as each other.

The vision that not only can we sit down in the kingdom but can also sit down together in love is not an inevitable result of the human condition. It is a vision of redeemed humanity. Relationships where resentment, emotional scarring, and pain dominate interactions are part of what it means to live in a fallen world. Christ could see that this was not who we really are. He could see that this was not where we belong, eternally trapped in relationships that Jean-Paul Sartre famously described in his play *No Exit*. “Hell is other people.” Instead, Christ came down to us in our broken, fallen state to lift us up and show us that we belong in a more elevated state. Christ leads us to heavenly life, a life increasingly filled with others on a celestial journey.

One day in my early twenties, I was in the dressing room of the Provo Temple. I saw a woman I knew to have served many missions in her older years. She impressed me that day by reaching out to a sister she didn’t know in a kind, loving, and genuine way, saying, “here, let me help you.” She tucked the tag back in on that sister’s dress, smiled, and touched her on the shoulder. Something inside me wanted to believe that someday I could look outside myself, see others’ needs, and fearlessly and graciously lift them up and help them along. I knew that I was still absorbed with myself and my own problems. I knew that my shyness could be paralyzing and that it kept me locked away from reaching out to others. But

when I saw that gracious, loving action, I wanted to be able to do that. I wanted to be the person who would and could do that for others.

Christ came to show us who we could be. When we are taking the name of Christ upon us, we can show others who he is and who they can become. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can loose the deepest bonds of all, the ones that keep us from repenting because we just can't believe that we can ever be the person who, metaphorically, will never punch our brother again. Believing in the redemption of Jesus Christ makes real repentance possible. Believing in the redemption of Jesus Christ is believing that we can someday be the person who has "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).

The way that Christ's redemption wakes us up to this new sense of self can "blow our minds," shocking us into a new way of thinking. Our fallen selves know, deep down, that we are wretched. Our fallen selves know that we have hurt others and deserve to be hurt in return. Our fallen selves can't imagine being different or wanting different things. We know that we are in the dust and that we deserve to be in the dust.

God takes us from the dust and shows us that we belong on thrones instead. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, expressed God's power to reverse our state and radically change our vision of ourselves. Her prayer emphasizes that we can be lifted up to a glorified state and shows the glory of our Deliverer rather than of our own merits: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, *and to make them inherit the throne of glory*" (1 Samuel 2:8; emphasis added). By telling us we can be worthy to inherit the throne of glory, Christ is fracturing our own narratives of ourselves. In our heart of hearts, we may think that we are the poor in the dust or the beggar on the dunghill, but he does not see us that way. He does not leave us there. He calls us to arise from the dust and to sit enthroned.

This is the invitation that Isaiah records in Isaiah 52: "Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down [*yāšab*, "sit enthroned"], O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion"

(52:2). We feel we are captive to our weaknesses, even when we know that a redemption price has been paid. So Christ doesn't just say, "Leave captivity!" He says, "Sit enthroned! This is who you really are. This is where you belong. Arise and inherit the throne prepared for you in the mansions of your Father."

Christ's ransom for our souls and his invitation to come and sit with him on his throne is a shocking refutation of everything that we feel we deserve. He is telling us that he has not only bought us out of bondage, but also that he is lifting us up to thrones of glory in the presence of his Father. His love for us, his vision of who we are and who we can become, is so radically different from our fears and doubts, our regrets and self-recrimination, that it can rewrite our vision of ourselves and our lives.

I experienced a witness of this "mind-blowing" love in probably the darkest moment of my life. As I mentioned before, I like to do everything right. Maybe it comes with being the oldest, but I always want to be the good example, the model child. About a year into my mission, I was assigned as a trainer. This was the ultimate opportunity to be a model and good example. And I failed. But not because I didn't try. I worked and worked, trying to do everything the right way. But I was not possessed of the love that could nurture our companionship. All my efforts to do everything right had the opposite effect I had intended because I was focused on myself. It came to the point where I knew I had to do what I never would have dreamed I would need to do. I called the mission president and told him that we needed an emergency transfer.

She was moved to a city with one of the most loving and gracious sisters in the mission. I was moved to a city with a kind and patient sister who didn't freak out when I cried myself to sleep at night from the shame and the regret of everything that I had done wrong when I tried to do everything right. One of those nights, I had a life-changing experience. I don't know if it was a dream or a vision or a thought. But I could clearly see myself back in Virginia, entering our dining room from the back porch. I came with all my regret and shame. I came feeling like a failure. And there, standing in the dining room right near the door to the kitchen

was my mother. Her arms were open, and she said, “I love you anyway.” The witness of Christ’s redeeming love that I felt through that vision of my mother and her love became the bedrock of my life.

“I love you anyway.” Christ knows us. He knows what we have done. He knows what we have felt, what we have thought, and he loves us anyway. That is the message of redeeming love. He laid aside his crown for our soul. He came down to earth from heaven to show us who we are and where we belong. His suffering and death encompassed our sins, weaknesses, and mistakes. Even when we try our best and it all falls apart, he suffered for us. When we lie down on the job and don’t do our part, he suffered for that too.

OUR FOUNDATION

There is no other way to be saved, only in and through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. His redeeming love must be our foundation. We cannot build on our own righteousness. We can and must build lives of holiness to honor his name. We can and must walk in the light to thank him for buying us out of the darkness of slavery to sin. But whatever efforts we make to do good and be good, it must always be on the foundation of his unchangeable love.

In the New Testament, Paul uses the image of being rooted in Christ’s love to describe the foundation we are given. We are able to grow because we receive the nourishment we need from Christ. Paul prays that “[God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). When we feel the Spirit, we feel a witness of the love of God that gives us strength to do and be what we have covenanted to be. Paul continues this prayer—“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (3:17). Having Christ dwell in our hearts is not an image we use much as Latter-day Saints because we know that, as the Risen Lord, he has a glorified, resurrected body. Nonetheless, this feeling of being rooted, grounded, and established in the love of God can symbolically be compared to having Christ dwell in

our hearts. His love for us and his vision of us as exalted beings, sitting with him on his throne, radiate the light that can drive out the darkness of doubt and discouragement. Paul describes this condition as “being rooted and grounded in love” (3:17).

Being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, we can continue along the covenant path. We can grow up into the exalted state that Christ sees in us. Paul prays, “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17–19). The fullness of God. That is the promise: being filled with all the fullness of God, all the Father hath. That is our inheritance. That is what God has sworn with his oath and covenant to give us if we are willing to receive (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–39).

THE INVITATION TO BECOME

We don’t deserve it. We don’t earn it. The gift of Christ’s redeeming love comes to us not just to start us on the path home, but also to give us strength, power, and desire to continue on the journey. He invites us to “arise, and sit down on a throne” (Isaiah 52:2). He finds us in the dust, and we may not believe the invitation at first. It is too outrageous, too far-fetched. We don’t belong “at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out” (Helaman 3:30). But he has come to invite us to sit down with them and with him. He is telling us that we are welcome, that we belong.

Mormon talks about this promise. He uses the phrase *sitting down* to frame his assurance that “the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name” (Helaman 3:27). Mormon doesn’t say that Christ is merciful to those who have always been perfect in keeping their covenants. Mormon doesn’t say that Christ is merciful to those who are always diligent in keeping his commandments.

Mormon doesn't say that Christ is merciful to those who have never done anything to offend the Spirit of the Lord. Christ is merciful to us when we are sincere. Christ is merciful to us when we "call upon his holy name." Our confidence must be in his nature and his name, not in our own. We will call upon his holy name when we know that he is our Kinsman-Redeemer and that he will come and get us, no matter how horrible the trouble we've gotten ourselves into.

For any number of reasons we may find ourselves captive and in the dust, but we have a choice. Our choice, our only choice for getting out of captivity, is to "call upon his holy name," to exercise faith in his redeeming power, over and over again (Helaman 3:27). When we exercise faith in Christ, he opens us up to the power of his redemption and the power of his exaltation. He wants to exalt us to a higher status, and he will, if we let him and if we keep asking and keep believing. "The gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God" (3:28). As we "lay hold upon the word of God," we find that it is "quick and powerful," leading us across the "everlasting gulf of misery" (3:29). It can be a long journey, but he is patient and faithful as we keep struggling and stumbling forward along the path.

In the end, it comes back to what we want. We have to want to get out of the gulf of misery. We have to want to "lay hold upon the word of God" and go where it is taking us. We have to be willing to come to a new place. We have to be willing to be different and feel different. When we hold on and follow the word of God, we find that it will "land [our] souls, yea [our] immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to *sit down* with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out" (Helaman 3:30). He can get us there. He will get us there. We just have to want to be there enough to leave our "gulf of misery."

SETTLING DOWN

Sitting implies permanence and stability. But sometimes we just fall for the novel and the exciting. It's like being in a classroom when everyone is all excited and the teacher says, "OK everybody, it's time to settle down." We love the buzz of something new and different. Controversy and scandal catch our attention. It's fun and entertaining to have new things to talk about and speculate about. It's a break from the routine.

Following the covenant path can feel routine, but part of growing up in life and part of growing up in Christ is learning to find joy and satisfaction in the routine. Stability may seem like the enemy when we're a thrill-seeking teen, but refusing to settle down leads us to miss out on being at home in God's presence. If we're always seeking out new sensations and diversions, we won't settle down to be present and enjoy the simple joys of the Spirit.

There's a phrase in the scriptures that has several meanings: "entering into the rest of the Lord." In its most lofty and sacred sense it describes becoming people who are worthy to enter into the physical presence of the Lord in mortality (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–24). But within the layers of meaning, entering into the "fullness of his glory" doesn't have to be an event as much as a feeling of being settled and grounded in Christ's love and his covenant promises. It's the hope that follows faith. We're not there yet. We're still on the journey. We're still traveling down the covenant path. But we know that we will arrive. We have confidence in the direction that we are going and that our efforts are pleasing to the Lord. We don't panic. We're not bored. We don't keep asking, "Are we there yet?" We don't have to see the throne of glory to know that it is ours.

In Moroni 7, Mormon spoke to a group of people that he said were "the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven" (Moroni 7:3). I think that is the goal in mortality: becoming the peaceable followers of Christ. As our faith in Christ grows, we follow him. We make and keep covenants. We live lives of worship, bowing down and serving, being humble

enough to do things his way even when we may not understand. We live lives of holiness, honoring him by applying his atoning blood to become clean and to purify our desires. Having faith we “lay hold upon every good thing” (7:25) and “cleave unto every good thing” (7:28).

But since we’re not perfect, we won’t always be consistent in this learning process of a journey. We may increasingly want to cleave unto every good thing, but our actions don’t always match our aspirations. How can we be settled then if we ourselves are not constant? Faith in Christ produces something that stabilizes us when the fruits of our faith are sometimes a little erratic. Mormon explains “if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope” (Moroni 7:42). Our hope is the internal product of faithful living. Even if we are not perfect in everything, our confidence that *he* is grows and grows. Hope is the fruit of faith. Moroni describes this “hope [which] cometh of faith” as “an anchor to the souls of men” (Ether 12:4). As we keep looking to Christ and keep calling on his holy name, we find that he is there for us. We know that his promises are sure. He is our Redeemer. He doesn’t leave us stranded.

So, Mormon asks, “What is it that ye shall hope for?” And then he gives us the best possible answer, the answer that we can rely on to bring hope to our souls: “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). Christ’s promise is sure. We trust in the covenant because we trust in him. We can have confidence that even if we have slipped and fallen, he is there to raise us up and put us back on the path. If we have sold ourselves, he has already paid the price for our release. We will be “raised unto life eternal” because he is our Redeemer. He is our covenant Father. He can and will bring us home. Our “faith in him according to the promise” gives us the courage to get up and keep going down the covenant path. He is the source of our stability. He is the source of our hope. Because his promises are sure, we can settle down and not

be tossed about by the novelty and controversy that keep everyone else jittery and agitated.

SITTING DOWN WITH CHRIST

In his visit to the Americas, the Savior gave us a glimpse of the exalted state to which we are being led. He used the imagery of sitting down to describe the full change of status and condition of the three disciples who were translated. “And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 28:10). The promise of becoming “even as I am” and “even as the Father” is, is the fullest possible sense of being exalted, or lifted up, to a new status. This is the end to which we are progressing on our journey of discipleship.

Obtaining this exalted and divine state and condition requires us to be filled with charity and to take on the divine nature. It’s a long journey, but we can have hope. We see this clearly taught in the Lord’s promise to Moroni in the book of Ether. Moroni first acknowledges the sobering truth that “except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (Ether 12:34). The Lord proceeds to console Moroni in the face of others’ weakness and even in the face of his own weakness: “And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, *even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father*” (Ether 12:37). Moroni was being invited to a throne of glory that was a *way* of being as much as a *place* to be. He was promised that he would be made strong enough to sit down on the throne prepared for him.

Moroni wasn't blessed for having no weakness. He was blessed for seeing his weakness. That is always where we have to start. That is how the process works. We must start by acknowledging that we need help, that we need a Redeemer. Having the humility and faith to ask for his grace opens up the door to all that we need to do and to be. Moroni was taught, "if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27). Christ will redeem us. Christ will exalt us. But he can't exercise faith for us. He can't repent for us. We have to choose him. We have to trust him. We have to want to be where he is and how he is more than we want to stay where we are now.

Being exalted to sit upon the throne requires not only leaving behind the captivity and dust of sin but also putting on the beautiful garments of righteousness and sitting down upon the throne of God's glorious and godly nature. Here is the symbolic invitation to live a better way: "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down [enthroned], O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money" (Isaiah 52:1-3). The Lord knows that we've made mistakes. But he reaches out to save us, to buy us out of the bondage we cannot leave on our own. As Lehi testified, "There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8). His grace is sufficient, if we are willing to rise up and become what he sees in us. His redemption is there to reclaim us and to take us to where we belong, sitting on the throne of the covenant promise of exaltation. We do serve him as his servants when we are redeemed, but he has bought us so that we can become kings and queens, sitting on an exalted throne.

As we're getting used to being redeemed and living lives of holiness, these garments of righteousness might feel like an awkward fit at first. They might not be fashionable. They might make us stand out or seem old fashioned. We might be tempted to adjust them, to take shortcuts in keeping the commandments. We might be tempted to leave them behind when we want to go somewhere they don't fit in. It's easy to forget that we were once captive and sitting in the dust. We may start to see ourselves as limited by the covenant relationship that makes us his servants, bowing down and doing God's will and not our own. It's easy to resent his expectations of holiness and righteousness. Do we really have to wear these robes of righteousness all the time?

We have to remember that we were in bondage. We were all captive. We sold ourselves for naught. Our Redeemer found us in captivity and invited us to "arise from the dust" (2 Nephi 1:14) and to "shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound" (1:13). But, in addition to liberating us from the bondage of sin, he also invites us to sanctify ourselves, to "put on [our] beautiful garments" and to sit down upon the throne of godliness and righteousness (Isaiah 52:1).

Being clothed with righteousness is a temple image that shows us that God wants to give us the kind of nature that he has, if we are willing to keep moving along the path to receive that gift. As we gradually feel greater desires to do good and be good, then we can say with all our hearts, "My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10).

When we attend the temple, we accept the invitation to ritually sit down as kings and queens. When we discard anything filthy from our lives, we accept the invitation to sit down as kings and queens and allow ourselves to be clothed with the robe of righteousness. Through the daily, upward journey to receive what Christ is giving us, we look ahead to the day when we can fully participate in the promise that "the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness,

being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14).

Just as we are invited to put on “robes of righteousness” that are external representations of an internal state, so the “throne” upon which God sits and reigns is the “throne” of his righteousness and holiness. The Psalmist taught that “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Psalm 97:2) and that “God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness” (Psalm 47: 8). His throne is not where he is as much as how he is.

As we receive the redemption that Christ offers, we gradually overcome the natural man part of ourselves. In that process, we leave behind the dust and captivity of sin and mortal limitations and are lifted up to become righteous and holy through faith and repentance. As we believe Christ’s vision of who we are and what we can become, we prepare ourselves to receive the exalted promise: “Sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). As we become like him and take on the divine nature, we prepare ourselves to “sit down in the kingdom of my Father; . . . and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 28:10).