

King Benjamin: From Fear to Joy

Mosiah 3-5

Introduction

King Benjamin was a Nephite king and prophet nearing the end of his reign when he gathered his people for what would become his final recorded sermon. Although his son Mosiah would soon assume the throne, King Benjamin used this gathering to prepare his people for a covenant centered in Jesus Christ. An angel awakened him with a message concerning Jesus Christ and instructed him to declare these “glad tidings of great joy” to his people (Mosiah 3:2–4). The Lord had sent the angel so that King Benjamin might rejoice and his people “may also be filled with joy.” Joy is therefore named as one purpose of the sermon before the people ever hear it (Mosiah 3:4).

The angel identifies Jesus Christ as the eternal “Lord Omnipotent” and announces that He “shall come down from heaven among the children of men” (Mosiah 3:5). King Benjamin’s people learn that Christ will live among men, heal the sick, suffer temptation and pain, bleed from every pore, die, and rise again (Mosiah 3:5–10). They are also told that “there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come” except through Jesus Christ (Mosiah 3:17). King Benjamin teaches them about the Savior who makes transformation possible before asking them to confront the natural man and consider what must change within them. For readers today, this sequence offers a merciful approach to repentance: honest self-examination can lead us toward Christ because we already know that He has provided the way to repent, change, and be healed.

The people’s response shows how they understood his message. After hearing King Benjamin, they recognize their fallen condition and fall to the earth. Their fear moves them to cry out, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins” (Mosiah 4:2). The answer comes immediately: “the Spirit of the Lord came upon them,” and they are “filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience” (Mosiah 4:3). The joy announced in Mosiah 3 has now become their own experience.

Their experience provides a pattern we can follow. We come to understand the Savior, recognize our need for Him, seek His mercy, and receive the forgiveness, peace, and joy that make lasting change possible. King Benjamin’s sermon turns honest self-examination toward Jesus Christ. His grace lifts us from condemnation, prepares us to covenant with God, and changes how we live.

1. The Lord Omnipotent Comes Down

Mosiah 3:5–10: “The Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men.”

King Benjamin begins his sustained witness of Jesus Christ by teaching his people who the Savior is and what He will do. The angel calls Him “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity” (Mosiah 3:5). In the same sentence, this eternal and all-powerful God “shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay.” Christ enters mortality already divine, already reigning as “the Lord Omnipotent,” and willingly accepts mortal limitation and vulnerability (Mosiah 3:5).

King Benjamin’s people hear this prophecy more than a century before the Savior’s birth. They cannot look backward to Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Calvary, or the Resurrection as later disciples can. The angel tells them what Jesus Christ will do, and they must receive his witness by faith. The prophecy gives their faith concrete detail: Christ will go among men “working mighty miracles,” healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, restoring sight to the blind, and enabling the deaf to hear (Mosiah 3:5). The angel first describes Christ moving among His people and relieving suffering; only afterward does he turn to the suffering Christ Himself will bear.

Bishop Richard C. Edgley described the Savior’s condescension as a choice made “only for love.” King Benjamin’s account gives that love recognizable form. Jesus Christ comes among the children of men rather than saving humanity from a safe distance. He ministers among them, experiences mortal conditions, and willingly accepts the vulnerability of “a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5).¹

The angel then moves from the suffering Christ will relieve to the suffering He will bear. Christ will suffer “more than man can suffer, except it be unto death,” and His anguish will cause “blood [to come] from every pore” (Mosiah 3:7). The One introduced only verses earlier as reigning from all eternity willingly accepts suffering beyond ordinary mortal capacity. King Benjamin does not present the Atonement as a distant theological idea. The Lord Omnipotent enters mortality and bears the cost of redemption Himself.

King Benjamin’s first sustained witness of Christ therefore begins with movement in an unexpected direction. His people first learn how far God will descend to reach them rather than how far they must climb to reach Him. With that knowledge in place, King Benjamin’s words ask us to examine what needs to change within ourselves by directing our attention toward Jesus Christ—who He is, what He willingly entered, and what He was willing to suffer to save us.

2. The Only Name by Which Salvation Comes

Mosiah 3:17: “There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.”

The angel’s language is unusually emphatic. He does not simply say that Christ can save. He

¹Richard C. Edgley, “The Condescension of God,” *Ensign*, December 2001, 19.

says there is “no other name,” “nor any other way nor means” (Mosiah 3:17). Ancestry cannot save. Position cannot save. Religious knowledge, personal discipline, good intentions, and an impressive record of service cannot do what Jesus Christ does. These may matter deeply in a faithful life, but none is the source of salvation.

That distinction can become harder to maintain than it sounds. Faithful disciples would rarely claim that they can save themselves, yet we can still begin measuring our standing before God primarily by how well we think we are doing. Prayer, scripture study, temple worship, service, repentance, and obedience are essential parts of covenant life. Distortion begins when we ask these practices to prove that we have earned God’s love or use them to rank our discipleship against someone else’s. King Benjamin gives his people—and us—a steadier foundation. There is one Savior, and it is not us.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described the mortal reality that keeps disciples dependent upon Christ: “Except for Jesus, there have been no flawless performances on this earthly journey.” King Benjamin gives his people reason to pursue faithfulness without confusing discipleship with flawless performance. Jesus Christ alone is without sin, and salvation comes through Him. His disciples follow Him imperfectly, repent when they fall short, receive His grace, and continue becoming more like Him. Their unfinished progress becomes the setting in which they repeatedly learn to rely upon the only name by which salvation comes.²

3. Becoming a Saint Through Christ

Mosiah 3:19: “For the natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit . . . and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.”

Mosiah 3:19 contains one of King Benjamin’s strongest descriptions of the human condition: “the natural man is an enemy to God.” King Benjamin places a clear way forward beside this severe diagnosis. The natural man remains an enemy to God “unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit,” puts off the natural man, and becomes “a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). The verse identifies what is wrong with us and teaches that, through Jesus Christ, we can become different.

King Benjamin’s choice of “yields” deserves attention. The word shifts the emphasis from strength or accomplishment to our response to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Yielding still requires agency. We must listen, respond, repent, and sometimes surrender something we would rather hold onto. It also requires humility enough to recognize the source of the transformation. We become saints “through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

King Benjamin describes a person who “becometh a saint.” The verb suggests a process rather than a finished condition. Sincere discipleship can coexist with weakness. Some changes come quickly; others require far more patience than we expected. Elder David A. Bednar taught,

²Jeffrey R. Holland, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually,” *Ensign or Liahona*, November 2017, 40–42.

“The spiritual rebirth described in this verse typically does not occur quickly or all at once; it is an ongoing process—not a single event.” Repentance, correction, growth, and continued reliance upon Jesus Christ all belong to that process. We can make progress and still struggle with something we thought we had overcome. King Benjamin’s words leave room for people who are still becoming. Being unfinished does not mean the process has failed.³

Patience stands out among the qualities King Benjamin names. We need patience with other people and with our own unfinished growth. Humility allows us to accept correction without turning it into condemnation. Submission makes room for God to teach us something we may not have chosen for ourselves. Love gradually changes the way we see and treat other people. These qualities reach beneath outward behavior toward a changed heart.

His final comparison makes dependence especially clear. The disciple becomes “as a child” (Mosiah 3:19). Children need teaching, correction, protection, nourishment, forgiveness, and repeated help as they grow. King Benjamin’s comparison makes dependence part of spiritual growth rather than something disciples should be ashamed of. We do not outgrow our need for God. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, we learn to trust God and allow Jesus Christ to continue changing us.

4. Joy That Follows Mercy

Mosiah 4:2–3: “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified. . . . And . . . they were filled with joy . . . and having peace of conscience.”

When King Benjamin finishes speaking the words delivered to him by the angel, he looks over the multitude and sees that his people have fallen to the earth because “the fear of the Lord had come upon them” (Mosiah 4:1). They have heard about the Lord Omnipotent, His Atonement, and their need to become saints through Christ. They now see themselves and their need for the Savior more clearly. That recognition brings them to the ground, where fear becomes a plea for mercy.

The people cry aloud together, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified” (Mosiah 4:2). Their prayer goes directly to their need. They offer no defense, explain nothing away, and make no promises about what they will do to deserve forgiveness. They ask for mercy. The word “apply” turns doctrine into a personal plea. King Benjamin’s people have heard what Jesus Christ will do and believe in the Savior who will come among the children of men and atone for sin. Now they ask for His Atonement to reach them personally. Knowing about Christ has brought them to the point of trusting Him with what they cannot repair by themselves.

Their plea is answered almost as soon as it is spoken: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon them,” and they were “filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having

³David A. Bednar, “Ye Must Be Born Again,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2007, 19–22.

peace of conscience” because of their faith in Jesus Christ (Mosiah 4:3). Within two verses, “the fear of the Lord” has given way to joy and peace. Their outward circumstances have not changed; what they carry before God has. They have turned to Christ and received His mercy.

“Peace of conscience” shows where repentance is intended to lead. A conscience can alert us when something is wrong and move us toward repentance, but guilt can be difficult to release, particularly for someone who sincerely wants to do what is right. Elder Richard G. Scott called true, sincere, continuing repentance “the path to peace and joy.”⁴ King Benjamin’s people trace that path in only a few verses: fear awakens them to their need, repentance turns them toward Christ, and mercy brings joy and peace. They show that guilt is meant to take us somewhere—toward repentance and then toward Christ. After we sincerely repent and receive His forgiveness, continued self-condemnation adds nothing to the mercy He has already given.

King Benjamin continues teaching them after they receive forgiveness. They still have children to raise, people to serve, choices to make, and weaknesses to overcome. Mercy changes the place from which that work begins. They can move forward having received forgiveness instead of continually trying to prove that they deserve it.

5. Remembering the Goodness of God

Mosiah 4:11–12: “I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God . . . and his goodness and long-suffering towards you.”

King Benjamin tells his people to “remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God,” their own dependence upon Him, and “his goodness and long-suffering” toward them (Mosiah 4:11). The gathering around the temple will end, and the people will return home. Their task is to carry the spiritual experience they have shared into ordinary life rather than preserve the emotional intensity of the gathering.

King Benjamin then brings his counsel down to the scale on which most discipleship is lived. His people are to humble themselves, call “on the name of the Lord daily,” and remain “steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come” (Mosiah 4:11). In President Henry B. Eyring’s words, disciples must “find ways to recognize and remember God’s kindness.”⁵ King Benjamin’s counsel gives that remembrance daily form. The gathering is extraordinary; the practices are familiar and repeatable. Prayer, humility, faith, and remembrance will continue after the gathering ends.

The words “daily” and “from day to day” may be among the most reassuring in King Benjamin’s sermon (Mosiah 4:11, 26). Some days bring unmistakable answers to prayer. Others are filled with work, family responsibilities, disappointment, fatigue, or mistakes that require repentance. King Benjamin gives every kind of day spiritual importance. His people can

⁴Richard G. Scott, “The Path to Peace and Joy,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 25–27.

⁵Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign or Liahona*, November 2007, 66–69.

remember again, pray again, choose faith again, and continue relying upon the goodness of God. Faith is sustained by returning to these practices, even when the powerful experience that first taught God's goodness begins to feel distant.

King Benjamin connects these daily practices to a promise. Those who continue in this way "shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of [their] sins" (Mosiah 4:12). The word "retain" connects their future directly to what they have just received. The remission they have received belongs to the life they will live after the gathering.

Remembering how completely they depend upon God will affect the way they see people who depend upon them. The mercy they have received now moves outward. It will soon be tested in their homes, in their treatment of the poor, and in the judgments they make about people whose circumstances differ from their own.

6. Mercy Received Becomes Mercy Given

Mosiah 4:19–21: "For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have?"

King Benjamin first brings that responsibility close to home. Parents are to teach their children "to walk in the ways of truth and soberness." His instruction reaches beyond correct behavior and religious teaching: children are also to be taught "to love one another, and to serve one another" (Mosiah 4:14–15). The people have received mercy together in a sacred setting, and that mercy is meant to follow them home. Children also learn these principles by watching how mistakes are handled, how family members speak to one another, and how people outside the home are treated. The sermon places love and service beside truth and soberness because covenant teaching is lived as well as taught.

From the home, the sermon moves outward to the poor. King Benjamin imagines someone seeing a beggar and saying, "The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand" (Mosiah 4:17). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught that the Savior "set the pattern for us" in caring for those the Lord commands us to remember: "the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted" (Doctrine and Covenants 52:40).⁶ King Benjamin does not stop to determine whether the beggar contributed to his circumstances. Instead, he turns the question back toward the person making the judgment. "Are we not all beggars?" he asks (Mosiah 4:19).

"Are we not all beggars?" becomes especially pointed because of what King Benjamin's people have just done. Only a short time earlier, the entire multitude cried, "O have mercy" (Mosiah 4:2). His next words make the connection explicit: "even at this time" they have been calling upon God and "begging for a remission" of their sins (Mosiah 4:20). They asked God for something essential that they could not provide for themselves, and He answered with mercy. Now someone else is asking them for help.

The distinction between giver and receiver begins to collapse under the reminder of their

⁶Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Inspired Church Welfare," *Ensign*, May 1999, 76–79; see Doctrine and Covenants 52:40.

shared dependence upon God. “Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God,” King Benjamin asks, “for all the substance which we have?” (Mosiah 4:19). One person may have food, money, health, security, opportunity, or other resources that another lacks, but having more does not make anyone self-sufficient. The hand that gives and the hand that receives remain dependent upon the same God.

The sermon also makes room for those who have little to give. Those who cannot share their substance are told to say in their hearts, “I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give” (Mosiah 4:24). No amount of money, time, or material assistance becomes the measure of charity. The teaching recognizes that people live with different resources.

King Benjamin summarizes the principle plainly: “For the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day,” his people are to “impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath” (Mosiah 4:26). The phrase “according to that which he hath” measures charity by willingness and capacity rather than by amount. Verse 26 also develops the promise made in verse 12. There, those who remember God’s goodness are promised that they will “always retain a remission” of their sins. Here, caring for the poor becomes part of retaining that remission “from day to day.” Remembering mercy and extending mercy belong together.

7. In Wisdom and Order

Mosiah 4:27: “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength.”

King Benjamin has asked a great deal of his people. They are to teach their children, live peaceably, care for those in need, visit the sick, and provide relief both spiritually and temporally (Mosiah 4:13–26). He then acknowledges something simple but important: human strength has limits. “It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27).

His next sentence places diligence beside restraint: “And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize” (Mosiah 4:27). Both instructions belong together. Do not run faster than you have strength and be diligent. Wisdom governs the pace; diligence keeps the disciple moving. King Benjamin leaves room for neither frantic excess nor passive indifference.

Capacity changes. The same person may have greater strength in one season of life and considerably less in another. Responsibilities and resources change as well. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf drew directly upon Mosiah 4:27 when he encouraged disciples to “proceed at the optimum speed for our circumstances.”⁷ His wording captures King Benjamin’s balance. Slowing down when circumstances require it is not the same as abandoning the journey. King Benjamin’s counsel remains useful from one season to another because it rests on wisdom, order, and diligence rather than on a fixed level of activity by which everyone’s faithfulness can be compared.

⁷Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Things That Matter Most,” *Ensign or Liahona*, November 2010, 19–22.

King Benjamin knows that no list can account for every choice his people will face. “I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin,” he acknowledges (Mosiah 4:29). His answer is sustained attentiveness to the whole of life: “watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds” (Mosiah 4:30). Thoughts matter before anyone else can see them. Words affect other people. Deeds reveal what disciples choose to do with what they believe.

The remainder of the verse keeps that watchfulness centered on Christ. King Benjamin tells his people to keep the commandments and “continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord” (Mosiah 4:30). The chapter closes where the angel’s message began: with Jesus Christ. Wisdom, order, diligence, and watchfulness serve faith in Him and help His disciples continue in it.

8. A Mighty Change of Heart

Mosiah 5:2: “Because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts . . . we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”

When King Benjamin finishes speaking, he sends among the people to learn whether they believe what he has taught them. They answer “with one voice” that they believe his words because “the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent” has “wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts” (Mosiah 5:1–2). King Benjamin has spent much of his sermon teaching his people what discipleship requires. Now the people describe what God has done within them.

“Wrought” places the change where it belongs. Their agency has mattered throughout the experience: they listened, believed, recognized their dependence upon God, cried for mercy, and responded to the Spirit. Yet when they describe the transformation itself, they attribute it to the Spirit. They have participated fully without claiming to be the source of what happened within them.

Their testimony brings Mosiah 3:19 into clearer focus. King Benjamin had taught that men and women put off the natural man as they yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” and become saints “through the atonement of Christ the Lord.” Now his people describe the result: the Spirit has changed their hearts. What King Benjamin taught as doctrine in Mosiah 3 has become experienced in Mosiah 5.

Spiritual change reaches deeper than outward obedience. King Benjamin has already taught his people what covenant disciples do: teach their children, live peaceably, care for the poor, give according to what they have, act in wisdom and order, and watch their thoughts, words, and deeds. Mosiah 5 moves beneath those actions to desire: the Spirit is changing what the people want.

“Mighty” describes the depth of the change, not its completion. Elder Dallin H. Oaks later used this verse to offer a practical measure of spiritual progress: “If we are losing our desire to

do evil, we are progressing toward our heavenly goal.”⁸ Their next response points toward continued discipleship. They express willingness “to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things” for the remainder of their lives (Mosiah 5:5). Their experience gives us a more patient way to understand spiritual change. Continued obedience remains necessary, but it now grows from a changed desire.

9. Remembering the Name

Mosiah 5:12: “I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts.”

Willing to covenant “to do his will” and “to be obedient to his commandments” for the remainder of their lives, the people now hear King Benjamin explain what that covenant means (Mosiah 5:5). “Because of the covenant which ye have made,” he tells them, “ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

Near the beginning of his sermon, King Benjamin declared that there is “no other name given” whereby salvation can come (Mosiah 3:17). In Mosiah 5:8, that name returns as he repeats the teaching and invites those who have made the covenant to “take upon you the name of Christ.” Now the name through which salvation comes has become the name the people covenant to bear.

“Remember to retain the name written always in your hearts,” King Benjamin tells them (Mosiah 5:12). Its location in their hearts is significant. Earlier, the people testified that the Spirit had wrought “a mighty change” in their hearts (Mosiah 5:2). Now they are told to retain Christ’s name in those same hearts. A heart changed by the Spirit becomes the place where the name of the One who changed it is retained.

A searching question turns the sermon from bearing Christ’s name to living in relationship with Him: “How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13). His people have heard an angelic witness of Christ, experienced forgiveness through faith in Him, and covenanted to take His name upon themselves. Drawing on this same verse, Elder Kenneth Johnson observed that in service, “it is the relationship that develops that is of greater significance than the contribution we make.”⁹ Service becomes one way the covenant moves from a name written in the heart into a lived relationship with the Master.

Knowing the Master requires more than knowing about Him. That difference sharpens the warning in the verse. Christ can become “a stranger” who is “far from the thoughts and intents” of the heart even to someone who once made a covenant in His name. King Benjamin wants his people to remain close enough to Jesus Christ that His name continues to shape what they think, desire, and choose.

⁸ Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 34.

⁹ Kenneth Johnson, “We All Have a Father in Whom We Can Trust,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 30.

King Benjamin's final counsel completes the movement. He asks his people to be "steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works," so that Christ, "the Lord God Omnipotent," may "seal [them] his" (Mosiah 5:15). Good works appear here in their proper place. They come after Christ has been proclaimed, after His saving name has been given, after the people have cried for mercy, after they have received forgiveness, after the Spirit has changed their hearts, and after they have made a covenant with God. Such works express continuing faithfulness to the Redeemer whose name they bear; redemption remains Christ's work.

Conclusion

King Benjamin's sustained witness of Jesus Christ begins with "glad tidings of great joy" and leads to a people who covenant with God to do His will and take upon themselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 3:3; 5:5–8). Christ is proclaimed before the natural man is described, and His saving name is given before the people recognize the depth of their need. When that recognition brings them to the earth in fear, they turn to Christ and are "filled with joy" and "peace of conscience" (Mosiah 4:1–3).

King Benjamin's people are still called to repent, yield to the Spirit, remember God's goodness, care for others, keep the commandments, and remain steadfast. Repentance remains necessary, strength will change, and becoming a saint will take time, but none of those realities places them beyond the reach of the Savior, whose Atonement makes continued change possible. Jesus Christ is not presented as a reward waiting at the end of successful discipleship; He is the source of their change from the beginning. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland placed the Atonement at the beginning of discipleship: "The Crucifixion, Atonement, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ mark the beginning of a Christian life, not the end of it."¹⁰

King Benjamin's people do not perform their way toward mercy. They receive mercy and then learn how those who have received it should live. Their covenant is not an attempt to persuade God to be merciful. It is their response to mercy already received: their hearts have changed, and they now want to belong to Christ. Mercy is not the conclusion of King Benjamin's sermon; it becomes the foundation of the covenant life that follows.

Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we receive what we cannot provide for ourselves. His mercy leads us to joy, His Spirit changes our hearts, and covenant gives that changed life a name and direction. The God who comes down is the God who can bring us home.

¹⁰ Jeffrey R. Holland, "The First Great Commandment," *Ensign*, November 2012, 83–85.