

Sunday School Lesson #3: Differences in the Sermons on the Mount

Submitted by Michael Kelley 2006-07

Lesson #3 Hyperbole: When comparing the two Sermons on the Mount interesting differences can be found, differences that help highlight the cultural changes between the Nephites and the Jews while teaching the same doctrines. These differences also discredit some of the accusations of critics against Joseph Smith of plagiarizing the Bible when he brought forth the Book of Mormon. Below is a comparison between Mathew 5:28-30 and 3 Nephi 5:77-78 with the differences highlighted in ***Bold Italics***.

Matt. 5:28-30 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery *with her* already in his heart. 29 *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell.* 30 *And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

3 Nephi 5: 77-78 But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart. 78 ***Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart; for it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.***

Bible scholars universally agree that Jesus never intended for us actually pluck out an eye or cut off a hand when temptations enter our heart. What Jesus was doing was using hyperbole... a poetic or rhetorical overstatement, an exaggeration used to emphasize an important point. These metaphors are common in the Bible however are remarkably absent from the Book of Mormon. Apparently this manner of language either did not exist 600 BC or was not carried with Lehi and his family when they migrated to the New World. There are many other similar hyperboles found in the Bible such as:

Matthew 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 23:24 *Ye* blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Numbers 33:55 But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them *shall be* pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Gal. 4:15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if *it had been* possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

As we can see, hyperboles are used frequently in the Bible using expressions such as “swallow a camel”, “pluck out your own eyes”, and “thorns in your sides”. If the

Nephites were spoken to using those terms and not being familiar with them they could have stumbled over those words, or even worse... taken those words literally! Vine's Dictionary seems to support this line of reasoning:

Pluck, Exaireo, to take out, is translated "pluck out" of the eye as the occasion of sin, in Matt. 5:29, 18:9, indicating that, with determination and promptitude, we are to strike at the root of unholy inclinations, ridding ourselves of whatever would stimulate them.

Pluck, Exorusso, to dig out or up, is rendered "ye would have plucked out your eyes" in Gal. 4:15, an indication of their feelings of gratitude to, and love for, the Apostle. The metaphor affords no real ground for the supposition of a reference to some weakness of his sight, and certainly not to the result of his temporary blindness at his conversion, the recovery from which must have been as complete as the infliction. There would be some reason for such an inference had the pronoun "ye" been stressed; but the stress is on the word "eyes"; their devotion prompted a readiness to part with their most treasured possession on his behalf.

Acts 9:17-18 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

This goes along with Lesson #1 concerning Paul's permanent weakness wherein the scriptures seem to support the theory that his weakness was more in the form of his appearance and a speech impediment rather than some sort of disease or eye problem. Surely Paul's healing of his eyesight would have been just as complete as his being filled with the Holy Ghost as mentioned in Acts 9:17-18. Interestingly there is another parallelism in the Book of Mormon about spiritual blindness:

2 Nephi 12:84 And their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and a delightsome people.

There are several cases in the Scriptures wherein a person had a spiritual and a physical illness or affliction, as was the case with Paul's spiritual and physical blindness, and both spiritual and physical needs were fully healed. Also notice in Numbers 33:55 it is other people, rather than a bodily ailment, who were the thorns in their sides, pricks in their eyes. Paul faced numerous persecutions because of the word he preached, as well as the possibility that his appearance and speech impediment would have caused those without charity to scoff and persecute.

2 Corinthians 11:23-25 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

The next lesson will cover other cultural differences between the two Sermons on the Mount and how God teaches the same principles to different cultures.