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"THAT I MIGHT DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME"

Brian K. Ray

OF THE MANY TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL OF Jesus Christ, certainly there is no truth more important or more sublime than the atonement of Jesus Christ. His infinite sacrifice is the crowning event of this earth's existence—the veritable centerpiece of the plan of happiness.¹ The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that without Christ's redeeming and rescuing role in the Father's plan, mankind would remain "in a lost and in a fallen state" (1 Nephi 10:6). The prophet Jacob teaches this same principle in frightening terms—without the Atonement, all would be "subject to that angel who fell," "in misery," and caught in the "grasp of this awful monster," even "death and hell" (2 Nephi 9:8–10).

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ gained the eternal victory and "delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell" (2 Nephi 9:19). By allowing His will to be "swallowed up in the will of the Father," the Son is given power to redeem mankind from physical and spiritual death (Mosiah 15:7). As we gain a deeper understanding of His atonement, we learn that

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Christ’s sacrifice was not limited to the effects of sin or the pangs of death. The Atonement is infinite and therefore infinitely far-reaching across the spectrum of human suffering. Because Jesus suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” (Alma 7:11) as part of the “awful arithmetic of the Atonement,”² He is “filled with mercy” and knows perfectly “how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

The Book of Mormon adds precious enlightenment to our understanding of the Savior’s atonement and its infinite power to redeem. As witnesses of the wonder and beauty of the Atonement, both the prophet Nephi and the resurrected Lord Himself highlight one aspect of this crowning doctrine. The prophet Nephi taught that the Savior “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life *that he may draw all men unto him*. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation” (2 Nephi 26:24; emphasis added). During His ministration to the Nephites, Christ explained: “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, *that I might draw all men unto me*, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—and for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father *I will draw all men unto me*, that they may be judged according to their works” (3 Nephi 27:14–15; emphasis added).

Christ’s ability to draw us unto Him by virtue of His atonement and by His loving efforts is a sublime and beautiful doctrine. To “draw” means “to move or cause to move in a specified direction or to a specified position, as by leading.”³ Additionally, it means to carry, to bear, or to carry together.⁴ The Book of Mormon describes the two-fold nature of the Savior’s power and efforts in this regard: His capacity to draw all men physically and His capacity to draw all men spiritually.

DRAWN PHYSICALLY

Christ's gathering of Israel exemplifies the physical *drawing*. The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that Israel has been scattered, and that after their "long dispersion," they will be "gathered in . . . from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth" (2 Nephi 10:8). The Lord taught the Nephites that He would "remember the covenant which [He] made with [His] people" and that in His "own due time" the house of Israel would again be brought to the land of their inheritance (3 Nephi 20:29). This is no idle promise; this is a covenant made by the Good Shepherd to His sheep whom "he numbereth" (1 Nephi 22:25). Israel can rest assured that they will be "led up as calves of the stall" to their inheritance, where there not only will "be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep," but Jesus Himself will "reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory" (1 Nephi 22:24, 25).

As a part of the glorious events of this last dispensation, Israel will be *drawn* together physically to receive the blessings promised to them through the covenant. The prophet Nephi describes the Savior's caring labors to gather Israel as follows: "Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

"Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel" (1 Nephi 22:11–12).

Another aspect of Christ's power to *draw* physically is the Resurrection, one of the most hope-inspiring doctrines of the gospel. Mormon counseled all to "have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Moroni 7:41). The prophet Jacob, after extending an invitation to "reconcile [ourselves] to the will of God" (2 Nephi 10:24), concluded: "Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also

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from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 10:25).

The Resurrection is a gift to all men and women who kept their first estate. All born into mortality will be raised in immortality regardless of knowledge possessed or choices made. “Behold, there is a time appointed that *all* shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed, . . . and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that *all* shall rise from the dead” (Alma 40:4–5; emphasis added). While we rejoice in the fact that Christ “breaketh the bands of death” and “that the grave shall have no victory” (Alma 22:14), the power of the Resurrection conquers even spiritual death, which is a separation from the presence of God. Samuel the Lamanite taught as follows:

“For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

“Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

“But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:15–17).

Sons and daughters of God will be *drawn* back into the Father’s presence as part of the Resurrection. For a portion, however, the privilege of remaining with Him will be short-lived. That is because of what awaits us in God’s presence subsequent to the Resurrection. The prophet Alma taught that after “all shall rise from the dead” we would “stand before God, and be judged according to [our] works” (Alma 11:41). Jesus will draw each of us through “the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, . . . to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God” (Jacob 6:9). Alma

explained in perhaps the most detailed terms in scripture about the Resurrection and Judgment:

“Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

“The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

“Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (Alma 11:42–44).

DRAWN SPIRITUALLY

We are invited repeatedly throughout the scriptures to “come unto the Lord, the Holy One” (2 Nephi 9:41). We can take great comfort in knowing that we are not left alone in this spiritual journey, for Jesus promises that His “arm of mercy is extended towards [us]” (3 Nephi 9:14). His arm of mercy reaches out to all mankind to *draw* them to Him, to help them become like Him, and to help them be worthy to be “joint-heirs” with Him (Romans 8:17). The Book of Mormon powerfully describes, with some of the most evocative images of the Savior’s love for each of us, His efforts to draw us spiritually and bear us back to the Father.

Jesus promises to *bring* the faithful back to Him just as He “did *bring* [Israel] out of the land of Egypt” (1 Nephi 17:40; emphasis added). As a missionary, Ammon witnessed the Lord bringing the Lamanites back to Him and described it as follows: “Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but

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behold, he has *brought* them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation” (Alma 26:15; emphasis added). Ammon knew deeply and personally of the Savior’s power to *draw* him back: “Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath *brought* us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls” (Alma 26:20; emphasis added). While we may not be considered “the very vilest of sinners” (Mosiah 28:4), as were Ammon and his brothers, we still find ourselves distant from God because of our sins, however minor they may be. Each of us, especially those under covenant, will feel the Savior reaching out to *bring* us back to Him. If we respond to His efforts and if we are faithful and repentant, then He will bless us and make our “garments spotless, that [we] may at last be *brought* to sit down . . . in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out” (Alma 7:25; emphasis added).

The prophet Nephi recognized that the Lord had great power to lead his family to the promised land just as He led Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt. Nephi rehearsed the story of Moses to his brothers so they might recognize how the Lord continually leads His people, especially in spiritual matters (see 1 Nephi 17:13, 23–24, 38, 42). Nephi later testified of how the Lord had led him: “My God hath been my support; he hath *led* me through mine afflictions in the wilderness” (2 Nephi 4:20; emphasis added). It is interesting to note that Nephi does not say that the Lord led him through the wilderness, but that the Lord led him *through his afflictions*. We might ask ourselves: Where was the Lord leading him? Undoubtedly, the answer is that the Lord was drawing Nephi back to Himself, allowing Nephi, as He does with each of us, to be refined in the “furnace of affliction” (1 Nephi 20:10). We know that the Lord will not leave us in our current situation forever, however bright or bleak we perceive it to be. Instead, Christ is consistently the One “who *leadeth* thee by the way thou shouldst go” (1 Nephi 20:17; emphasis added). Jesus explained to the prophet Moroni that “whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that *leadeth* men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that

I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world” (Ether 4:12; emphasis added).

Mormon and Moroni waded through some of the most painful and disheartening times described in scripture, their trials culminating in the destruction of their people. They were surrounded by a portion of God’s covenant people who absolutely refused to be drawn by and to their Redeemer. These prophets labored “without hope” because the Nephites refused to repent (Mormon 5:2). However, each was consoled in his testimony of the Atonement and the Lord’s power to draw them back to Him. On one occasion Mormon counseled Moroni: “My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ *lift thee up*, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25; emphasis added). By lifting us up, whether it be “at the last day” or merely lifted up from the day to day difficulties of mortality, the Savior will draw us to Him and with Him that we might “enter into his rest” (Alma 13:29).

In an answer to the humble pleadings of a distraught father, as well as the prayers of their people, the Lord sent an angel to correct Alma the Younger. After days of intense repentance in a comalike state, Alma awoke and testified of how the Lord had drawn him back. Alma exclaimed: “Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to *snatch* me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

“My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am *snatched*, and my soul is pained no more” (Mosiah 27:28–29; emphasis added).

The word *snatch* connotes a sudden or unexpected seizing or catching. Originally the word made reference to a “sudden snap or bite at something.”⁵ How comforting it is to know that when we face

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our private and personal challenges, that when we feel that “the very jaws of hell . . . gape open the mouth wide after [us]” (D&C 122:7), our Savior has the power and the love to *snatch* us and *draw* us to Him. Though He may not remove our own individual “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), for to do so may deprive us of necessary “experience” that “shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7), nevertheless He will be merciful to both strengthen us and *snatch* us from that which is “awful, sinful, and polluted” (Alma 26:17).

For a child that is hurt or frightened, few things could be more comforting than to be embraced by one whom he loves and who loves him. It is not difficult to imagine our Savior, filled with mercy and compassion, reaching out to *draw* us into His healing arms. This is the “whole meaning,” according to Amulek, and “the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and *encircles them in the arms of safety*” (Alma 34:14–16; emphasis added). Mormon lamented the fact that the Nephites “rejected that Jesus, who stood with *open arms* to receive [them]” (Mormon 6:17; emphasis added). In this time of great commotion as the second coming of the Lord draws near, those who suffer from fear or pain or any of the host of human sufferings can be *drawn* into the Savior’s “ample arm[s]”⁶ and “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11).

THE ONGOING LABOR TO DRAW

Our Savior is indomitable in His efforts to draw us back to Him. In the allegory of the olive tree, He asks the question, “Have I slackened mine hand?” His answer is plain: “Nay, . . . I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long” (Jacob 5:47). However, in spite of His unrelenting efforts on our behalf, He will not abrogate man’s agency. He will plead, entice, invite, and persuade, but He will never force or compel. “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you. Yea, he saith: Come unto me

and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely” (Alma 5:33–34).

Some have been blessed by the personal ministry of the Lord and have been drawn to Him in the flesh, such as the Nephites who, at the behest of the resurrected Lord, came forward “one by one” to feel the prints in His hands, feet, and side (3 Nephi 11:15; see also 3 Nephi 17). Yet for the majority of God’s children, our Savior’s efforts will be much more subtle. Some will be invited by the voice of the Lord (see Alma 5:37–38, 60), while others will be “wrought upon” by the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 13:12; see also Mosiah 5:2; Alma 16:16). In addition, some are tutored by the “wintry”⁷ doctrines such as a personal weakness (see Jacob 4:7; Ether 12:27, 37) or a chastening experience (see Mosiah 23:21–22; Helaman 12:3). Whatever the case, the perfect example of our Redeemer will draw us to Him. Nephi testified that Christ “set the example” for each of us. The prophet further taught that Jesus “said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. . . .

“And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.

“Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do” (2 Nephi 31:9–10, 16–17).

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Book of Mormon, and His atonement is the central doctrine therein. His infinite sacrifice was the fruit of His love and selflessness, as well as His devotion to our Heavenly Father. Through the power of His atonement and because of His endless charity toward mankind, those who have been drawn spiritually to Jesus, becoming like Him through His atoning blood, will become heirs to the celestial kingdom. In the words of the prophet Jacob: “Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power

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of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh” (Jacob 4:11).

NOTES

1. See Neal A. Maxwell, “Put Off the Natural Man and Come Off Conqueror,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 15.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 73.
3. *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), s.v. “draw.”
4. Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Larousse Kingfisher, Chambers, 1988), s.v. “draw.”
5. *Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology*, s.v. “snatch.”
6. “Lean on My Ample Arm,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 120.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, “Irony: The Crust on the Bread of Adversity,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 62.