

The Holy Ghost – Conversion & Baptism of Fire

Tualatin Valley Branch, June 2000, Mike Baird

Our Heavenly Father's greatest desire is that we should live with him again for eternity. He has provided us a way to do so. It is not easy but there is a way. There are requirements that are set up that we must meet. The Savior said "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

To be born of water is to be baptized. What does it mean to be born of the Spirit? I will focus my talk on being born of the spirit or to receive the baptism of fire.

In the Book of Mormon Alma the Younger asked the members of the church in his time some questions:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? (Alma 5:14)

I think we could and should ask these questions of ourselves

- ◆ Have I been born again?
- ◆ Have I made this change?
- ◆ Have I felt this baptism of fire?

I'd like to discuss this further. I will use the story of Peter's conversion to illustrate and for us to learn. As we discuss this I'd like you to imagine the scenes in your mind's eye.

We will begin Peter's story in the outer court of the high priests abode the night before Jesus is to be taken away and crucified. Christ is there with some or all of his Apostles. Picture yourself there.

The Lord said to Peter: "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But [Jesus says] I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art **converted, strengthen thy brethren**. And he [that is, Peter] said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." (Luke 22:31-34.)

We are familiar with what followed. Between the time of this scene and the next morning Peter does indeed deny that he knows Christ three times. This occasion was near the end of Christ's ministry – **yet** notice that Christ speaks of some future time of conversion for Peter – "...**when** thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

We could ask ourselves: How is Peter not converted? He has been with Jesus for some 3.5 years. He has eaten, slept, lived, traveled with the Lord during this time. He is an Apostle, undoubtedly an Elder. He has worked miracles in Jesus' name. He has been a stout defender, preacher and teacher. Yet – Christ said "**When** thou art converted....." Peter was converted in

the sense of joining the church, yet, he was not converted in the full and total sense that we all must be converted.

Let us look at this deeper into this to understand. Let's move our setting and look back at Peter's time with Christ

Peter heard of Christ from his brother Andrew. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. Andrew had left John the Baptist to follow Christ at John's direction. Just like you and I, when we have something wonderful we wish to share it with family and friends and so Andrew too wished to share so he told Peter the "good news".

Peter came to Christ; he was taught, undoubtedly baptized and begun to follow Christ. He "Joined the Church" as it were. Peter was with Christ virtually all the time during Christ's ministry (3.5 yr.). He did spend some time initially, with James and John in their fishing enterprise. When time came for the call of the 12 Apostles, Jesus met him and his two partners on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and said: "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Peter was ordained an Apostle at this time.

As we move through Christ's ministry we see that Peter had many experiences with Jesus of a spiritual nature. Picture the scene: He was there (very possibly his house) when they lowered the man with palsy down through the tile on the roof, because they could not otherwise get him into Christ's presence. This was the occasion when Jesus said to the man, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Then when the disbelieving Jews began to reason in their hearts that such an act was blasphemous, Jesus said:

"Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." (Mark 2:5-11)

Jesus used the occasion to prove his divinity. Peter was in the room when Jesus raised the young maiden from the dead. He was with the Lord at the tomb of Lazarus who had been dead for four days, who had started to decay, and then had been called forth by Jesus. He had borne testimony of Jesus. On one occasion Jesus asked: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" After he had received the various answers, it was Peter who answered the query: "But whom say ye that I am?" with the declaration, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 16:13, 15-17.)

How was Peter blessed? He was blessed because he had a testimony of Christ. He had received revelation from the Holy Ghost. One definition of a testimony is to know by revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. Peter knew by revelation, not by argument, not by reason, but by the whisperings of the Spirit. Peter affirmed it later after Jesus fed the 5000. Christ provided bread for audience and so as to preach about spiritual food, the Bread of Life. The sermon included harsh doctrine and many fell away at this time.

Jesus even said to his disciples: "Will ye also go away?" Peter, speaking for the group, said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:67-69.)

Peter knew, yet Christ had said, "when thou art converted..." Can you project yourself into that situation? Think - I have borne testimony of Christ, I follow Christ. Yet "when thou art converted..." Christ was in effect telling Peter: You have borne testimony of me and I have confirmed your testimony is of the Spirit, BUT you are not converted.

So what does it mean and how does conversion differ from a testimony? Peter's story illustrates that there is a difference. Essential to the story of Peter that the Holy Spirit was not yet poured out on the people. The Spirit had been with them time to time, but they did not have the constant companionship the full sanctifying power of the Spirit had not come into their lives.

Elder Bruce R McConkie gives an analogy relative to the Gift of the Holy Ghost before and after receiving this gift:

Before you receive the Holy Ghost it is like walking in darkness through a storm with flashes of lightning that occasionally illuminating the way. Where as after you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost it is like walking in the full light of the sun all the time.

This gift was in the future for the Apostles. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to His constant companionship based on our faithfulness. Peter didn't have that gift yet.

Lets move forward to after the Crucifixion. The disciples, **that is the sheep**, were scattered. Picture this scene. It is the Sea of Tiberias. (John 4-17)

2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.

9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, and hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

12 Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? (Meaning the fish, which symbolized the things of the world) He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

We now have two statements from Christ to focus on. First "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren". After this Peter denied Christ 3 times: "I do not know the man" (Matt. 26:72), he said to the maid who accused him of having been with Him. Now we hear: "Feed my sheep". These two statements are measures for degree of conversion. Are we strengthening our brethren and sisters? Are we feeding the Lord's sheep? Or are we seeking the "fish" of the world?

What is our answer to "lovest thou me more than these", that is "lovest thou me more than the things of the world?" I think of the example President Hinkley. He is tireless in his devotion to the Saints. I think of the example of President Richardson. I think of the examples of your Branch President. These are people who are feeding the Lord's sheep. We don't need to be in High office to "feed the sheep".

Elder Dallin H Oaks: "Spirituality is not a function of occupation or calling. Spirituality is determined by personal outlook and priorities.

Now lets move forward in time to the day of Pentecost. Peter and others were teaching the gospel. It was on this day that the Holy Ghost as promised came.

1 AND when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

(Acts 2:1-4)

Bruce R McConkie (Speaking of the cloven tongues like as fire): "(this) is the language that is used to describe the miraculous things that transpired in their hearts. There really is no language that it is possible to use to tell what happened in the hearts of the disciples on that occasion, which is the one when they became fully converted. And so they did the best they could to get some language, and they said "cloven tongues like as of fire" rested upon them."

This is the day of Peter's conversion. After this day we see a different Peter. Let me illustrate with an incident. Acts: 3:1-6:

1 NOW Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God

Peter and John were thrown into prison as a result of this incidence. In his interrogation later Peter said"

"If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. Neither is there salvation in any other... name." (Acts 4:9-10, 12.)

What a difference!

Peter's conversion was a gradual one:

- He heard the gospel from his brother Andrew
- He came to Christ and joined the church
- He had experience in the church and grew line upon line
- He received the Priesthood and was called as an Apostle
- He worked miracles
- He received a witness from the Spirit
- Then came the companionship of the Holy Ghost
- That was the day of his conversion
- When he had a testimony he said: "I do not know the man"
- When he was converted: Faced down those who thirsted after his own blood.

What is conversion then? It means simply to change.

Alma 5:14 "Have you experiences this mighty change of heart?"

Apostle Paul describes conversion or being born again by saying that we crucify the old man (Rom. 6:6). This only happens when we get the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

Bruce R McConkie: The Holy Ghost does two things in particular. On the one hand he is a witness to truth, and so he bears the testimony of the truth, and that is how we get a testimony, by revelation from the Holy Ghost. But on the other hand the Holy Spirit is a sanctifier, and he has the power to cleanse and perfect the human soul, to wash evil and iniquity out, and to replace it with righteousness. And that is the occasion when we are converted.

We are cleansed from sin and are born again and become converted to the truth when we get the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead, that is, get the right to the constant companionship. Nobody actually has companionship all the time because nobody is perfect. We do best we can, we get enough of companionship of the Holy Ghost so that our sins are burned out of us as if by fire.

This is the meaning of baptism by fire. It symbolizes the burning or purification process. The creation of a new creature in Christ

This is change, this is conversion. Concerning conversion President Marion G Romney said: "Conversion .. is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience. Conversion is effected by divine forgiveness, which remits sins." (Conference Report, Oct 1963, pg. 23-26)

Some of us have a sudden conversion – Alma the younger had such a conversion.

He was undoubtedly baptized as a youth and promised the Holy Ghost. He never received it however. He went off to destroy the church as a young man. He was in this state when his conversion occurred.

For most people it is step by step process and that is OK!

Loren C Dunn: “The witness, the change, the cleansing that comes gradually is no less powerful to the person with the right heart, and he or she is impelled to action whether the experience was a sudden, miraculous manifestation or the quite workings of the Spirit.” (Ensign, June 95, pg. 24)

President Kimball: “The gift of the Holy Ghost grows with worthiness. If you are baptized when you are eight years old, of course you are a child, and there is much you would not be expected to know. But the Holy Ghost comes to you as you grow and learn and make yourselves worthy. It comes a little at a time as you merit it. And as your life is in harmony, you gradually receive the Holy Ghost in great measure.” (Ensign, May 82, pp 4-5)

We are striving to be converted, to be born again. It is not enough to have a testimony D&C 76:71-80 describes those who are not valiant in their testimony – they receive Celestial glory. These are members of the church who are lukewarm. They perhaps know in heart that the church is true, but are not valiant. It takes work to be converted.

President Howard W. Hunter: “Developing spirituality... will not happen by chance, but is accomplished only through deliberate effort and by calling upon God and keeping his commandments.” (Ensign, May 79, pg. 25)

Alma 5:14, 26 “Have you been spiritually born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts...” **“Can ye feel so know?”**

How does a person know when he or she is truly converted? We know by how we feel.

The spirit touches us and we are no longer passive but become a witness.

President Marion G Romney: “No person whose soul is illuminated by the burning Spirit of God can ... remain passive. He is driven by an irresistible urge to fit himself to be an active agent of God in furthering righteousness and in freeing the lives and minds of men from the bondage of Sin” (Ensign, Nov 79, pg. 16)

Elder Loren C Dunn: “there is .. a sense of unity that comes with the outpouring of the Spirit. As one becomes united with the Spirit, he or she also becomes united with fellow members and leaders.” (Ensign, June 95, pg. 26)

As a loving Father, our Father in Heaven wishes to bless us with his spirit.

The baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost is from his presence.

- It has the power to testify of the Father and his son
- It can cleanse us from sin
- It can make us a new person at heart
- It can be a guide in our personal lives
- It is the only thing that can truly change our hearts
- It is a gift from God – and it brings inward peace

- It is offered to all that will humble themselves, accept his truths and live by them.