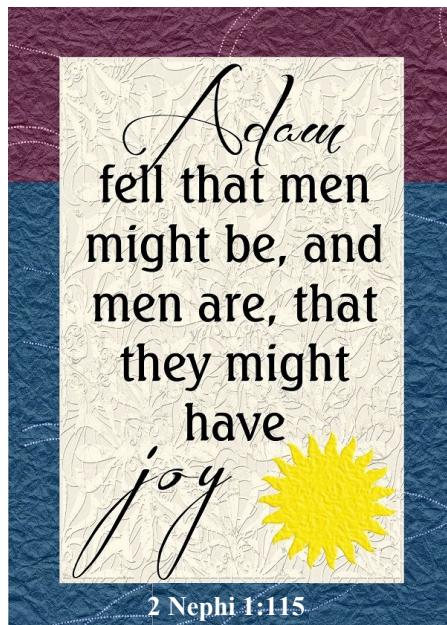


The theme for the year and the theme for the month are expressing those things which will CHANGE OUR LIVES!

We need to acknowledge we are sinners. We need to accept God's conditions for forgiveness and His willingness to forgive. We need to give ourselves to Christ and respond to the scripture, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Read Matthew 16:25) We need to be the kind of disciples who would give up more than just the **secondary** things in our lives. We must be true disciples, willing to deny ourselves and follow the kingdom way of life.

We need to be as the father of King Lamoni, who recognized that receiving enlightenment about God was not enough. He felt he needed to embrace—by faith—the way of salvation offered by God. He demonstrated his willingness to give up everything he had to obtain salvation when he asked the question of Aaron as recorded in the book of Alma: "Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess; yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy." (Read Alma 13:49-50)



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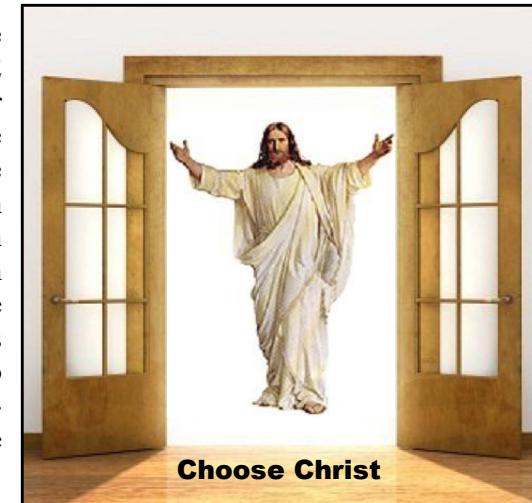
Bulletin Insert – January 2023

"Repent and Come Unto Christ — Choose Christ"

by Elder Bill Jones

The theme selected for the year is, "REPENT AND COME UNTO CHRIST." The theme for the months of January and February which supports the yearly theme, is "**Choose Christ**." The similarities in the two themes make it possible to discuss them together since their subject matter is supportive of one another.

The theme for the year "REPENT AND COME UNTO CHRIST" calls our attention to facts which we already know—that we live in a state of sin and rebellion which separates us from God. The natural man is an enemy to God. Sin is in the heart of men. Our will is sometimes in opposition to God's will. Corrective action on our part needs to be taken.



The scripture selected to be a part of this year's theme is 2 Nephi 12:41. It is suggestive of the nature of God's love for us and what we can do to take advantage of that love: "Nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of hosts."

The importance of this scripture grows in significance if we realize it is in reference to the worldly conditions of mankind in our day, as shown to Nephi under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He saw the people's predisposition to sin as evidenced by their taking advantage of their fellowmen. Because of their extravagant excesses and greed they oppressed the poor; they persecuted the meek and the poor in spirit; and they willfully imposed their own pride and wickedness. They taught with their own learning, promoted false doctrines, and ignored the utterances of the Holy Ghost.

Nephi understood that all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on Christ. He remembered the words of his father Lehi concerning Christ. “Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.” (Read 2 Nephi 1:72)

Nephi took to heart Lehi’s counsel to make Christ known to the inhabitants of the earth. Our considerations should lead us to the same action. “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that 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.” (Read 2 Nephi 1:73)

This recognition of Christ as spoken by Lehi, brings us to our monthly theme for January and February which is to “CHOOSE CHRIST.” To choose Christ means we have to deny ourselves or deny that way of life that separates us from God. If we are to be true disciples of Christ, the application of His words must reflect in our lives. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Read Matthew 16:25)

However, the act of choosing can bring into question the issue of trust. In whom, or what, do we trust? The scriptures assure us of God’s character, and as Arthur Oakman says, “It [God’s character] enables us to feel quite confident that He [God] will deal in justice and love with every human soul He has created.” You would think our choosing would be a simple matter and yet it is not. Why is that? If we are to continue with Arthur Oakman’s line of reasoning to supply our answer, “It is because the spirit of the age in which we live is one of ignorance of God and His ways. **Society as a whole is organized apart from God and the ways of man prevail, unguided by the word of God.**”

It is because of this condition that the Spirit prompted Joseph Smith to write these words recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 1:3e: “Every man walketh in his own way and after the image of his own God.” If this is what we do, it allows us to rewrite the definition of sin in such a way as to satisfy our interpretation, and become comfortable with our sin, and ignore our God.

We have been created to understand that we must strive for perfection and for fellowship with God, but Satan seeks to persuade us otherwise. He seeks to mislead us in ways that excludes us from fellowship with God. It is Satan’s intention to deceive and blind men and lead them captive by his will. Captivity begins with deception. If we can be persuaded to believe it is alright to sin a little and God will beat us only with a few stripes and still be saved at the last day, then the act of deception in our lives is established.

We know we are to CHOOSE CHRIST and even though Lehi gave counsel to make Christ known to the inhabitants of the world, Lehi was aware that men—“are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil.” (Read 2 Nephi 1:120) Therein lies the danger. Satan seeks that—“all men might be miserable like unto himself.” (Read 2 Nephi 1:121) It was a fact that did not go unnoticed by Lehi and which prompted him to speak to his sons in the following fashion: “And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments, And be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit, And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, Which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate....” (Read 2 Nephi 1:122-125) The **evil therein** of which Lehi was speaking was the **will of the flesh** and the predisposition of men to sin and transgress the law because of their willfulness.