

Railroad(ed) to Heaven¹

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Referring to the greatest joy—godly joy—that our Heavenly Father waits to bless us with, President Nelson said that he couldn't even imagine someone settling for second best. Exaltation is the outcome of the covenant path and everything in our church points to that outcome. The only problem is that the numbers don't add up. Last night in priesthood session, Elder Uchtdorf let us know that people on the covenant path amount to a mere 0.2% drop in the whole world's population bucket. And it appears that even 100% home teaching in the spirit prison will not impact that figure significantly.² So might it not be prudent to reconsider the most foundational assumption about what people are willing to settle for, and make a better plan to give folks a viable alternative within Jesus' precious flock? Did Alma apply a worthiness test for baptism?

*Know this, that ev'ry soul is free
To choose his life and what he'll be;
For this eternal truth is giv'n:
That God will force no man to heav'n.*³

When will we create policies that match our most cherished beliefs of moral agency?

Not only will God force no one to Heaven, but it is our own choices that determine *which* heaven we will make our own. Should not our policies also reflect that great truth?

What if we stop viewing the Terrestrial Kingdom as the garbage can for the Celestial cast-offs—the refuse of the Judgement—and begin viewing that heavenly mansion as one of the glories of God, worthy of the Holy Son's abiding presence?⁴ What if we stop assuming everyone who seeks the waters of baptism knows about or even *wants* the Celestial kingdom? Why does someone have to commit to the *entirety* of the covenant path at the moment of baptism? What happened to *line upon line* and *precept upon precept*? What if someone doesn't *want* to be exalted? *What if someone just wants to be saved?*⁵

Is this merely hypothetical? How do we welcome a gay couple in our church? Do we love them unconditionally as Jesus would? Or do we expect them to stay only if they are willing to be *fixed or repaired*? In the Church, we just went through a policy change and a policy reversal thinking on the one hand that perhaps we would mitigate the difficulty of dividing values within a family; and on the other hand realizing that we had separated children of gay and lesbian couples from the love of Christ. But what of the gay or lesbian parents? What if the adults want to participate in the raising of their child within the church structure and culture for the same reasons that the rest of us do? What if they themselves seek salvation and association with the body of Christ while fully acknowledging and accepting that the covenant path to *exaltation* requires further changes and sacrifices? But what if they are okay with that? Should not the rest of us be okay with that too? And should not our policies reflect that too?

*He'll call, persuade, direct aright,
And bless with wisdom, love, and light,
In nameless ways be good and kind,
But never force the human mind.*

Chastity is a covenant of the temple and those who break that law are currently disfellowshipped if they have not been through the temple (and are not making a public mockery of the church). In bringing the policies in alignment with the Savior's practices, should not a repentant endowed adulterer be placed back at the beginning of the covenant path, to start over, rather than be excommunicated? ("Go thy way and sin no more.")

Baptism is for the remission of sins, but what if we look at 'sin' and re-consider what that means: The most fundamental meaning of 'repent of our sins' is to *change the way we look at* sin, to re-think what the word even means so that when we see 'sin', we perceive it through God's eyes. Too many times, we overinterpret the word 'sin' and the enemy fills our minds with our every mistake, shortcoming, weakness, infirmity, deficiency, imperfection... .. after all: *we can never be perfect; Jesus never really meant for us to be perfect!* How many times have we heard or repeated that lie?⁶

Rather, if we define sin as Jesus saw it,⁷ then we can finally understand both sin and perfection *through God's eyes*: to sin is to betray God by preferentially believing the enemy.⁸ And *perfection* in the way Jesus expects it from us *now* is to be perfectly *loyal* to God, never hearkening to the words of the enemy. Thus, baptism is not the renunciation or removal of all our faults, flaws, limitations, shortcomings and blemishes. It is rather the merciful application of Jesus' ransom, paid to the malicious one who *owned us*⁹ for our having preferentially believed and obeyed him—*The Fall*. My baptism becomes my acceptance of the new contract that transfers my title and deed, from Lucifer to Jesus. Baptism says that *I now belong to Jesus*. My choice to be baptized declares that *I willingly assume his name as my owner and master, the one to whom my very life is indebted*.

That is quite different from being exalted. As President Nelson said today, *salvation is individual; exaltation is familial*.

*Freedom and reason make us men;
Take these away, what are we then?
Mere animals, and just as well
The beasts may think of heav'n or hell.*



What if the covenant path to exaltation is so daunting that someone just wants to worship Christ and stand as his witness after having committed to comfort others and mourn with those that mourn? Did Jesus or Alma ever apply a test of *worthiness* to baptism? Who are we to say that the sins we each seek forgiveness from each week when we partake of the emblems of the Lord's flesh and blood are lesser than someone else's or that somehow we are more worthy? Is not the most fundamental test of worthiness that we *reach* to touch the Master's robe or seek his touch or his word, or his thought in the direction of someone we both love?

What if, institutionally, we *also* teach the glory of the Terrestrial Kingdom and invite those attracted to it to come worship with us as part of the Body of Christ? What if we invite *all* to come unto Christ—the heavy laden as well the worthy—and let it be okay with us (as it is with Christ) that the heavy laden may retain their burdens until they wish to give them up? What if we make the Table of Christ large enough to welcome the outcast, the marginalized, the adulterers, the smokers and drinkers; and love them unconditionally as they come to worship with us and from within our company reach for Jesus' saving, pierced hand? What if, not everyone wants to be transformed in Christ *yet or at all*, but they simply want to *know* and love him? That is the most fundamental terrestrial desire. Shall we not welcome those to our fold who simply desire salvation but who, for their own private reasons, seek neither transformation nor eternal familial ties?

Is that, too, a hypothetical question? Or what shall we do by policy with someone who wants to be part of the body of Christ but they are convinced that their spirit has a penis when their body came without one? Is there anyone better suited to judge such a thing than one's self?

*Come unto Me.
I love you just as you are.*

*Abide in Me
(and let Me abide in you)
to become the person
you want to be.*

I merely suggest: given that transgender or gay proclivity is not a personal choice¹⁰ (largely, barring recruitment), then there still remain choices to be made. I suggest that *Abide in Me and become the person you want to be* creates room for such a one that they might choose to seek a divine gift of specific attraction to a specific individual that would make them eligible for Celestial Joy (eternal marriage as presently constituted).¹¹ However, I am also suggesting that there is another perfectly viable choice for that person too, that would require some policy changes on the part of the church: let them choose a Terrestrial glory. Now.¹² Consciously. In other words, what if a person wishes to associate with Christ but does not (yet) wish to change who they are, *i.e.*, by seeking this or another divine gift? What if who they presently are (and their associated behavior) does not qualify them for celestial marriage nor the endowment, for that matter? Why should we as a church exclude a legitimate Terrestrial candidate in a committed gay marriage, for instance, from our association while they seek to determine who they wish to become through Christ, *even if they never choose a transformation?*¹³

Are not both Sunday worship and partaking of the sacrament Terrestrial-level activities that should comprehend all of us as any-flavor addicts, white collar sinners, cheats, gossips, masturbators, gays, transgendered, hypocrites and unrighteous judges; together having sought Jesus' salvation from the enemy? Some may not be able to receive a temple recommend (which recommend presumes commitment to seeking Celestial glory), but why should anyone be either turned away or excommunicated for having specifically chosen a Terrestrial glory?

*May we no more our pow'rs abuse,
But ways of truth and goodness choose;
Our God is pleased when we improve
His grace and seek his perfect love.*

**What else changes if we change the way we view the covenant path,
with additional optional—legitimate and desirable—forks in the railroad?**

We see that God did not *do* this (cause disease, sickness, deformity, neural mis-wiring), either as a personal test or punishment. Our fallen world with its countless generations of mutations separates our genetic makeup from the perfect physical hosts—the First Flesh—designed by our Father to house his spirit children and impart to them their agency. (Moses 3:7)

Salvation is not the same as exaltation. Salvation is associated with the Terrestrial heaven and exaltation is associated with Celestial heaven. As President Nelson said today, *salvation is personal and exaltation is familial.*

Devotion and loyalty to Christ are pre-requisite for baptism, while a temple recommend sets the standard for entry to the covenant path.

Baptism is the entry at the strait gate (Terrestrial life), while successfully traversing the covenant path requires endurance to the end which is Celestial Glory.

No worthiness tests for entry into the Terrestrial Kingdom other than seeking Jesus for salvation from the enemy.¹⁴ Worthiness is measured only for entry into the covenant path toward the Celestial Kingdom by being valiant in the testimony of Jesus.

Terrestrial : “Come as you are” :: Celestial : be transformed through Christ.

The world is the Terrestrial Kingdom. The Chapel is as the Terrestrial Kingdom. The Temple is as the Celestial Kingdom. (stars:moon:sun)

Baptism and the sacrament of the Lord’s supper are the terrestrial covenants; the priesthood, the endowment and the everlasting covenant of marriage are the preparatory celestial covenants.

Married gay/lesbian couples would not be considered in violation of the terrestrial law of chastity any differently than anyone else who is in a committed, loving relationship as demonstrated by legal marriage. And transgendered people would decide and act upon their own gender and then marry under either the celestial or terrestrial law, or not, as they are inclined.

Should not our terrestrial worship and thought promote closer, more familial, frequent and intimate relationships with Jesus,¹⁵ and then temple preparation and activity focus on the same with the Father?

Are we so convinced that our church has the exclusive keys to Terrestrial access just as we do Celestial? Or isn't it so, that our baptism is simply the "get out of jail free" card for those in the Spirit Prison predisposed to the Terrestrial Kingdom, who would otherwise wait until the second resurrection?

For any concerned that we could be lowering our standards in accepting terrestrial candidates in regular church activity and sacramental participation, perhaps such should cast the first stone in suggesting that standards be *raised* for entering the temple and the covenant path to Celestial Glory? At any rate, all of our conversations should be more focused on how we should more fully love one another, as Jesus loves us.

The power in letting go of the church's single-minded path to celestial heaven is in the freedom it bestows to the others Father gave to Christ, that we/they might in fact be able to return to him. (John 10:27-29; 17:all)

Notes

¹ In the April 6, 2019 (Saturday morning session) conference, Sister Becky Craven gave us a railroad metaphor for the covenant path. It occurred to me that there are legitimate forks in the road for the masses accounted within the restored gospel and described in the scriptures, but not within the current church practices. Perhaps we need another train station, new rail, switches, track and new signage within the policies of the church? What if we changed a few assumptions that allowed us to build railroad infrastructure leading to happy destinations perhaps different from those we wrongly assumed in the past that everyone would *obviously* want?

² D&C 76:109 *But behold, and lo, we saw the glory and the inhabitants of the telestial world, that they were as innumerable as the stars in the firmament of heaven, or as the sand upon the seashore.* For an alternative view of mortality 'by the numbers' and a peek into the D&C 76 insight for how God will judge this fallen world, see, *Satan Gets To Reign BAD THINGS HAPPEN God Gets the Blame*, I.R. Harvey, Outskirts Press, 2017, ISBN 978-1-4787-9022-8 (Profits to OURrescue.org).

³ This and subsequent embedded verses from *Know This, That Every Soul Is Free*, Hymns, #240 Text: Anon., ca. 1805, Boston. Included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835. Music: Roger L. Miller, b. 1937. © 1985 IRI

⁴ D&C 76:71-80; 89-91 *And again, we saw the terrestrial world, and behold and lo, these are they who are of the terrestrial, whose glory differs from that of the church of the Firstborn who have received the fulness of the Father, even as that of the moon differs from the sun in the firmament.*

Behold, these are they who died without law; And also they who are the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited, and preached the gospel unto them, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh; Who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it. These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness. These are

they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father. Wherefore, they are bodies terrestrial, and not bodies celestial, and differ in glory as the moon differs from the sun. These are they who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus; wherefore, they obtain not the crown over the kingdom of our God. And now this is the end of the vision which we saw of the terrestrial, that the Lord commanded us to write while we were yet in the Spirit...

...(89) And thus we saw, in the heavenly vision, the glory of the telestial, which surpasses all understanding; And no man knows it except him to whom God has revealed it. And thus we saw the glory of the terrestrial which excels in all things the glory of the telestial, even in glory, and in power, and in might, and in dominion.

⁵ President Nelson gave a poster child case study: the man who did not wish to be ordained an elder but requested his temple work be completed after he died. What if the response was able to be tangibly focused on the ramifications of that choice: a choice for a Terrestrial Glory?

⁶ I am suggesting that Terrestrial-level perfection is different than walking the covenant path to ultimately become *perfected* in Christ (the latter as defined in Moroni 7:48; 10:32-33). Jesus' spotlessness in this world was most essentially of the terrestrial variety. I believe that we can determine what that level is and mimic it successfully in real-time obedience to his command.

⁷ Jesus was not perfect because he was able to please everyone. Jesus constantly surprised or angered others with his unconventional practices and sayings. But if we review Jesus' singular attribute that made him spotless, unblemished, *perfect*, then we find it abundantly manifest in his *loyalty* to his Father as he responded to Satan's temptations: *I will not hearken to you.*

⁸ A smattering of essays describing betrayal as the *primal* sin in Eden is included at www.SnowHorseLab.com, including one entitled, *A Case for Coming to Christ.*

⁹ Our being subject to death and our choice to become carnal, sensual and devilish. See D&C 20:18-20, Alma 42, Moses 6:48-51. Whether or not our experience in mortality was willed and intended to be so by God is explored in: I.R. Harvey, *Well Dr. Nibley, I do have a suggestion: always believe God; always disbelieve Lucifer*, Sunstone, 183, Winter 2016, 11-15.

¹⁰ If gender were strictly bimodal (one or zero, male or female) in distribution, then it would be easy (and perhaps logical or even justifiable) to place every individual into a descriptive bucket or category and expect them to stay there. However, there is a continuum of observed genders with the middle being so difficult to discern that infants born with ambiguous genitalia or genitalia beyond categorizing are labeled as *intersex* (or possibly hermaphrodite), and are then often *assigned* a gender by well-meaning doctors who sometimes attempt to surgically *fix* them. Sometimes they get it tragically wrong and a child grows up appallingly conflicted in how they self-identify versus how they are perceived and treated by others.

Similarly, there is a continuum in human sexual attraction with the middle being *asexual*, having no sexual drive at all.

On either side of the intersex middle point of the gender distribution are people who outwardly appear as male or female, but inwardly they *know* they are the other. Shall I think that I am a better judge? Shall you?

On either side of the asexual middle point there are folks whose brains are wired to same sex attraction or some mix of same and opposite sex attraction.

For the majority of the human population, it is very difficult to place our/themselves into the shoes these marginalized—and often suicidal—people wear, let alone to walk a mile in them. I suggest it is not for any of the rest of us to say that any of these situations is either designed/intended by God, or that these propensities were chosen by the individual. Neither should we be about fixing or repairing someone who does not—of their own will—wish to be fixed, repaired or *transformed*. This is a burden one may only ask Jesus to help carry.

¹¹ The interesting thing about this approach is that it does not require the person to renounce their same-sex attraction, just to add a new, specific attraction that can be acted upon within the covenant path. It assumes that sexual intimacy is a divine gift subject to prayerful requests for attraction *to a specific person* so that each might see a friend (and candidate for partnership in celestial joy) also as a lover.

¹² As opposed to when we/they die and are judged at the resurrection.

¹³ This seems the most fundamental definition of a terrestrial candidate: *not valiant in the testimony of Jesus*, (D&C 76:79) or in other words, unwilling to believe him sufficiently to become one with him; *to be transformed by him*. (D&C 76:69)

¹⁴ It is interesting to note the similarity in our view of the Terrestrial Kingdom to the Heaven otherwise taught within Christianity, namely being together with Jesus in an indescribably wonderful and beautiful state; but without ongoing familial relationships, *till death do us part*. To each of these, the Father is beyond reach; real but amorphous.

Then also our requirements for entry into that kingdom become the same as theirs into the heaven they describe: baptism and communion (or sacrament).

¹⁵ My whole view of worship changed when Kris and I together read a powerful little book, *Beautiful Outlaw – Experiencing the Playful, Disruptive, Extravagant Personality of Jesus* (John Eldredge, 2011, Faith Words Press, ISBN 978-0-89296-088-0).