

Sure Foundation High School Class of 2014

Charge to the Graduate, Jacob Oliver Burford

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Our family had recently returned home from a late October vacation in southwestern Missouri. The year was 2002 and our six-year-old son, Jacob, couldn't wait for us to display the new tapestry we purchased from the Visitor Center of the Precious Moments Chapel near Carthage, Missouri.

The tapestry featured a painting by Greg Olsen. In the painting Jesus is seated and looking intently into the face of a small child standing by His side.

Jesus' face shows sincere interest and warm compassion. The child's face reveals trust and a sense of being valued. There is clearly a bond of friendship and love between the two.

When I finally got around to hanging it on the wall November 2 of that year, Jacob asked me to take his picture standing in front of the tapestry. So I stopped what I was doing and snapped a photo. Jacob seemed satisfied and went about his play for the day. But the scene lingered in my mind. Something about the look on Jacob's face, as he posed for the picture, told me that having a relationship with Jesus like the small child in the painting meant a great deal to him.

Later that month, on Thursday, November 21, Pam recorded in her journal how Jacob had spoken to her that day about a dream he had had the previous night. Here is what she recorded of his account of that dream:

Our family drove in our Ford van to a train station. We all got on the train, but after a while Jacob did not see any of us and he knew that he was lost. He thought I (Mom) was coming back, but I didn't. Suddenly a light appeared; a voice from the light spoke. "Don't be afraid," said the voice, "If you pray you will be saved." He looked out the window and saw our Ford van. He got in it with us and we drove home. When Jacob woke up it was still night.

Jacob, your dream along with your desire to have your picture taken with the painting of Jesus and the small child on the tapestry remind me of just how uncomplicated and straightforward the gospel of Jesus Christ really is. "If you pray you will be saved," you were told in your dream. This is truly good news. This is a gospel that a child can believe in and have sufficient confidence to live by. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you remember what Jesus taught His disciples about *prayer*, the kind of prayer that brings salvation into our very lives? As recorded in Matthew 21 (vs. 20 IV), Jesus said, “*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, in faith believing, ye shall receive.*” This includes salvation. Thus, if we *ask in prayer, in faith believing*, we will *receive* salvation. But how is this possible? The answer is found in the words of Jesus as recorded in John 14:13-18:

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.

Recall also the words of the prophet Joel whom the Apostle Paul quoted in Romans 10:13, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”

It is true, Jacob. Jesus is willing to befriend you just as Greg Olsen portrayed Him in the painting in the tapestry on our dining room wall. There is even more good news. As it is written in Hebrews 7:24, Jesus is not only willing to save us, He is able to save each of us unto what the writer of Hebrews called *the uttermost*.

It is also true that we must call upon Jesus in order to be saved. This is why Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 7 to *ask*, and to *seek*, and to *knock*. For He said of Himself in John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”

That is to say, if we ask of Jesus, we will receive Him into our lives as the way we may abide in His salvation which He offers to us freely. If we seek Jesus, we will find Him to be the truth by whom we are set free from sin and death (John 8). And if we knock at the door placed before us, and He is that door (John 10:9), He will open the way of everlasting life unto us.

The message is simply this: in as much as you ask Him, He will answer you. In as much as you seek Him, you shall surely find Him. And in as much as you knock, He will open unto you.

At the same time, it is important to understand from the scriptures why the Lord does not hear the prayers of everyone who prays unto Him. In Psalm 66:18 we read, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*” And in Proverb 28:13 we read, “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*”

The lesson is once again simple and uncomplicated: we must be careful to be honest with Jesus when we pray. Hypocrisy is not acceptable to Him. This is why Jesus asks, “*And why call me Lord, Lord, and do not things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46) To truly come unto Him and have fellowship with Him, we must pray in true faith, believing that Jesus will indeed save us *from* sin, not *in* sin. As John testified,

I John 1:5-10 – *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as*

he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Remember how Joseph, Mary's husband, was told by the heavenly messenger that the baby she carried would be called *Jesus* because He would save His people *from* their sins. Jesus cannot save us in our sins, only from our sins (Helaman 2:71-75 with Helaman 5:62-74). This is why we must call upon His name. His name, *Jesus*, means He will save us from our sins, not in our sins. And this is why those who *regard* iniquity in their hearts, the Lord will not hear them.

The word *regard* in Psalm 66:18 is translated as *cherish* or *harbor* in some translations of the Bible. Meaning, those who *cherish* sin cannot be saved because the Lord will not hear their prayers. It is only by repenting of our sins, by our turning away from our sins and toward Jesus that we can receive *the object of our faith*, even the salvation of our souls.

Jacob, let's return now to Jesus' words found in the 14th chapter of John and His promise to those who keep His commandments (John 15). Jesus promises to pray for them that they may receive the Comforter, whom He also called *the Spirit of truth* and *the Holy Ghost*. Why is this particular gift, the gift of the Holy Ghost, so important? The answer, as before, is this thing called prayer. In the words of the Apostle Paul, as found in the 8th chapter of Romans, we do not know how to pray as we should pray. So the Spirit of truth, Jesus's Spirit, makes intercession for us:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)

And so we are admonished to "*Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.*" (D&C 10:6)

There is one sure way you may know that you are being led by the Spirit of truth, and that is if you are being led to pray.

For if ye would hearken unto the spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray: for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. But behold I say unto you, that ye must pray always, and not faint: that ye must not perform anything unto the Lord, save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (II Nephi 14:11-12)

Why is it important to be led of the Spirit which teaches us to pray? In Jesus' words, as recorded in Luke 13:24, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for I say unto you Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able; for the Lord shall not always strive with man.*" We would be wise then to confess with the Apostle Paul:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung,

that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the just. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 3:8-14)

Paul's determination was to press forward in Christ that He might win Christ and the life He offers to each of us. This type of determination is in keeping with Jesus' words as recorded in John 8:31-36.

... 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... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Jesus is the only one who is able to abide forever in the house of the Lord on His own merits. This is why Jesus promises to not leave us comfortless, but to come unto us and comfort us as we see portrayed in the picture on the tapestry. As recorded in John 14, Jesus said He is preparing a place for us, and in John 14:18-27 we read:

I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him ... If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings; and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

With these words we can understand what Paul meant when he wrote, "Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Corinthians 3:17). God's promised Comforter, called the Spirit of truth, is the Spirit of Jesus Christ as Paul states in Galatians 4:6. And His Spirit is able to lead us into all truth because He is able to call to our remembrance all the words of Jesus. In John 16:12-14 we read:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.

Thus it is written:

Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit, and in this there is no condemnation; and ye receive the Spirit through prayer; wherefore, without this there remaineth condemnation. (D&C 63:16a)

We receive the Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ, through prayer. And thus are you were told if you pray you will be saved. That is, we receive everlasting life salvation through the prayer of faith unto the Father in the name of the Son. Remember, therefore, the words of Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the churches at Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Philippi:

Ephesians 6:13-18 – *Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*

I Thessalonians 5:14-24 - *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it.*

Philippians 4:4-9 – *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be afflicted for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.*

In conclusion, remember that...

... by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified; and by the blood ye are sanctified. Therefore it is given to abide in you, the record of heaven, the Comforter, the peaceable things of immortal glory, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things which maketh alive all things, that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice and judgment. (Genesis 6:63,64 IR)

Jacob, by His Spirit, Jesus Christ promises to teach you the peaceable things of His kingdom (D&C 39:2b). Therefore, put your trust in Him and His Spirit who is able to lead you to do good. Or in other words, in the words of the prophet Micah, *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8).

Jacob, Jesus loves you and I love you. Please receive these words of counsel into a gracious heart. Choose life, and may the God of all peace and comfort keep and bless you all the days of your life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.