

The Plan of Salvation-An Alternate Method of Teaching

Allen Blake Boatright

10/1/2015

I propose that a metaphor of the role of spiritual light in our lives can help us see ourselves and others on an eternal journey of adding or rejecting spiritual light in our lives. The ultimate spiritual light includes that account of the Sacred Grove where Joseph Smith prayed and the restoration of ancient priesthood authority and ordinances that followed.

An Alternate Method of Teaching The Plan of Salvation

When the LDS Missionaries taught me what they called the Plan of Salvation they used a flannel board with little cutout pieces of cardboard that stuck to the flannel. They showed the journey of mankind from the pre-mortal world to earth, then death, a spirit world, then judgment, and finally three circles that represented three degrees or kingdoms of glory. I think the idea was meant to encourage me to aspire to enter the highest of God's kingdoms, the Celestial Kingdom, where God and Christ dwell. Later, on a mission to Denmark in 1971–1973, I used the same method and flannel board to teach the same lesson. And quite honestly, it was one of the more popular lessons we taught. Nothing was quite like it. For many years that was the way we illustrated and taught the Plan of Salvation.¹ That same illustration is in a Primary manual from 1996.²

In 2003 Elder Boyd K. Packer explained that his favorite name for the Plan of Salvation is The Plan of Happiness.³ That lesson includes an alternate method of teaching that uses a bridge with the pillars of the bridge being creation, the Fall, and then the Atonement. The bridge represents the gap between mortality and eternity

¹ New Testament Study Guide, 2 Corinthians 12-13, Paul is Caught Up into the Third Heaven, illustration, (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City) 1999, 130.

² Primary 6: Old Testament Lesson 1: Heavenly Father's Plan for Us, illustration, (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City) 1996, 1-5.
<http://www.lds.org>, accessed: 29 Sep 2015.

³ *Old Testament Teacher Resource Manual*, (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City) 2003, 13–19.

overcome by Jesus Christ that then allows us to return to the presence of God. Elder Packer also used a metaphor of a three-act play to describe how we are in the second act without knowledge of the first act and no understanding of the final act. The teachings of the restoration fill in our ignorance and assist us to go forward with faith. In some ways I feel there is still something missing in explaining The Great Plan of Happiness or the Plan of Salvation. How can we account for other churches and their teachings in addition to the teachings of our own? Can we explain the Lord's plan in a way that makes it more inclusive of the truths taught by other faiths?

I propose that a metaphor of the role of spiritual light in our lives can help us see ourselves and others on an eternal journey of adding or rejecting spiritual light in our lives. The ultimate spiritual light includes that account of the Sacred Grove where Joseph Smith prayed and the restoration of ancient priesthood authority and ordinances that followed.

The Metaphor

During the First Gulf War in 1991, I deployed with a Special Forces Battalion to Saudi Arabia in preparation for operations in Kuwait and elsewhere. In my work as a chaplain I assisted one soldier who had an addiction to alcohol to find an Alcoholics Anonymous group. He met with them and began a life of sobriety. Delighted with the change in his life, he thanked me again and again for helping him move away from his addiction, but he did not seem hungry for any other improvement. Frankly, I was frustrated that he only wanted just that much help. I wanted to give him a foundation for a spiritual life that went way beyond his AA

meetings but he wanted nothing to do with that. I complained to my Supervisor chaplain, an accomplished Methodist, that I was frustrated by the experience. I said to him, "Suppose that spirituality is on a scale of zero to ten. Zero is carnal, sensual and devilish and ten is celestial. You help someone move from zero to one and they stop. They don't want anything more. Have you ever experienced anything like that before?" He replied that he experienced that all the time. I asked him how he dealt with that.

He asked me, "Have you ever been caving (spelunking)?" I said yes, and he then asked, "Did anyone light a match while you were in total darkness?" I responded yes, to which he said, "What happened to your eyes?" I replied that it was actually painful to see so bright a light when my eyes were so completely dilated. He said, "I think it's like that when someone moves from zero to one. It takes them a while to accustom to the added light." That was a wonderful answer and illuminating in its own right.

Change or spiritual growth happens in degrees, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly like Paul on the way to Damascus.⁴ I believe that for most of us on earth, the growth process is gradual, like the almost imperceptible growth rings on a tree. This process is inclusive of every person regardless of their beliefs or religion.

In addition, God seems to give us as much light or spiritual knowledge as we are willing to receive. The experience of Joseph Smith opened the door to spiritual light on a scale not seen of the earth for a long time. God the Father and Jesus Christ

⁴ See Acts 9:3-6

opened the heavens in a pillar of light brighter than the noonday sun.⁵ Then heavenly messengers arrived with power to restore ancient priesthood ordinances that gave authority to provide holy ordinances of salvation for the living and the dead. Temples were built as sacred places where further light was available for the living and the dead.

In our day there is more light available than there ever has been in earth's history. The available light is in the form of ordinances such as authorized baptism, the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost, priesthood ordination, and other ordinances leading to higher covenants in the Lord's Temples. The restoration of all these ordinances is available for the living and the dead. But for someone struggling in the darkness, the journey of acquiring light often begins long before accepting the light of the gospel and all the ordinances available therein.

The Journey

Suppose my friend found additional light in the AA meetings and friends who helped him to move away from a very negative addiction. He added a measure of light to his life that was empowering and so much brighter than his addictive days of drinking. Suppose later that he joined a group of Buddhists who taught him the Eightfold Path toward enlightenment and he learned to become selfless and kind to others. To my thinking that is adding light to his existence. These things he has embraced do not add covenants, which are essential to reaching the Celestial Kingdom, but they prepare him to perhaps add the light of the Atonement of Jesus Christ at some later time in his existence.

⁵ JS History 1:16

I see this as everyone's journey, adding or subtracting light on a journey of mortal existence and even adding light in a world of spirits who died and are now in a place of prison or peace depending on the choices they made with the light available to them in mortality. In a 1978 statement by the First Presidency, Spencer W. Kimball taught, "... we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come."⁶ Thus the great discriminator in the eternal heavens may simply be those who accept the ordinances and teachings of the Father and those who reject them. It seems we are ultimately either outside the covenants of God or within them. Do my actions and my choices add light to my life or push it away. For those who live in darkness, a candle is a wonderful thing. For those who've found spiritual light that has helped them move away from darkness, that light is precious indeed, and additional light is still more cherished.

I see the precious works of Mother Theresa and other great souls on earth as engaged in the Father's work of adding light to all mankind. The aforementioned statement by the First Presidency also said, "The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

⁶ "Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind," February 15, 1978.

The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.”⁷

So I like to draw a single line on the chalkboard with zero at the left side and ten on the right. I try to draw the line between real straight. Then I like to describe zero as carnal, sensual and devilish, or spiritually dead.⁸ The ten on the right is where we have become as God is, Celestial and heavenly, fit to dwell in his Kingdom. How do we get there?

How do we add light to our lives? Like the growth rings on a tree, the growth process is gradual. It is accomplished by daily adding spiritual nourishment to our lives. That may need to be an addiction recovery program or personal habits that encourage the spirit to nurture us like prayer and scripture study. I like to ask the class questions such as: Don’t raise your hand or respond out loud, but where are you in your spiritual journey? What are you doing that is adding or detracting light in your life? Are you working toward accepting the covenants of God? Are you a covenant keeper? Do you invite others to share your light? Or is your light under a bushel basket?⁹

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Moses 5:13; 6:49, see also Doctrines of the Gospel Teacher Manual/ Chapter 18: Spiritual Rebirth: True Conversion, <http://lds.org> accessed 29 Sep 2015.

⁹ Matt. 5:14-16.

Power in the Ordinances

As part of the powerful restoration of all things, the Lord gave to mankind the ordinances of the Priesthood. He tells us, that “...in the ordinances thereof, the power godliness is manifest.”¹⁰ I would say that the power of godliness is light in our lives. The power of godliness in the ordinance of baptism is an extension and symbol of the power of Jesus Christ to remove our sins when we repent. Through him and that ordinance, we can become clean from our mistakes and sins. The darkness of our sins is washed away and light replaces the murky deeds done in the dark. We are new creatures with a new lease on life, a spiritual life. When I refuse authorized baptism, I remain in darkness, and the power of the Savior and his atoning sacrifice is withheld from me. In this respect my progress is stopped; I am damned, meaning, damnation is equivalent to halted progress, not being automatically cast into Hell or Outer Darkness. When I accept the Savior’s atonement through baptism from those who are authorized to perform that ordinance, I am cleansed and born again. Those who are born again are promised that they may eventually live with God. The ordinances are essential for the living and the dead if we wish to live with our Heavenly Father. He has graciously provided a perfect plan with his Son Jesus Christ that allows us the freedom to choose and the power to rise above sin and mistakes when we repent and make the power of the Savior’s suffering on our behalf a reality.

Everyone’s Journey

¹⁰ D&C 84:20.

Mortality is everyone's journey. We existed before as spirit children of a Heavenly Father; we were given the opportunity of birth and all will have an equitable chance for redemption through our Great Redeemer. Elder Richard G. Scott, who recently completed his journey in mortality, wrote:

"I testify that with unimaginable suffering and agony at an incalculable price, the Savior earned His right to be our Redeemer, our Intermediary, our Final Judge. I know that He lives and that He loves you. Consistently make Him your 'lead' in life. The secure anchors of His laws will assure safety and success as you scale the challenges you will face. You will not fall into serious transgression. Yours will be a life of peace and happiness crowned with exaltation in the celestial kingdom."¹¹

The Great Plan of Happiness can be described as a process of adding light to our existence in this life and in eternity. Through Jesus Christ we can find and add light and be empowered by sacred ordinances that teach and empower us to return to God's very presence. Lastly, growing in light allows for anyone who accepts spiritual growth to progress outside the church and eventually to progress toward all of God's covenants and glory.

¹¹ Elder Richard G. Scott, October 2006, General Conference "The Atonement can Secure Your Peace and Happiness."