

The Wonderful Wizard of Zion

A Latter-day Parable from the Wizard of Oz...

So long as it is interpreted correctly

By

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PROLOGUE

When I was a young boy growing up in the 1960's, I always looked forward to watching on television, in awe and wonder, the yearly autumn showing of the classic 1939 movie – The Wizard of Oz. For me, the visual portrayal of the story was a cinematic marvel. At that young age, I never could have imagined the story would eventually reveal to me a powerful allegory for contrasting the true gospel of God's Grace against the works-based doctrines of man-made religions. From the perspective of my past experience as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as The LDS or *Mormon Church*), The Wizard of Oz allegorically transforms into *The Wonderful Wizard of Zion*.

I have often been asked by my Evangelical friends, "What was it like to be a Mormon?" My reply was usually something like – "Aside from the differences over the essentials of orthodox Christianity, and the legalism emanating from the religiosity of the Church's corporate structure and practices, it's not much different than being an Evangelical". However, that response, while accurate and adequate, always seemed to fall short in getting across the differentiating *experience*. On one hand, they still seemed a bit confused and intrigued over the mindset of devoted followers of such a religious structure and faith system. On the other hand, I was never satisfied in not being able to convey the thought processes associated with being a Mormon.

As fate would have it, upon a recent viewing of the Wizard of Oz, I found myself being enlightened with a new perspective on the symbolism and metaphors within the story which aptly, and uncannily, correlated to my own experience. The result, from a metaphorical

reinterpretation of the story, is a more effective explanation of the LDS experience by way of a parable.

According to the following definitions, a parable is:

1. A short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson.
2. A statement or comment that conveys a meaning indirectly by the use of comparison, analogy, or the like.

The parable of the *Wonderful Wizard of Zion* arises from the metaphors embedded within the narrative and characters of *The Wizard of Oz*.

This culturally familiar movie is in itself an adaptation of L. Frank Baum's novel – *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Interestingly, over the past century, Baum's original story has been the focus of several allegorical interpretations, from Politics to Monetary Reform to Spirituality. We can probably be assured the metaphors I will share in this parable were not at all imagined or purposed by Baum or, for that matter, by the movie adaptation. Yet, their presence – from the perspective of a grace-filled, born-again Believer, set free from the bondage of a works-based religion – appear prominently in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before going any further, let me say I have a tremendous appreciation for my experience as a Latter-day Saint. With a continued respect for the values the LDS religion instills in its members, I am most grateful for the biblical principles I learned along the way. It proved to be a spiritual education, buoyed by deep and wonderful relationships.

However, as an Evangelical Christian, there are obvious doctrinal differences, as well as issues of concern, which cannot be ignored. As positive an influence the LDS community has had on myself, and many

others in our society, there exists within it unbiblical elements which distort and distract from the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A simple example is that of salvation – where one’s real salvation, according to their interpretation of one’s purpose in God’s Plan – can only be attained through the LDS Church.

Thus, with their keystone scripture, the Book of Mormon, along with their other standard works – the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible – a compelling screenplay has emerged which they have adapted to a Hollywood-level narrative. It is this narrative, with its historic heart-of-America roots, which has supported and propelled its commercially successful proselytizing efforts over the last several decades. For the most part, that success has been most fruitful with the biblically illiterate – those who may still be open to the seeking and acceptance of further light and truth to supplement their limited knowledge of God.

From a cultural Christian-leaning standpoint, what is not to like about the Mormon narrative? It’s a great American story. It contains a heavy dose of alluring elements that are difficult for any reasonable and rational human being to ignore, such as: Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as two separate divine beings, each with their own physical body; God communicating through prophets, just like in the Old Testament; America’s founding being divinely inspired to bring about the restoration of God’s true church and latter-day kingdom – which possesses God’s proper authority.

Elements such as these – with clear and concise rational accounts for support – are not so easily dismissed by those who are not already familiar with the biblical narrative. As such, it is within this gap of biblical knowledge where this parable emerged.

The *Wonderful Wizard of Zion* is a parable for the benefit of several different audiences, one of which is the Evangelical community. Another audience is comprised of the LDS members, especially those faithful adherents who were born under the covenant... and who really have no other perspective than the LDS culture. However, for those in a third category – individuals who may not be too familiar with the biblical narrative – the beneficial gain may be greater.

Why do I say that? Not because they will learn more about the Bible... but rather due to the following reason – Whenever these individuals open their hearts and minds to further light and knowledge, and are then approached by Mormon Missionaries, they are the ones most susceptible to the alluring message of Mormonism. Therefore, it is my hope this parable will give them another perspective on the issues of concern regarding incompatibilities between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity.

Within these different audiences, I suspect there will be varying degrees of acceptance or rejection of the parable. Naturally, my LDS friends will more than likely see this message as offensive or, at the very least, inappropriate. I may even cause some turmoil amongst my Evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ. However, if the message can adjust the lukewarm to hot or cold, or knock the fence-sitters to one side or the other, then I'll rejoice in the God-ordained shift taking place in the heart and mind of the reader.

As any Christian can testify, there is power and authority in the Word of God... and authoritative power in sharing the message of the biblical Gospel. Just the hearing of it will manifest the Love of God upon any humble and sincere believer who puts their faith and trust in the shed

blood of Jesus Christ. As Romans 10:17 (KJV) reminds us – *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

And, perhaps like a converted New Testament Jew, no one can appreciate the unmerited favor of salvation more than an enlightened former Mormon. After 18 years of devout service, my journey out of the works-based environment of the LDS Church was as an awakening from a dream – vivid, colorful, captivating ... but a dream nonetheless.

Looking back, as I was entrenched in faithful service while captivated in constant devotion to its founder and prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., I can honestly say I enjoyed – as well as valued – my experience and fellowship with the saints of Zion. If ever a Wiz there was, Joseph Smith was by far the best, the brightest, and the boldest of them all.

While my journey out of the LDS Church can be attributed to several factors – none of which merits any comparison to the pure grace of God alone – an important one was the constant and continual desire to search for God, and His Truth, in the Bible. And, looking back, I can see how the Holy Spirit – the most important factor – removed the scales from my eyes throughout that process.

Thus, with my spiritual eyes opened, as I recently enjoyed another viewing of the Wizard of Oz, a new allegorical tale emerged to reveal the following two points:

1st – Without the written Word of God (*The Bible*) which contains the Standard of Truth, any humble seeker can fall into the trappings of a works-based religion.

And...

2nd – How that same humble seeker can be reconciled and restored to God – by God Himself, as well as through the friends He sends on their behalf. In simpler terms, reconciliation and restoration comes through God’s Grace.

That is the message in this inspired parable emanating from within the Wizard of Oz. And, it is my intent to share that message, using the Mormon approach of “likening the scriptures”,¹ with this parable – *The Wonderful Wizard of Zion*.

THE JOURNEY IS LIKE A DREAM

Have you ever looked back upon a profound and impactful period in your life, wondering how you survived it all, only to liken the whole experience to a dream? Well, for someone coming out of Mormonism, the experience and comparison is fairly accurate. If you still can't imagine what I'm describing, then just watch the 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*.

While Dorothy's journey through the whimsical Land of Oz turns out to be only a dream, a closer analysis reveals something strikingly similar to the journey a born-again Believer takes when coming out of Mormonism. And, being spirit-led out of that works-based religion is like waking up from an entertainingly bizarre dream.

Let us examine the characters and elements from the story of the *Wizard of Oz*, revealing the metaphors contained therein, as we develop the message in this parable, *The Wonderful Wizard of Zion*.

As we bounce back and forth, we'll refer to the 1939 movie as *the story*, while developing the message in *the parable*.

Let us begin with Dorothy.

DOROTHY

The Small and Meek

Aside from the impeccably beautiful portrayal of Dorothy by the talented Judy Garland, what we find in our protagonist is the innocence, humbleness, and decency that draws out our empathy for her throughout the unfolding of the story. Her character traits, accentuated with childlike curiosity, captivate us as she reaches out into the heavens – singing “somewhere over the rainbow” – searching for that one place where you can’t get into any trouble... perhaps that place where God and His Glory reside.

For the purpose of our parable, Dorothy is the humble seeker of truth. Her character’s desire to search for something in the heavens represents the longing to fill the God-shaped void which every person has. However, in the context of the story, it also represents a common condition in our modern Christian-centric American society. Namely, a young person who, being raised in a hard-working family, is never consistently taught – if at all – the biblical Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though it may seem obvious that Aunt Em is a good Christian woman, and the matriarch of a Christian household, it appears Dorothy lacks a well-grounded knowledge of the Gospel – due to searching *somewhere over the rainbow*. Perhaps the lack of training is simply due to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry being too busy with life to oversee such a

responsibility. Unfortunately, this condition – amongst the professing Christian communities across America – has become more and more evident. Nevertheless, Dorothy represents that which is in every human being – a desire to know God.

As an aside, we'll note from the story, the representation of Dorothy's family and farm: namely, that of stewards in God's post-Eden creation. Farmers seem to adequately represent the stewardship God has placed upon mankind for tending and overseeing His creation of the land, the animals, and the family. A significant emphasis in Christian discipleship is the principle of stewardship – as it is naturally connected to our purpose in life – with a focus of glorifying God in the process. Proper stewardship can get easily sidetracked with the *busyness* of life... as was apparently the case with the Gale family.

In the story, a serious conflict arises with their uncharitable neighbor, Almira Gulch. Because she was supposedly bitten by Dorothy's dog, Toto, Almira has brought a legal order to have the dog destroyed. Having no choice but to submit to the order, Aunt Em and Uncle Henry allow Almira to take the dog. Nevertheless, Toto soon escapes and returns to Dorothy. In protective desperation, Dorothy decides to run away with Toto. As a result of a more charitable encounter with a traveling Professor, who helps Dorothy realize she has hurt her family, her only subsequent desire is to *return home*.

After thanking the Professor, she hurriedly returns home just as a severe and frightening tornado strikes the farm. Upon entering her bedroom, she is knocked unconscious by a windswept window pane. As her consciousness is transferred to the magical Land of Oz, her desire to return home is only deepened by the realization that she is *not in Kansas anymore*.

Dorothy's constant refrain to get back to Kansas... to get back to her family... to get back home, is a reminder of our own deep desire to return home to our God.

Regarding our parable, here in lies one of the more alluring messages of Mormonism. Just as Dorothy strongly desires to get back home, Mormonism teaches us of a *Pre-existence* which has imprinted a strong desire to not only return to God... but to our family as well. In returning to our eternal family, we will be home. Family and Home - It is a powerful message.

However, from a Christian perspective, our eternal family goes far beyond our physical and temporal ancestry and posterity. It includes the body of all true believers – those who have put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, returning home to the God who gave us life will include a far greater heavenly family.

TOTO

DOG is "GOD"... Spelled Backwards

I don't know about you, but I've always seen dogs as the living embodiment of God's love for us. I guess it's because "dog" is "god" spelled backwards. Seriously though, all dogs give God's kind of love – unconditional love. If there is another animal in all of God's creation that can love mankind unconditionally like a dog, I am not aware of what animal that may be.

The remarkable thing in this story is that Toto, with the exception of two brief moments, is constantly with Dorothy. And really – that should be of no surprise... for God is always with the "humble and meek".

The first time Toto and Dorothy are separated, you will recall he was taken away due to a legal order by the law of the land. Yet, while the evil influence – in the form of Almira Gulch, who ironically characterizes Toto as a "menace to society... and must be destroyed" – removed Toto from Dorothy's grasp, it was only temporary... as he quickly escapes and immediately returns to Dorothy. Thus, we see in this happy reunion that *nothing can separate us from the Love of God.*²

As an aside, it is interesting to see the parallels in our current society regarding the taking away of God from our everyday culture – schools, public buildings, business, etc. – by the legal process from the law of the land.

The second time we witness the two of them separated is when Toto escapes from the premises of the Wicked Witch's castle... after Dorothy is forcibly imprisoned there. And where does Toto immediately go? To find, alert, and direct the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion to rescue Dorothy. In this, we are reminded how God will use others to intervene as a blessing in our behalf and for our comfort.

While watching the relationship between Dorothy and Toto, I couldn't help but notice how much love is manifested between the two of them. Especially, from Dorothy to Toto... as she is constantly holding Toto close to her bosom. She talks to him as if he's her best friend. Other than those brief moments of separation – due to the unwanted presence of evil – Toto is continuously at Dorothy's side.

In Toto, we see how God is with the humble and meek; never abandoning them; always protecting them.

THE MUNCHKINS

“We thank you very sweetly, for doing it so neatly”

Through their obvious physical stature and appreciative nature, The Munchkins represent the sweet and happy innocence so indicative of children.

In the story, when Dorothy opens her farmhouse door to explore what is outside, we are mesmerized by the colorful and whimsical grandeur of Munchkinland. If you can recall watching this scene for the first time as a child, perhaps your imagination got its kick-start in this land of Munchkins. I know mine did and, in like manner, I can recall being similarly enthralled with the scene of “Pure Imagination” in the movie, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. The point being, all of this points to the worldview of a child.

As the scene unfolds in Munchkinland, we immediately sense the childlike curiosity of the Munchkins. Because of this, it is easy to understand how believing they can be in a Wizard living in the Land of Oz. It is noteworthy to witness their reverence of a supernatural being they have never seen. One can only be reminded of the trust and faith that children have... and how easily it is for them to believe.

The Munchkins soon reveal themselves to Dorothy. And just as children are want to do, they can't help but show her their appreciation for removing the Wicked Witch of the East from their midst. Like innocent children, they can only be themselves – happy and excited – in the

absence of wickedness. During their grand spectacle of gratitude, we can't help but be happy for them; joining them in their revelry and celebration.

But first, as Dorothy begins exploring Munchkinland, trying to figure out where she is – perhaps ending up somewhere over the rainbow – we witness the amazing arrival of someone who can help her make sense of it all.

THE GOOD WITCH

Are you a good witch, or a bad witch? – Glinda

With the arrival of Glinda, the Good Witch, we witness the miraculous appearance of a heavenly being who comes to introduce Dorothy to the inhabitants of Munchkinland. I don't know about you, but the first time I saw this Good Witch as a boy, I thought there couldn't be anything more beautiful. If heaven was a real concept, then Glinda was the perfect manifestation of divinity. So, for the purpose of our parable, she represents a divine angelic messenger.

As such, the Good Witch of the North comes to the aid of Dorothy – to shed light; to bring comfort; to give guidance and direction.

Inquiring of Dorothy's presence in Munchkinland, she asks, "Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?" When Dorothy replies, "I'm not a witch at all. Witches are old and ugly", the humorous and charming appeal of the hidden Munchkins is revealed in their responsive giggling. Glinda helps us all understand that she too is a witch... and that only bad witches are ugly.

What is more, we begin to sense her majestic role in the life of the Munchkins – to calm and alleviate their fears, and to protect them from evil.

As Glinda's presence relates to our parable, the concept of angelic messengers is a major element in the Mormon narrative. Mormonism

teaches the notion of latter-day visitations of angels. In fact, the Book of Mormon comes to us through Joseph Smith, Jr. via an angel named Moroni. The success of Mormon proselytizing efforts rests, in part, on the apparent comfort in knowing angelic messengers are still actively engaged in the affairs of mankind.

While Christians also believe in the ministering of angels, there is also a very healthy dose of caution to be heeded according to the warnings given in the New Testament.³ As Christian discipleship brings discernment in applying the Word of God, it becomes evident – in the light of the Gospel – this topic is an issue of concern between Mormonism and Christianity.

Nevertheless, the thought of divine angels interacting with mortal humans, who are struggling with the trials of life, brings us great comfort. One just need watch the 1946 Christmas classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*, to remind us of our tendency to romanticize that wishful interaction.

Thus, with Glinda's presence, we can't help but feel protected, comforted, and spiritually lifted. And, in Dorothy's case, that undeniable feeling of protection is manifested when Glinda magically gives to her a blessing beyond measure – the movie's iconic treasure, the Ruby Slippers.

THE RUBY SLIPPERS

There they are... and there they'll stay. – Glinda

Of all the metaphors in the story, none is more central to the message of Dorothy finding her way home than the Ruby Slippers. Without them, the parable's symbolism would lose its significance. Why? Simply because they represent the blood of Christ.

Upon viewing the magnificent splendor of the rich ruby-red footwear, covering the lively feet of Dorothy, it is clearly understandable why they are the envy of all women. In fact, men are drawn to them with such admiration, they too can't deny the desire for such a blessing. It seems even Cinderella's fairy Godmother could not match this fashionably consecrated footwear.

In these Ruby Slippers, one can't help but sense the supernatural power invested in them. Through them, we are reminded how God the Father provided His Son, Jesus Christ, as a willing sacrificial Lamb for the crimson and scarlet stained sins of all;⁴ whose shed blood redeems and restores all who are fallen, lost, and separated from God. And, if anyone in this story is *fallen* (from the sky), *lost* (in the Land of Oz), and *separated* (from home and family), it is Dorothy.

In the story, aside from the Ruby Slippers previously belonging to her sister, their magical power was the reason why the Wicked Witch of the West deeply desired them. Because of this, our angelic messenger,

Glinda, magically transfers the Ruby Slippers from the feet of the now deceased Witch of the East to the feet of Dorothy.

Alas, the bestowal of the Ruby Slippers onto Dorothy's feet reminds us of the Christian whose *feet is shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*.⁵ Dorothy's preparation comes with the counsel to never remove the Ruby Slippers – for as long as she has them on, she will be protected from the curse and threatening's of the Wicked Witch. Just as God allowed Satan to buffet and curse Job with all manner of sore afflictions, yet the one thing Satan could not do was destroy Job.⁶ God knew Job's faithful heart was set on The Promise to redeem and restore mankind.

As the story progresses past this point, we see how Glinda's blessing prepares Dorothy for the long and arduous journey ahead... a journey fraught with the fiery darts of a wicked one.

THE WICKED WITCH

“I’ll get you my pretty, and your little dog too!”

There can be no doubt as to who the Wicked Witch of the West represents. She is Evil incarnate. She is the mother of all devils. I can still recall, as a boy, the horror and fear which gripped my imagination upon seeing Almira Gulch, while still riding her bicycle, transform – *within the frightening storm of the tornado’s vortex* – into the broom-flying, evil-cackling, Wicked Witch.

Looking back at the many times I’ve watched the movie, I have constantly found myself to be impressively repulsed by the following characteristics –

- The abnormal mocking cackle meant to strike fear
- The greenish grotesque gargoyle features of her elongated nose and chin
- The length and motion of her expressively pointing fingers
- The eerie gaze from her piercing eyes
- The blackest black of witch-iest robes ever seen in Technicolor
- The statuesque height and size of her pointy black hat
- The quick and evasive movement in her body motions
- The intimidating tone of enmity in her speech
- The nails-on-a-blackboard screechiness in her voice

All of these characteristics seem to descend upon the senses with such an intensity that you find yourself curiously overwhelmed in both a

state of repugnant revulsion and ravenous relishing over her presence in the story.

In Christendom, revulsion of evil is a normal byproduct of transformation and sanctification. And while Mormonism will agree with that observation, it also tends to relish the concept of *opposition in all things*⁷ in order to focus the sanctification process on what a Mormon can do to overcome that opposition.

The Wicked Witch's personification of the devil reminds us of how easily she can get us to begin thinking about not only what we must do to counter her many threats but who else we need to rely on and put our trust in – such as a professor, philosopher, wizard, etc. What can you say about such wickedness... but be reminded that it exists. And just as Dorothy was threatened by the Wicked Witch, we too seem to be threatened by the sinister nature of evil and wickedness as we travel along our own journey to return home.

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

“Hold to the rod, the iron rod...” – LDS Hymnal, #274

For Dorothy, returning home meant heeding the admonition to “follow the yellow brick road”. In our parable, the yellow brick road is *the iron rod*⁸ of Mormonism. And what is the iron rod? It is Mormonism’s version of the Word of God – meaning, the gospel according to the Book of Mormon, and reapplied through subsequent revelations from their Prophet.

On the surface, holding to the iron rod looks and feels like the Biblical Gospel of Christ. But just as it appears like a solid anchor for following the straight and narrow path, that anchor turns out to be a tremendous burden of religious works to hold and bear.

In the story, *follow the yellow brick road* means that it is the only way to the Emerald City. Likewise, in our parable, *hold to the iron rod* is the only way along the journey to Mormonism’s Celestial City of Zion.⁹ Just as the only one who can help Dorothy return home is connected to the yellow brick road – namely, the Wizard of Oz – so too is the only one who can help you hold onto the iron rod – namely, the Prophet.

In Christianity, Jesus says, “Come follow me. I AM the Way.”¹⁰ Whereas, in Mormonism, the LDS Church says, “Follow the Prophet. He knows the way.”¹¹

Metaphorically speaking, it is this great and mysterious Mormon *Wizard*, along with his followers – the citizens of *Zion* – who have made the yellow brick road possible. Throughout the land of our allegorical Oz, the yellow brick road (a.k.a., *the iron rod*) is the path of obtaining the answers to the great questions of life: *Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I get there?*¹² Only the great and powerful Wizard of Zion knows.

The allusion to the iron rod means we are now on *our way*;¹³ a way leading us to *another way*; which will lead us to yet *another way*; always keeping us hoping and trusting that *we can do it*, that we can find *our way* back home... if we follow the yellow brick road and *keep to the iron rod*.

Just as the yellow brick road appears as the neatly paved infrastructure throughout the Land of Oz – binding the country and forested scenery in which it meanders – it is interesting to note that within the Land of Zion, the infrastructure which supports the iron rod is made up of many neatly designed brick chapel buildings, most of which were constructed in the second half of the twentieth century. The LDS infrastructure is actually quite impressive in contrast to other religious institutions. When one considers the growth of the LDS church within that same time period, it is hard to argue with their success in *keeping to the iron rod*.

THE SCARECROW

“Pardon me, this way is a very nice way.”

The Scarecrow represents not only man made in the image of God but, more specifically, the intelligence of mankind. With this intelligence we learn to create, organize, formulate, decide and apply our own talents and abilities for living out our purpose in life... which includes participating in the stewardship of God’s Creation, as well as in service to others.

Intelligence is the foundation for both *knowledge* and its more mature application *wisdom (i.e., knowledge rightly applied)*. Thus, while *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom*,¹⁴ intelligence is a prerequisite. However, in Mormonism intelligence is viewed at a more noble level, being looked upon as the foundation for godliness – for *the glory of God is intelligence*.¹⁵

Therefore, in the Scarecrow, we see the desire of man to be *intellectual*... without first understanding how it is much better to properly apply what you know. Being wise is much better than acquiring a wealth of knowledge... and then not knowing how to properly use it to glorify God, and serve your fellow man. The desire for knowledge, without wisdom, started way back in the Garden of Eden. Here, in our parable, the desire continues.

Apart from the seriousness of the notion, I find it somewhat amusing to see the Scarecrow use his intelligence to get down from the wooden

pole by getting Dorothy to bend the nail down so he'll slip off. In a similar manner, Mormonism's thought-process of not placing the same value of significance on *the Cross* as Evangelicals do – a sort of bending of the nail in order to get down from *the Post* – suggests the strong emphasis on man's intelligence. It's a part of the American "can do" attitude. In Mormonism, *we are saved by grace, after all we can do.*¹⁶ For Christians, *the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*¹⁷

I also find the encounter with Dorothy and the Scarecrow amusing for another reason. As they begin conversing with each other, the pleasantries in their tone and demeanor remind me of the propriety in LDS conversations, such as: speak in soft tones, not harsh and loud; be polite, not rude; speak with refinement and uplifting language, not with crassness. When the Scarecrow responds, "That's very kind of you, very kind", I can't help but be reminded of the obvious first-impressions of the Mormon Missionaries by the non-LDS, which is typically something like, "They are so polite, kind, and helpful."

With their *success* in first impressions, the opportunity for *access* naturally follows. Now that's wisdom.

Obviously, in the story, the Scarecrow is a representation of the farmhand, Hunk. As such, we see his specific talents and abilities transferred into this enchanted character. What we immediately find in this brain-less Scarecrow is that he is already addressing, albeit unknowingly, his intelligence issue – namely, his good horse-sense (*wisdom*) and his quick-witted resourcefulness. Of course, we also see his weaknesses as well – such as his flammable straw body and natural clumsiness. Nevertheless, his talents and abilities are a source of comfort, and are a means by which God blesses Dorothy in the story.

THE TIN MAN

“And I was standing over there, rusting for the longest time.”

The Tin Man represents the inherent desire – born from the God-shaped void given to every man – for *relationship*. God created man to have fellowship not only with Him but with others... especially with a companion to compliment him in the journey of life.¹⁸ In very practical terms, God’s love is manifested in intimate relationships within families. After every child grows up and matures, they eventually leave the nest to start their own familial relationships.¹⁹ As such, one usually desires a companion to express the love and fellowship for which God created mankind for.

For a person to be alone, as was the Tin Man – tending to his neck of the woods without the help of a companion – well... it’s no wonder we can see the sadness in his tin-stained face, as well as feel the emptiness in his barren chest. As you watch and come to understand his situation, you just want to shout out, “Have a heart, and give this man a companion! Can’t you see he desperately needs one to help lube his body with the oil can! And, he’s dying to know what it’s like to love someone!” The sadness in his situation just tugs at your own heart strings.

The Tin Man’s tender soul is so evident throughout the story, it’s difficult to see how his desire for a heart, as a result of the Tinsmith forgetting to give him one, could ever be rightly resolved.

Nevertheless, for our parable, the Tin Man's heart issue also represents the importance Mormonism places on *feelings* from the heart.²⁰ The proselytizing success of missionary work in Mormonism is directly related to getting investigators to rely on their feelings. As pertaining and relating to the emotional experiences evoked from sharing personal testimonies – along with the Church's historical narrative, with its biblically based principles from top-notch media presentations – the Missionaries are quite adept at getting their investigators to focus on their feelings.

With the gospel of Mormonism, the formula for successful proselytizing is the following: First and foremost is feelings, then faith, followed by facts. Meaning, the goal of the missionary is to get the investigator to identify and associate what they are feeling as the Holy Spirit... then, to have faith in that feeling... then, any actual facts of the biblical gospel – which are strategically diluted amongst the other Mormon scriptures – become a tertiary and trivial side note to conversion.

In a contrasting process, the evangelical message of sharing the gospel of Christ is based, first, on facts... then faith... followed by feelings. In other words, Christian conversion is based on the biblical facts contained in the Word of God, the Holy Bible. These facts point to the Grace of God spiritually regenerating a sinner, through faith in Jesus Christ, and His shed blood on the Cross. The born-again disciple puts their faith in that fact, and the uplifting feelings associated with regeneration from the Holy Spirit naturally follow.

In providing the differentiation of witnessing between the LDS and Evangelicals, let me share a few thoughts on *feelings*. Obviously, the feelings of any person are to be taken seriously, as God instilled them into the human condition for a reason and purpose – perhaps to

motivate us, or enact change in us. Whatever the reason, His Word provides a caution that the *heart of man is deceitful above all else*.²¹

Nevertheless, Mormon Missionaries are successful at getting investigators to focus on the *burning in the bosom*²² and, similar to what the two men on the road to Emmaus experienced, have *hearts burn*²³ with feelings. However, the difference is in the focus of the message: The Emmaus experience was facilitated by the Master Teacher – the Risen Lord – who expounded, in detail, the scriptures which testified of Himself. Whereas, the LDS experience is facilitated by masterfully disciplined students who share only the basics of the bible, which also happen to be embedded in the Book of Mormon. This allows the hearer to be exposed to the biblical witness of the Holy Spirit – *from another source*²⁴ – then deftly having the investigator associate their biblical burning heart with the rest of the LDS narrative... which really has little to do with Jesus Christ.

The point in sharing these thoughts on *feelings* is to simply identify how powerfully influencing they can be in associating *a legitimately accurate Holy Spirit witness of Christ* with non-biblical doctrines of works-based religions. In the case of Mormonism, the LDS have marvelously perfected this approach in proselytizing the unchurched and biblically illiterate. So long as the feelings are associated with the *fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith*,²⁵ the LDS have a script – at a Hollywood level – that is warm and emotionally captivating. The point being: *if it feels right, then it must be true!*

Returning to the Tin Man, we see him as a representation of the second farmhand, Hickory. And, like the Scarecrow, we see in him a variety of wonderful talents and abilities that only he possesses: such as his wood

chopping skills, his fire-proof body, as well as his entertainingly whistling stovepipe hat. Unfortunately, his quick rusting shell of a body proves to be his major weakness.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of our parable, we'll see in the Tin Man's talents and abilities another metaphor for God using a friend as a source of comfort and blessing for those in need.

THE COWARDLY LION

Tin Man: *Why don't you try counting sheep?*

Cowardly Lion: [sobbing] *That doesn't do any good, I'm afraid of 'em.*

The Cowardly Lion represents the more fallen aspects of our human nature. Without God in our lives, *fear* tends to take over our fallen nature. Fear is the opposite of Faith. While a regenerated born-again sinner is Spirit-filled, typically having no fear of mankind, the Cowardly Lion has so much fear he is even afraid of his own shadow.

A companion to fear is *pride*. We see that in our timid friend as well. For him, he's quick to depend on a blustery pride to get others to see him as he wishes to be seen – the King of Beasts. He must rely on this pride for fear he'll actually be seen as a disgraceful coward.

When I was a member of the LDS Church, I found myself being fearful of failure. Though not surprising as a human frailty, the fear of failure seemed to be much more pronounced in my constant striving for perfection in carrying out my priesthood duties and responsibilities.²⁶ There was the fear of failure of not progressing, of not enduring, of not being able to reach my goal of celestial glory and exaltation when this mortal life ends.

And yet, in a similarly convoluted vein, I found myself also buoyed by a sense of well-deserved pride as I dutifully carried my weight within the culture of this *one and only true church upon the face of the land*.²⁷

And why not? I was a worthy leader, an exemplary saint, and considered as the elect of God. I always had that status to focus my attention on... which had the effect of crowding out that nagging fear of failure.

Fear and pride: two attributes of a fallen man. Unfortunately, a works-based religion can easily facilitate what the devil wishes to accentuate.

Like the others, the Cowardly Lion is a representation of another farmhand, Zeke. Aside from the weakness of fear and pride emanating from his nature, we get to experience the wonderful talents and abilities that only he possesses – such as his remarkable tail with its dexterity and strength, as well as his entertaining humor. And, just as with his new found friends, we also witness how his delightful attributes will come in handy as it pertains to Dorothy's journey.

POISONED POPPIES AND SOOTHING SNOW

Poppies will put them to sleep. Sllleeeep. Now they'll sleeeeeeep!

– Wicked Witch of the West

One of the more poignant scenes in the story is that of the poisoned poppies, followed by the immediate remedy of the soothing snow. Who can forget being excited for our four traveling friends when, after coming to the end of the long and winding yellow brick road, they are met with the most picturesque view in all the land of Oz. There in the distance, beyond the reaching edge of a rolling meadow of poppies, is the beautifully gleaming Emerald City.

With refreshed anticipation and enthusiasm, our friends leap and dance as they make their way across the open meadow. However, just as they are frolicking through the meadow, a poisonous spell is placed upon the poppies, inducing a mysteriously deep sleep upon two of our flesh and blood creatures. With this unexplained and strange calamity taking the wind from their sails, the Scarecrow rightly surmises the workings of the Wicked Witch. When he and the Tin Man are helpless to assist Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion, they desperately cry out for help.

I'll stop here in this scene to discuss some symbolic parallels in our parable.

On the one hand, for new converts to Mormonism, when coming to the end of that long and winding yellow brick road of personal searching –

over those same issues Joseph Smith pondered as a young boy²⁸ – they too are met with the most picturesque views of the iconic Salt Lake Temple, and its spiritual symbolism to the city of Zion. And while their worthiness and qualification may be off in the distance, the Temple’s central imagery and purpose for God’s Latter-day Kingdom rolls forth with angelically sung heavenly hymns springing up from the everlasting hills²⁹... and filling the beautifully designed Conference Center. With refreshed anticipation and enthusiasm, new converts leap and dance as they make their way from Temple Visitor-Centers to Mormon Meeting-houses.

But...

On the other hand, for many former long-time convert members – upon looking back at their own church experiences – there comes a realization that somewhere, sometime, after the enthusiastic rush to Zion, a strange sleep-inducing spell came upon them. Then, with revelatory clarity, they can finally discern God’s response to their fervent cries for help. With the descending enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, it becomes clearer as to when their poisoned veil of slumber finally lifted.³⁰

Just as the Good Witch of the North brought forth the sublime and soothing snow to fall upon the sleeping Dorothy, so too has God allowed the sublime and soothing Spirit to descend upon the spiritually dead – to enlighten the mind, and revive the heart – and remove the curse of a slumbering sleep.

Let us return to our story, and see what other metaphors will contribute to our developing parable.

THE EMERALD CITY

A Horse of a Different Color

With divine intervention, our four friends have been revived and refreshed... and have now happily arrived at the magnificently fortified gate of the Emerald City. Where they were once in the remote and enchanted climes of country and forest in the Land of Oz, they are now at the doorstep of the greatest city ever created and designed for paradise in a far-away land – somewhere over the rainbow.

Upon their entrance, as we are taken into the magical world of the Emerald City, we witness the hustle and bustle of an engagingly happy society. It becomes evident that its citizens enjoy a contrasting combination of leisure-filled and purpose-driven lives – all within the futuristic landscape of a grand metropolis reminiscent of the cultural art deco designs of the 1930's.

Like all the other imaginative experiences in Oz – such as the Munchkins, or the grumpy talking apple trees – we find the horse of a different color to be a foreshadowing of things that don't appear as they seem in the Emerald City. Nevertheless, what does seem genuine is the welcome our friends receive from its citizens, who bask each of them in an individualized royal grooming for their anticipated court with the great Wizard.

This scene returns us to our parable.

When I first became interested – and enchanted – by the LDS Church, it was through a Christmas-season visit to the Oakland Temple. I had never before been to the Temple grounds, which are located prominently in the hills of Oakland, California, overlooking the San Francisco Bay Area. Though I had viewed and admired it from lower elevations, I was always intrigued by the size of the monolithic granite edifice... and its mysterious purpose. Situated high upon the hill, its prominent presence always captured my imagination. When invited by my new female LDS friend (who, I might add, would be my wife within three months) to take a trip up to the Temple, I did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity.

Upon arriving in the early evening, the Temple grounds were lit up by the most spectacular display of Christmas lights I'd ever witnessed. What was even more impressive was the Temple itself – an imposing granite structure of marvelous stature. In addition, the magnificent view overlooking the splendor of San Francisco's nighttime skyline, resting upon the Bay, was beautiful to behold.

Even though it was a chilly December evening, there was a warm and festive feeling in the air. The people milling around were very friendly, and appeared most happy. Everyone seemed to know somebody else in the crowd. It was definitely an evening filled with enchantment. For me, an outsider to this Mormon culture, it was truly a horse of a different color.

In fact, the experience was so mesmerizing, all I really wanted was to be inside the Temple. If the Temple was supposedly a metaphorical representation of God's House on earth – allowing those who are prepared to approach His presence while inside – then, naturally, I wanted to share in that experience. But, just as Dorothy and her friends

were denied initial entry into the Wizard's hall, so too was my desire for entrance denied for a time. For, in the LDS culture – in similitude to the preparation Dorothy and her friends received – one must also be prepared and groomed physically and spiritually before being allowed to enter the Temple.³¹

Returning to our story – Everything is appearing as it should be. Uplifted by the gracious attention given them by their hosts, we see our friends at their happiest and glorious best. They are now prepared physically and emotionally to have their deepest desires met; ready to meet the wonderful Wizard of Oz.

THE GREAT AND POWERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

“Who goes there?!”

It is most intriguing how words and titles can elicit an emotional response from our human nature. The use of lofty language in just the right tone and attitude, from the speech of those in authority, can draw intense emotional reactions – from reverential awe to quaking intimidation and fear. Such is the case upon our encounter with the great and powerful Oz.

Our story finds the friends cautiously striding down the grand hallway to the private chamber of the Wizard of Oz. In abundant anticipation, we’ve been waiting for this moment to see the great and powerful Wizard; this mysterious ruler of the land who – by the mere mentioning of his title – elicits solemn worship and reverence from the inhabitants of the land.

As Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, carefully approach the throne room, we hear the forceful booming voice, with power and authority, question who they are and why they are there – only to remind them of his omniscience and foreknowledge of their circumstances and desires. What is even more breathtaking than the voice is the amazing heliographed image, resting high in the air above the throne, of an imposing, cranium-enlarged, green-faced, talking head – with its protruding veins and furrowing brow accenting

the austere facial expression; accompanied with animated fiery flashes of billowing steam and smoke.

What we find most distressing in this encounter is the onslaught of hostility in the boldly aggressive tone of voice which quickly engulfs our friends with fear and intimidation. Just as each are shaking uncontrollably at the sight and sound of this great and powerful being, we find ourselves almost responding in a similar manner.

Then, as the Wizard begins an individually tailored diatribe upon each one's desire for approaching him, we can't help but be entertained with the comedic relief from the Wizard's use of alliteration. For example, with a thunderous voice, he calls forth the Tin Man with the following alliterative castigation, "You dare to come to me for a heart, do you? You clinking, clanking, clattering, collection of caliginous junk!"

In the light of our parable, what are we to make of the great and powerful Wizard?

He is the quintessential representation of a callously vengeful God, which most – *amongst the biblically illiterate* – typically envision from certain Old Testament stories. For example, when I was a boy – *without really understanding the nature of God* – what naturally got impressed upon my mind were the tales of God's wrath; with total destruction whenever He willed it. It was always a sobering thought for a young impressionable mind. Unfortunately, those thoughts resurface with the image and countenance of the great and powerful Wizard of Oz.

OBEDIENCE AND WORKS

“Bring me the broomstick... and I will grant your request”

In total faith, our friends have finally encountered the Wizard. Though they meekly and humbly submit to his ostentatious display of pompous authority, trusting and hoping to receive the answers to their sincere desires, they are callously confronted with a conditional response. To our dismay, the great and powerful Oz states, before he will grant the requests of our friends, they must perform a task to prove their worthiness.

After all they’ve been through to reach their only hope for completion and resolution, they are now commanded to depart and fulfill the task of bringing the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. In this demand, the four of them realize they will need to kill her in order to carry out this wayward work. Needless to say, our poor friends are frightened into obeying this daring deed.

As relating to our parable, I find it interesting how new converts to the LDS Church will trustingly comply with all the rules, regulations, and requirements placed upon them on their new journey to the celestial kingdom. Just as the Wizard commanded Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, so too does the Prophet command – albeit, under the guise of speaking for the Lord – and the membership complies.

It is the doctrine of the LDS Church to obey and keep commandments and covenants in order to progress and receive one's eternal reward. Adherents rely heavily on the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith – which are *a collection of revelations and declarations given for the establishment and regulation of the kingdom of God on the earth in the last days... and are prized by the LDS as messages from God.*³²

The obedience can be taken to extremes even if only symbolically displayed, as was manifested in previous temple oaths to suffer one's own life to be taken if a sacred oath was broken.³³

Nevertheless, it is the concept of performing works and deeds relating to the building of the kingdom of God on the earth (The LDS Church), in order to become worthy of one's eternal reward, which is the message from God and His servant, the Prophet.

And exactly what is that eternal reward? If one can endure to the end – by obeying the laws, ordinances and commandments – one can expect to qualify for the highest glory in the celestial kingdom,³⁴ and receive their exaltation. Meaning, to become like God... and, thus, have an eternal increase with your Forever Family.³⁵

Naturally, your forever family members will need to obey as well... and, if they do, one will need to consider the endless illogical relational connections for family members with exaltation status. Furthermore, the strong possibility of plural marriage will factor in your eternal increase.

Curiously, many find this ultimate destination – from the LDS version of The Plan of Salvation – most compelling... and convincing. By human standards and rationale, the results speak for themselves. No other religious organization comes close to achieving the success – as the

world defines it – in such a relatively short period of time than the LDS Church. Outside of the Roman Catholic Church – money, power and politics have never been more entwined than in this home-grown American religion. What is more, as America defines success, they are the elite of the religious community. Its organizational structure, not unlike the Military, is the most disciplined and, thus, most effective at moving the membership in lock-step for its own purposes. Even under the conditions of legalistic rules, regulations, practices and procedures, many find comfort and security in the routine and structure which the LDS Church provides.

With its more appealing and rational doctrinal explanations, along with a modern historical narrative, the LDS message is so compelling that admirers and followers simply overlook the serious incompatibilities the religion may have with orthodox Christianity. As such, it is not surprising to find the membership comply with whatever the authoritative body dictates.

OVERTAKEN ON THE WRONG PATH

I do believe in spooks! – Cowardly Lion

Getting back to the story – our friends are now cautiously and nervously making their way toward the Wicked Witch’s castle. As they get closer, the scenery in the wilderness changes to a dark and eerie landscape reminiscent of a classic Halloween fable. Within this setting, we find strange relief in our agreement with the Cowardly Lion’s mantra, “I do believe in spooks, I do, I do, I do believe in spooks.”

Our frightened friends are trying their best to maintain their composure when we witness a malevolent movement in the sky’s darkening dusk. With the dispatch of the flying monkeys, the Wicked Witch has cast her beastly-winged servants to capture Dorothy and bring her to the castle.

I don’t know about you but, when I was a boy, this scene was rather unsettling. Perhaps it was due to the sense of evil being unleashed – with these unearthly looking creatures. Whatever it was, I couldn’t shake the feeling of helplessness, from the lack of protection against such odds, for our defenseless and ill-equipped friends.

And no wonder – as we witness our retreating friends being forcefully overwhelmed by the invading army of the skies, Dorothy is caught and taken hold by the flying monkeys, screaming and kicking as she is whisked away by her captors to the Witch’s castle. Meanwhile, the molestation upon the other three is clearly evident when we see the

Scarecrow's talking head frantically shout for help, describing where his bodily hay is scattered all over the ground.

Applying this scene to our parable, we see a parallel consequence to those who rely on the commandments of a works-based religion – rather than on the Word of God from the Holy Scriptures. Just as Dorothy and company were overtaken in unfamiliar territory as a result of following the commandment from the Wizard, so too will the placing of one's trust and faith in the word of man lead you down the wrong path of discipleship.

History is rife with examples of unsuspecting believers following a charismatic and dynamic leader down a path of blind obedience. These sincere believers are overcome with a sense of divine mission, putting their trust, hopes and dreams in the compelling message of their spiritual leader. All that is promised will come to pass... so long as the leader is followed.

For example, back in the story we know Dorothy and company understood their task inevitably involved killing another individual. Once they acquiesced to that command, they started their journey into that dark and eerie wilderness. As 1 John 2:11 reminds us, "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

In the darkness of this type of spiritual wilderness, the sincere unsuspecting believer will, as did the Cowardly Lion, begin to listen intently to their own repetitive recitations associated with the task at hand. It's as if there comes an inevitable wrestling for faith and trust; not in God but between what the leader has commanded and the natural fear that still resides within. As Ephesians 6:12 states, "For we

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Thus, just as what happened to our friends in the story, a resulting consequence for the follower of a false leader – with works-based motivations – is to be simply overtaken by the principalities of darkness.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, the follower doesn't realize that is the path they are on. It usually takes a major life event to alert the follower of the errant way. Or, perhaps God will use friends to intervene with counsel and guidance. However, it appears the more sure way the follower gets enlightened is when God intervenes Himself.

GOD'S LOVE SHINES THROUGH FRIENDS

“Don’t you see... he’s come to take us to Dorothy!” – The Scarecrow

As we find Dorothy imprisoned within the walls of the Wicked Witch’s castle, our hearts are burdened with a foreboding apprehension over her predicament. When the Wicked Witch tries to remove the Ruby Slippers from off of Dorothy’s feet, we finally witness their real power as they painfully shock her fingers with an impressive display of energy.

In an interesting side note, a similar type of scene is described in the Book of Mormon narrative. Within the Book’s opening chapters, during the telling of a family’s exodus from the old world to the new, a young prophet uses an impressive display of divine power as self-defense against his older wicked-hearted brothers, who are filled with rage and jealousy over his God-appointed righteousness.³⁶ Yet, as relating to our parable, I digress.

In returning to the story, our despair and concern for Dorothy’s welfare rises to new heights when, resulting from the Witch’s anger upon not being able to remove the Ruby Slippers, the Wicked Witch realizes her only chance of obtaining them is through Dorothy’s death. Our anxiety becomes more elevated as we are left to watch her time, toward an impending demise, slip away through the visibly seeping sand of a very large hour glass.

Just as darkness and despair engulfs our emotions over this seemingly hopeless scene, Toto, Dorothy's closest companion and loving dog, escapes from the Wicked Witch's domain.

As previously noted, there are only two times in the story where Dorothy and Toto are separated. The first time was back at the farm, when Toto was forcibly taken away, only to escape from Almira's basket prison to return to Dorothy. The second time is here, at this point in the story. Again, Toto escapes from the Wicked Witch's castle prison... but, what will he do?

As we have already identified Toto as the representation of God in our parable, it is not a mystery to us what Toto's purpose will be. Immediately after his escape, he quickly finds and retrieves Dorothy's friends for the purpose of having them return, by following him back to the castle. With Toto's action, his welcoming presence gives Dorothy's friends an unexplained sense of courage and determination, as well as provide us with an immeasurable sense of right – and light – in the face of darkness and despair. With his barking out to the three friends, it's as if we are reminded of God's word: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105).

We witness the effect of Toto's lamp in the newly determined mission of Dorothy's friends. We now see them in a new light... as they risk all to enter the Witch's castle. We see them use cunning and courage. We see them enter into combat in order to reach Dorothy's prison cell – all with the help of Toto.³⁷

For our parable, we are reminded of the way God uses friends to bring us comfort in time of great need. God will use these individuals as

agents to bless us in our trials and tribulations. God's intervening love shines through in these tender mercies of human interaction.

WORKS TO WORTHINESS

“Hail, Hail to Dorothy! The Wicked Witch is dead!”

As the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and Cowardly Lion reach Dorothy’s prison cell door, breaking it open to rescue the frightened but relieved Dorothy, we find them soon surrounded by the Wicked Witch and her castle guardsmen. Our outnumbered friends seem doomed... but for the Scarecrow’s quick thinking maneuver to use the Tin Man’s axe to fell the grand foyer’s heavy candelabra upon the encroaching sword-wielding guardsmen.

While this brilliant move buys them a moment of reprieve, our hearts are racing along with them as we realize they are running out of paths to escape within the castle walls. From our view, though trying their best to outrun the pursuing guardsmen, we know it will be futile as they will soon be surrounded and trapped.

Now the Wicked Witch has them... and it appears completely hopeless. With a coldly calculating threat, which we know she’ll carry out for all to see, she decides to terrorize them by allowing Dorothy to witness the destruction of the others before her very eyes. Lighting her straw broom from a burning torch, she sets the Scarecrow on fire. In horror, the panic stricken Scarecrow yells and screams with such emotional ferocity, we are caught in a daze of shock as we see Dorothy’s best friend jumping and pleading for help.

In all the commotion, we are almost unaware of what instantly happens next. Out of nowhere, Dorothy, having grabbed a bucket of water, heaves its healing contents into the air. The wave of water not only quenches the Scarecrow's flaming arm... but completely drenches the Wicked Witch. What happens next is, by all accounts, one of the most remembered and imitated scenes in all movie history – the melting of the Wicked Witch.

Who would have thought water could destroy the evil Wicked Witch. There, with steam rising, we see her slowly melting away. When she's gone, all that is left is her large black hat, resting upon her black robe, and her charred broomstick. With her coldness vanquished, the hearts of the guardsmen immediately warm toward Dorothy for the deed she has done. They reverence her for destroying the Wicked Witch, and setting them free from their bondage. They kneel, and pay homage to Dorothy... for she is worthy.

With this favorable turn of events, Dorothy asks for, and receives, the broomstick of the Wicked Witch. In abounding warmth and happiness, we can finally rejoice knowing our friends will return to the Wizard to receive their promised blessings.

As this relates to our parable, the Mormon journey is one of personal worthiness manifested in obedience to a process of works established by the LDS Church. It is the individual's effort which achieves progression and perfection toward sanctification. Eternal life awaits those who endure to the end in obedience.

In contrast, the Evangelical experiences the process as the work of God alone. From justification to sanctification to glorification, it is God

working it out in the Spirit-regenerated disciple. The contrast is simply the Grace vs. Works debate.

Nevertheless, for the LDS, the journey through life is about enduring to the end in obedience to commandments and covenants. Unfortunately, what this journey subversively does to the mind of an adherent is to give them an impression of elitism... as only the elect can achieve the ultimate goal of exaltation. With Matthew 7:14 stating, "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it", to be considered among the elect tends to be an appealing boost to one's ego.

And speaking of the gate, the LDS Church teaches that water immersion baptism – by their priesthood authority – is the gate that starts the journey on the narrow path to eternal life and exaltation. Just as the bucket of water melted the evil wickedness, so too does water baptism in the LDS Church wash away your past wickedness; allowing you to say goodbye to "what a world, what a world!" In turn, making you clean to start your new journey; proclaiming as you go, "*what a work, what a work!*"

Inevitably, this journey leads to the LDS Temple. In order to be permitted inside the Lord's House, you must *qualify yourself*; in other words, *become worthy*. It's at this stage where one begins to feel a sense of pride in being considered a member of an elite group of God's chosen people as a direct result of being worthy. Thus, from your works comes your worthiness to return to God and receive your exaltation.

FALSE WIZARDS LEAD TO FALSE BELIEF

“I never do anything without consulting my crystal first”

– Professor Marvel

As Dorothy and company return with broomstick in possession – in other words, their finished work – we join them in great expectation that they will finally receive their promised blessings from the Wizard. With confidence in their accomplishment, they present the Wicked Witch’s broomstick as evidence of their worthiness... and rightly anticipate the just reward for their achievement. But then, we hear... “Not so fast, not so fast!”

With that, we once again witness the pugilistic pomposity of the Wizard’s response to their petition.

With frustrating impatience, our worthily emboldened friends now feel justified to quickly question the Wizard over the apparent breaking of his promise to grant their request. As an argument ensues between our friends and the Wizard, Toto decides to explore what’s behind the large curtain. As Toto draws the immense curtain, revealing a scene of gadgetry and commotion, the Wizard defensively barks the command, “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!”

As an interesting side note, this scene reminds me of the Temple veil being torn asunder from top to bottom by God – at the moment of Christ’s death on the Cross.³⁸ Again, I digress.

With this curtain call, we finally meet the real great and powerful Wizard of Oz – who turns out to be... a charlatan; a humbug; a man no different than any other man.

Yet, as we look upon this man, we are immediately taken back to Dorothy's previous encounter with Professor Marvel. Like the Professor, he is a man of many faces... but, nonetheless, a fake, an imposter. Everyone in the Land of Oz has put their trust and faith in the charisma, the clairvoyance, the accomplishment and imagination of this learned man from a mysteriously distant land... even our dear friends. So much so, they risked their lives to carry out a task for a promise and reward which he could never fulfill – which brings us back to our parable.

Our false wizard represents a false prophet. And yet, given that connection, we can't help but wonder the following: how does this happen in the society of so-called believers?

Perhaps people find charisma so endearing, so persuasive, and so magnetic, they fail to grasp what is behind the persona. Or, perhaps as an individual is blessed with an unexplainable gift of clairvoyance – an astute visionary, able to see what others can't – it appears no other explanation suffices... but that of *Prophet*. Or, perhaps a person's unusually charged can-do attitude for getting things done – accomplishing much with so little – can seem like the making of a remarkably gifted leader that others simply find themselves naturally following in order to be a part of the impending accomplishment. Or, perhaps an individual has such an endless well of imagination that all they say and share captures the fancy of the listeners – where they can't help but agree with the possibilities.

Or...

Perhaps the combination of all these in one individual, along with other traits and gifts, proves too seductive for the masses. In that extraordinary case, we might begin to understand how such an individual can be successful at persuading a group of followers to simply submit freely to every counsel and command.

I find it rather noteworthy that these traits were embedded in the person of Joseph Smith Jr., the Prophet of the Latter-day Saints. It was said he possessed remarkable charm and magnetic charisma. And while the LDS narrative portrays him as “uneducated”, the fact is – as public education, for all intents and purposes, did not exist in those early American rural environments – many youth were educated on the Holy Bible. They *knew* the Scriptures... and I suspect Joseph knew them very well. We can look to his contemporary, Abraham Lincoln, as a classic example of this notion of being “uneducated” in his youth.

Furthermore, as a result of rural life and Yankee ingenuity, Joseph seemed to have a spirit of accomplishment; doing whatever was needful to survive. Innovation seemed to be a byproduct of his poverty-stricken and humble circumstances. In his case, the phrase *Necessity is the Mother of Invention* seems most appropriate. On top of this, it was said that he grew up with an imagination of unusual proportion; so much so his mother stated he could entertain the family with "the most amusing recitals" of the life and religion of ancient Native Americans "with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them."³⁹

In my humble estimation, Joseph Smith, Jr. – having an intimate and in-depth knowledge of the Word of God – was a religious genius.

Furthermore, I believe he understood, better than anyone in his time, the social and cultural ramifications of change brought about by the various religious movements blowing in the wind throughout the land of early America.

To drive home Joseph's influence in the development of Mormonism's *praise for the man*, I am going to share – *from an LDS perspective* – a mindset of thoughts on his prominent role as both a religious leader and icon in America's early 19th century history. In order to convey these thoughts, I will use Abraham Lincoln's life for context.

In Abraham Lincoln, it is interesting to note that his friends suggested his views on religion were not orthodox. It appears Lincoln's views and experiences were similar to the account of Joseph Smith's adolescent years. One can't help but wonder, given the Illinois connection, if the opportunity had ever presented itself for Lincoln to learn about the Mormons, and their cause – which, during the adult years of his civil service, was physically located outside the boundaries of the United States in the far west territories – it is possible he may have embraced it. However, due to his status as a public servant, perhaps after fully scrutinizing the beliefs and practices of the Mormons, he may have simply distanced himself from the teachings of Joseph Smith. We'll never really know.

Nevertheless, it is fascinating to see the similarities that Abraham Lincoln and Joseph Smith shared in their respective lots in life. They were born within four years of each other, not long after the young nation began to settle in to its constitutional government. They both came from humble origins, and were reared within God-fearing families. As youth, both had similar experiences with the organized religions of their day regarding the excessive emotion and bitter sectarian quarrels amongst the ministry of traveling preachers.

As both were seemingly raised up in their day to fulfill the purposes for which the Constitution was inspired, and for which God had in store for this

land, one can clearly see why each had a different proclivity toward the openly public expression of proclaiming religious doctrine.

For Joseph Smith, he saw it as his calling and duty, as a Prophet of God, to boldly proclaim new spiritual and religious doctrine. For Abraham Lincoln, being the honest lawyer and civil servant, he too clearly understood the weight of his calling and duty. As President of the United States, when the great moral conflict of slavery was besetting the nation, his oath to uphold the law and the Constitution veiled and tempered his views on religion.

Ironically, both were instruments in proclaiming Liberty to the Captives – spiritually, from the one; temporally, from the other. For Joseph, he was to shepherd in the restoration of the Gospel, and establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. For Lincoln, he was to shepherd the nation through the crisis of the Civil War by restoring and re-establishing the Constitution as the supreme law of the land.

Both gave their lives as martyrs to their respective purposes. Joseph was martyred for upholding and defending the *spiritual government* – the Church – by following the *civil law*. Abraham was martyred for upholding and defending the *civil government* – the Constitution – by following the *spiritual law*.

Hopefully, the thoughts conveyed in this little narrative shed some sense of the power of persuasion from Mormonism in regards to Joseph Smith's story, and his prominent role in Mormon history... which is a part of American history. In Joseph, we see a religious genius with impressive leadership skills. He inspired an innovative religious movement by capturing the hearts and minds of his followers – who were intent on following the man... and his message. Like the Wizard of Oz, such was the power of the man of Zion... whom the people called *The Prophet*.⁴⁰

And yet, just like Professor Marvel – the worldly showman, with his continentally decorated traveling wagon, pronouncing his status as *acclaimed by the Crowned Heads of Europe*, encouraging the curious to let him *read your past, present and future in his crystal ball*; with his wagon boldly advertising his talent for not only *juggling* but his *sleight of hand* as well – Joseph Smith, Jr., with professorial prognostication, established a self-fulfilling legacy. For, from out of the quaintness of his own traveling show, the proclamation of his *name would not only be had for good or evil...* but that he, *as the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.*⁴¹

FALSE WIZARDS DO NOT KNOW THE WAY

"I can't... I don't know how it works!"

Once again – returning to the story – with the Wizard's fraud exposed, we find the humbug contrite and humbled. What I find rather intriguing in this scene is how immediately we, as observers, sympathize with his now apparent humanness. What is more, we are warmed by his sincere empathy for the longing of completeness which the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion have desperately desired. With melting hearts, we witness the gracious exchange of blessing and edification from a very wise man to a yet-fulfilled younger generation of dreamers and romantics.

The Scarecrow receives his diploma, with an understanding he always had no less of a brain than the great thinkers from the great universities – as the possession of a piece of authorized paper is not what makes one a thinker of deep thoughts. The Tin Man receives his heart, with an understanding that a heart is not judged by how much one loves... but by how much one is loved by others. The Cowardly Lion receives his medal of courage, with an understanding he was simply mistaken in confusing his lack of courage with wisdom.

Though we find great comfort in these bestowal of blessings, we realize the Wizard has not really given them anything they had not already possessed; only that he has shared his own wisdom and thoughtful insight as to broaden their perspectives to greater realities.

Now, as Dorothy takes her turn, she realizes there is nothing in the Wizard's blessing bag that would satisfy her request to return home. Sensing the reality of that observation, the Wizard again redeems his role when he proclaims that he also is a Kansas Man... and, that he will personally take her there himself in grand fashion – which turns out to be an ostentatiously staged departure by way of his hot air balloon.

In an interesting aside, an amusing reference surfaces in the Wizard's departing speech to the citizens of Emerald City when he mentions the reason for his departure to be a *technically unexplainable journey to the outer stratosphere to confer, converse and otherwise hobnob with his brother wizards*. It is fascinating to see a similar explanation in Mormon doctrine – where it is taught the prophet Joseph Smith, being one of many great and noble ones, conferred and conversed with other prophets such as Moses, Elias, and Elijah. As one might imagine, for the biblically illiterate, this can sound most rational and appealing – in the light of the LDS version of the Gospel.

The time to embark on the journey back home has arrived. However, when the moment comes for her and the Wizard to cast off, Toto spies a cat in the audience and, wriggling free from Dorothy's clutches, gives chase... causing her to immediately dash in pursuit to retrieve him. With unfortunate timing, the Wizard's balloon begins its awkward ascent without the both of them. As the panic stricken Dorothy screams for him to come back, he yells out that he can't... *because he doesn't know how it works!*

How apropos to our parable. When all is said and done, the false prophet really doesn't know how "it" works. The work of salvation – of returning home – is a work that only God can accomplish.

The best that even a good teacher can do is to be a role model while teaching from God's Word, helping and supporting the disciple's journey to be more Christ-like. That is why it is so very important to find a good bible-teaching church, with a competent and seasoned Pastor. Why? Because, when it is your time to return home, nobody can help you return... except God.

THE WAY IS THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

“That’s all it is”

Throughout Dorothy’s journey we have gone through a roller coaster ride of emotions. Just as we were being prepared with new found joy, in her anticipated return home with the Wizard of Oz himself, it quickly dissipates into a no-return act of human induced error and feebleness. We immediately feel for Dorothy’s sad and painful predicament of being left behind in this far away land, never able to return to Kansas to see her family again.

While in this moment of Dorothy’s tearful despondency, our emotions are once again lifted with hopeful relief at the reappearance of Glinda, the good Witch of the North. What could be more right than to have this divine messenger of comfort and light appear at the moment when Dorothy has exhausted all hope to ever be reunited with her family? Just as all holy messengers speak with the power of God’s Spirit, giving the same consistent message of hope and salvation in the right moment of one’s journey, Glinda’s presence indicates all is well, and will be well – for she knows the way for Dorothy to return home... with Toto too.

Upon Dorothy’s heartfelt petition for Glinda’s help to return home, we are met with a reassuring, yet ironic, answer that she always had the power to return to Kansas. When the Scarecrow asks Glinda the puzzling question – “Then, why didn’t you tell her before?” – it is

interesting to hear her response that Dorothy wouldn't have believed her... and that she needed to learn it for herself.

For the purpose of our parable, this is noteworthy for the following reasons –

Previously, we identified the Ruby Slippers as representing the Blood of Jesus Christ. For the Christian, the only way to return home is through Christ. In realizing we are in an undeniably lost and fallen state, unable to save ourselves, our only hope is to rely on Jesus Christ – and His sacrifice on the cross. If there is any formula to follow, it is simply, as was told the humbled Jailer – who asked Paul and Silas what must he do to be saved – “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31).

Our salvation is not achieved by our own works. As righteous and noble as we may credit them, they are as filthy rags to a Holy God.⁴² There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn forgiveness of our sins, and to overcome our sinful nature... which keeps us separated from God. Only by putting our faith in what Christ alone has done for us, can we be justified in God's Eyes.⁴³ One of the more hideous consequences of a works-based religion is to blind an adherent to that fact. The work of Salvation is God's alone... there is nothing in our own power that can contribute to it – For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What is more, a disciple of Jesus Christ will gather with other Believers to remember what God has done for them. By partaking in the emblems of the Lord's Supper, Christians are reminded of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus on the Cross. This corporate practice of

remembering is so solemn, Believers are cautioned to not partake of the emblems in an unworthy manner⁴⁴ – perhaps meaning a sense of indifference is beginning to creep into our worship, possibly forgetting the true meaning of Christ’s atonement for our sins... and forgetting our reliance on God’s grace.

However, in order to truly understand all this, one must get into the Word of God. Yet in Dorothy’s case, the story hints that perhaps she never really did. At a crucial time in her young life when she should have already been on a bible learning journey – seeking God’s truth in The Word – she was seeking it in a far-away place within her own imagination. Thus, our parable suggests that Glinda’s answer of, “Because she wouldn’t have believed me. She had to learn it for herself”, was meant to help Dorothy come to the realization that she must rely on God’s Way... as well as help correct her wrong thinking. Metaphorically speaking, Dorothy learned that God is home; His Word is home; and the Way to getting home is through Christ alone. Dorothy realizes she doesn’t need to go searching elsewhere. With that, Glinda affirms – “That’s all it is.”

Returning to the story, Dorothy realizes she must now say farewell to each of her dear friends. In this bittersweet moment, the emotional ride continues as she acknowledges, with tender fondness, the deep gratitude for their shared experiences and relationships. With this, Glinda shares the mystery of the power contained in the Ruby Slippers, for which Dorothy was counseled to never remove from her feet. By simply clicking the heels of her Ruby Slippers three times, while saying, “There’s no place like home”, she can now return home to her family.

As an aside, this mysterious formula is vaguely, but unintentionally, imitated in the LDS Temples. Although I will not go into the details, it

suffices to mention not the clicking of heels but the raising and lowering of hands while repeating three times a particular phrase, within the Endowment ritual, in a manner not unlike the poetic meter of Dorothy's utterance.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

“And I’m not going to leave here ever again!”

With the emotional transition from sentimental farewells to a peaceful reunion, we find Dorothy waking up from a concussion-induced whimsical dream, in her own bed, in her own room, surrounded with love and care by those who represent the true meaning of life. How pleasantly surprised we are to see the connection of the farmhands – Hunk, Hickory and Zeke – as well as Professor Marvel, to her experience in the Land of Oz. With Toto in her embrace, we feel the calm of closure as Dorothy takes in the relationships of family and friends – helping us all to realize there’s no place like home.

Turning to our parable, some doctrinal distinctions between Christianity and Mormonism begin emerging. For example, in Christianity, the purpose of our mortal journey is to return to God as a new creation, in a state of fruitful discipleship. The focus of that journey is centered on Jesus Christ... for without Him in our lives, we will stumble and miss the mark. The LDS will agree. However, from the Christian’s perspective, all glory and praise for our redemption is given to Jesus Christ. If there is a restoration to be experienced, it is the reconciliation to God – through Jesus Christ – from our fallen state to our original purpose in His creative plan, glorifying Him in all things.

In contrast, one significant aspect of Mormonism – as taught by the LDS – will have us believe that, in order to return to God (and our home), the journey is to be focused on eternal families. As such, family

genealogy is a prominent work for supporting the practice of baptisms for the dead. With such a message – based on familial love – it is not surprising that so many are attracted to Mormonism.

Even so, from a Christian’s perspective, while families are important, the hope of eternal glory with God does not rest on our physical human ancestors and descendants... but on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We put our hope and trust in what He has done for us. When we look around and notice there are others who also share this same faith, we see our brothers and sisters in Christ – and realize they are members of our eternal family. To love God and neighbor makes us part of a much grander forever family.

Nevertheless, the Mormon narrative is strong and compelling for many who are searching for God... and the answers to life. Just as Dorothy was trying her best to get back to her family in the midst of a raging storm, being knocked unconscious, then waking up in the beautifully enchanted land she had always dreamed about – so too is the typical result of many individuals who experience severe storms in their lives, which seem to knock them unconscious to ever really knowing God through His Word, only to awaken to a missionary’s message that resonates within them – which, in turn, causes them to wander into a new and wonderful world of alluring enchantment. In a very real sense, as the potential convert realizes “we’re not in Kansas anymore”, the natural conclusion is “we must be over the rainbow”... and, therefore, *it must be true!*

And yet, as with all great fictional stories, such as the Wizard of Oz, blessing us with inspiring entertainment – this too shall pass. The reality for all brothers and sisters, united in Christ, is to put no trust in wizards and false prophets – but in the Word of God... which testifies of Jesus

Christ. We put our faith in the Blood of the Lamb. Within the Body of Christ, we not only share the Kingdom of God on earth, we share the promise and assurance of eternal life, now and always. And, in this reality, we can openly declare, *there's no place like home!*

SUMMARY

The Wonderful Wizard of Zion is a parable taken from the metaphorical imagery contained in the classic 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. From out the movie's storyline and characters, a clear message emerges: one describing the consequential relationship which can occur between a biblically illiterate person – who sincerely dreams of a heavenly place – and that of a works-based religion, led by a false prophet.

The parable describes the alluring charm of the Mormon narrative in reaching and converting the individual who is not exegetically grounded in the Holy Bible, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ... but is looking for something beyond the Word of God.

The parable's message teaches a lesson on the following two points –

1. Without a proper understanding and reliance on the written Word of God – The Holy Bible, which contains the Standard of Truth – any humble seeker can fall into the trappings of a works-based religion.
2. How that same humble seeker can be reconciled and restored to God – by God Himself, as well as through the friends He sends on their behalf.

Themes for the parable – such as Returning Home, Family, Friends, God, Angels, Works, Grace, etc. – are allegorically derived, becoming elements of contrast between Mormonism and Christianity.

The following two metaphors juxtapose the major message of the parable: The Wizard as symbolic of the False Prophet; and, the Ruby Slippers as symbolic of the Blood of Christ. The former as the means to blindness and bondage in a works-based religion; the latter as a remedy

toward light and liberty in a grace-filled relationship. The journey from the former to the latter is guided by God – Who typically uses others to accomplish His purposes. However, it is God alone who has provided the Way to restoration... and the return to Home.

EPILOGUE

My intent in sharing the parable, *The Wonderful Wizard of Zion*, is to offer non-LDS a very different, but enlightening, perspective based on my personal experience with LDS-based Mormonism. In the absence of a non-LDS person actually becoming a Mormon, and experiencing firsthand the culture of a works-based religion, this parable captures the mindset and thought-process of individuals who naturally see themselves as Christian.

As I still have a great love for the LDS people, I have tried to be as respectful as possible in sharing my experience as a member of the LDS Church. It is my personal belief that amongst the population of the LDS, there are some bona-fide orthodox *Christian Believers*... but, for the fear of rocking the family boat or being castigated within the culture, have decided to keep silent about what they truly believe. I realize in making that statement, I'll likely get some harsh pushback – on different levels – from my Evangelical friends. What is more, the thought of using and applying the terms *Christian believer* and *fear* in the same person appears as an oxymoron. However, given the cultural context, I'm not as rigid on the incongruous principles of that type of LDS Believer.

In the same vein, I personally believe – according to the scriptures – that, side by side, amongst the congregational multitudes of Christian wheat, there exists *the tares*. Nonetheless, the truth is, I have no idea what is in the heart of my Mormon friends... or, for that matter, even my Evangelical brothers and sisters. However, realizing the fruit a person bears is indicative of their heart, all I can hope to do is live my

life as a witness for Christ, in word and deed, and leave it up to the Holy Spirit to convict the heart of those around me.

As there exists serious doctrinal incompatibilities between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity, there is still much in common between the LDS and Evangelical communities – where biblical principles and values are concerned. However, as pertaining to the essentials of Christianity, there is a conviction of faith which compels an Evangelical to ensure any and all are provided an accurate message of the biblical gospel. That is at the heart of the Great Commission⁴⁵... which both Mormons and Evangelicals take very seriously.

Allow me to give an example of what is at stake for Evangelical Christians, which further touches on the motivation for sharing this parable.

In a recent high-level sermon series on the topic of *Covenant and Kingdom* at my local church, our Pastor took several weeks to go over the Biblical narrative at a 50,000 foot level. From Genesis to Revelation, from Creation to New Creation, it proved to be a good series with excellent sermon messages. Yet, upon listening to the messages, I found myself rather alarmed at the following thought: If I had invited a biblically illiterate investigator – who was comparing Mormonism and traditional Christianity; who was trying to learn what it was all about – they more than likely would see the LDS narrative as more convincing. Why? Because when it comes to a high-level perspective of the biblical narrative, the LDS have a far more rational story. For Evangelical Christians, that should be a disconcerting thought.

The only remedy for preventing the biblically illiterate to fall into a works-based religion is to teach them the Bible – not at a high level

perspective... but at a deeper exegetical level. The 66 books of the Bible testify of Christ in just about every page, chapter and book. However, for the biblically illiterate, that is not so obvious. Thus, when the LDS provide their narrative – through their canon of Standard Works – the story of Jesus Christ, and our role in God’s creative plan, makes more rational sense. As the LDS Church continues to successfully co-opt the Christian language, their Plan of Salvation appears much too inviting to not take seriously.

Thus, as the unchurched and biblically illiterate are approached and exposed to the Mormon message, a *rationality barrier* develops in which the Evangelical message becomes much more difficult to share. The difficulty arises from the notion that the gospel message – while naturally the Good News – can be offensive to many. Most people do not like to hear they are sinners, or need forgiveness, or need saving. For many, the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.⁴⁶ These folks tend to see an apparent remedy in the LDS message... for it is rational to their human mind, and sweet to their human ears.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, regardless of the difficulty, witnessing of the biblical Jesus is simply in the discipleship nature of an Evangelical. And when our witnessing intersects with the Mormon influence, it should be done with civility and charity, never compromising the biblical gospel – so as to be agents for Holy Spirit conviction.⁴⁸ For, in the end, the work of conversion and, ultimately, Salvation – is God’s alone.

I was once the vilest of willful sinners... which I won’t make known in this writing. However, on a more modest note, I once actually despised the Evangelical message of being saved by Grace. I thought that notion was way too simplistic. I saw it as a spiritual cop-out, and looked at

anyone who believed such a notion as simply foolish. To me, it was cheap grace. Obviously – as my thinking went – there must be more to our salvation.⁴⁹ Certainly, God gave us a will and agency, along with commandments, in order to test us. After all, isn't that what it's all about?

After being raised Catholic in my youth, and then spending many committed years in the Mormon religion, I doubt any Evangelical Christian could blame me for thinking that way. Yet, why did I have those thoughts? Why, with arrogance and pride, did I condescendingly question in the same manner of the Cowardly Lion – “What do they got that I haven't got? Well... Jesus Christ. And, it was simply due to the fact I never really read the Bible, nor was I helped and supported in properly getting into the Word by a competent Bible teacher. It wasn't until I began to really read and study the Word – with a prayerfully open heart and mind – that the Holy Spirit opened my eyes.

For me, the process of committed bible study began in the LDS Temple. After five years of serving as a Temple worker, the desire to better understand the opening and closing chapters of the Holy Bible – in the context of God's Plan of Salvation – found me studying and pondering at every free moment between assignments. One evening, after several weeks of intent study, as I was officiating an endowment session, I had just sat down when – as the lights dimmed to begin the video presentation – a clear and distinct audible whisper entered my mind with the following rhetorical statement: *“Do you not know the Atonement of Jesus Christ has already taken care of this?”*

At first I was shocked into a frozen pause – being taken aback at such a clear prompting. I thought surely someone else must have heard the

voice as well. Upon realizing no one else heard it, I found myself sitting quietly... trying to ignore it, chalking it up to my imagination.

A few minutes later, after officiating at the Altar, I sat back down as the video resumed. Then, unexpectedly, it happened again. The same voice, in the same manner, spoke to my mind once again – but with even more penetrating clarity: *“Do you not know the Atonement of Jesus Christ has already taken care of this?”*

My only response was, “Yes, I know His Atonement has taken care of all this.” With this answer, I found myself immediately perplexed with the following self-assessing thought – “Then why am I doing this?”

After the session was over, I quickly found the nearest private room to pray and ponder about what I just experienced. By the time I left the Temple that evening, I realized what I had to do. Instinctively, I knew I would never set foot in the Temple again.

During the short trip home, I was trying to figure out how to share the experience with my wife. Realizing what the eventual consequences would be, but not yet knowing how she would react to such news, I decided to just be honest – and let the chips fall where they may. Well... God works in mysterious ways.

Unbeknownst to me, over the same previous span of weeks, she too was reading the Bible; specifically focusing on the New Testament, in the gospel of John, as well as Paul’s epistles. She took up that challenge as a result of a YouTube video she saw about a Mormon Missionary who was converted to Christ on his mission due to a discussion with a Christian Pastor, and the challenge the Pastor gave him to read the Bible as a child. With the intriguing conversion of this Mormon Missionary, as well as the conversion of some other Missionaries

associated with his story, she decided to take up that same challenge – to *read the New Testament as a child*.

After sharing my experience and letting her know – that I knew – the LDS Church was not the true Church, and that Joseph Smith was not a true Prophet of God, she shared that she too had come to the same realization. It was over.

As the Holy Spirit began removing the scales from our eyes, we began to see who we were in relation to our Holy God. And, upon finally understanding God's Grace, we were overwhelmed with an indescribable joy – a joy which surpasses all understanding. We are indeed saved by God's Grace alone... and not of ourselves.⁵⁰ We have nothing to boast – and, in Christ Jesus, we give all glory and praise to God.

Thus, it all began with the reading of the Word. As we dove into a more faithful study of the Bible's message, God intervened... and spoke to us. Furthermore, in my wife's case, she was helped by a YouTube stranger; someone she could relate to; whose testimony helped her in being restored to the biblical God. Interestingly, as it was the Temple that drew me into the LDS Church, it was the Temple that facilitated my exit out of it. Likewise, as LDS Missionaries were the main reason my wife joined the Church, it was a LDS Missionary who helped her transition out.

I have often been asked by others if I thought the many years of being faithful to the Mormon religion were a waste. I suppose it depends on whose perspective is referenced – mine or God's.

If from my own, then I can see both pros and cons to the experience. For example, on the positive side, I learned much about the teaching

and application of biblical *principles*. This is an area where Mormonism excels, as principles are universally applied in all walks of life. They are safe... because one doesn't need to get into the weeds of theological exposition. In addition, during the process of raising a large family in California on a single middle-class income, Mormonism instilled in me a better sense of financial discipline and commitment... which, on a personal level, I needed in that phase of my life.

However, on the negative side, the legalism of the religion, and expectations of the culture, blinded me to the weightier matters of the spirit of the law pertaining to my non-LDS family. Those relationships suffered to the exclusion of all things LDS. Sadly, they became less of a priority. Furthermore, the consequence of the LDS teachings, and the effects of its insulated culture, have left some of our children – those born and raised in the covenant – with spiritual and emotional scars which need further healing. In other words, for them – like so many others of their generation – if the LDS Church is not true... then nothing is.

On the other hand, if I try to look upon the experience from God's perspective, I can't help but be reminded of Joseph's (*of Egypt*) response to his older brothers, as recorded in Genesis 50:20, when he said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

If there is a final point to be made regarding the exiting out of a works-based religion into the liberty of a grace-filled relationship with Christ, it's that with all the spiritual transformation going on in our mortal lives, we come to understand we are not sinless; never were; never will be. Even in being more committed disciples of Jesus Christ, we still sin. However, as a result of becoming new creatures in Christ, our natures

are enabled by the Holy Spirit to sin less. Thus, becoming more like Jesus is a process – a sanctification process which only God can achieve for us.

I, along with many others over the past several years, have been led by God, and godly-inspired friends, to exit the legalism of the works-based religion of Mormonism. The common factor in these exiting journeys is the Word of God, as revealed in the Holy Bible. It is my hope this parable will assist us – as friends of Mormons – in understanding how important the Word of God is in helping them return home... by awakening them from the most enchanting of dreams, *The Wonderful Wizard of Zion*.

References –

All “scripture” references, cited below, come from the LDS Standard Works: The Bible (KJV), The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants. The Standard Works are the official canon of inspired scripture of the LDS Church. In addition, throughout its history, there are other LDS sources for Mormon doctrines and beliefs which have continued to prevail in shaping the LDS narrative for God’s Plan of Salvation. However, due to the core belief of continuing revelation – as manifested in the maxim, *a living prophet is more important than a dead one* – no credible confidence can be gleaned for subsequent sincere discussions between inquiring Christians and Mormons.

Nevertheless, for the benefit of the non-LDS reader, an example of an embedded belief not directly found in the Standard Works – *Becoming as God the Father, and as His Son, Jesus Christ* (i.e., progression to Godhood) – but which is indirectly referenced, and historically interpreted as such, is the classic King Follett sermon given by the Prophet Joseph Smith at the April 7, 1844, conference of the Church in Nauvoo, Illinois (see *Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 6, pages 302–17). Here is an excerpt of that talk –

“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another.

“In order to understand the subject of the dead, for consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.

“...Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.

Again, as this talk is not considered a part of the official canon of scripture, the LDS members can disregard it – and typically do – when engaging in theological and doctrinal discussions.

With the exception of two or three cited references, all have been taken from official LDS sources.

¹ 1 Nephi 19:23 (Book of Mormon)

² Romans 8:35, 39

³ 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:8

⁴ Isaiah 1:18

⁵ Ephesians 6:15

⁶ Job 2:1-6

⁷ 2 Nephi 2:11

⁸ 1 Nephi, chapter 8 describes Lehi's dream of the tree of life and the iron rod.

⁹ LDS.org – *The Guide to the Scriptures*: The pure in heart (D&C 97:21). Zion also means a place where the pure in heart live. The city built by Enoch and his people that was eventually taken to heaven because of righteousness was named Zion (D&C 38:4; Moses 7:18–21, 69). In the latter-days a city named Zion will be built near Jackson County, Missouri (United States of America), to which the tribes of Israel will gather (D&C 103:11–22; 133:18). The Saints are counseled to build up Zion wherever they are living in the world.

¹⁰ Matthew 4:19, John 14:6

¹¹ LDS *Children's Songbook*: Follow the Prophet (page 110)

¹² LDS.org – *Plan of Salvation: Our Eternal Life*

¹³ Proverbs 14:12

¹⁴ Proverbs 1:7, 9:10

¹⁵ Doctrines and Covenants, Section 93:36

¹⁶ 2 Nephi 25:23

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ Genesis 2:18

¹⁹ Genesis 2:24

²⁰ Doctrine and Covenants, Section 9:8

²¹ Jeremiah 17:9

²² Doctrine and Covenants 9:8

²³ Luke 24:32

²⁴ Ezekiel 37:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1, Doctrine & Covenants 6:28; *Principle of multiple witnesses*

²⁵ Galatians 5:22

²⁶ Doctrine and Covenants, Section 84:33-41; *The Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*

²⁷ Doctrine and Covenants, Section 1:30

²⁸ Joseph Smith – History 1:5-10; See *Pearl of Great Price*

²⁹ Music and the Spoken Word; *Mormon Tabernacle Choir Broadcast*

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:13-16

³¹ Doctrine and Covenants, Section 109; *Prayer offered at the dedication of the temple at Kirtland, Ohio.*

³² See *Introduction to The Doctrine and Covenants*

³³ www.LDSendowment.org

³⁴ Doctrine and Covenants, See Section 76; *Kingdoms of Glory*

³⁵ Doctrine and Covenants, See Section 132; *Promises of eternal increase and exaltation*

³⁶ 1 Nephi 17:48-54

³⁷ Romans 8:31

³⁸ Matthew 27:51, Luke 23:45, Mark 15:38

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_life_of_Joseph_Smith#CITEREFVogel2004

⁴⁰ LDS Hymn #27, *Praise to the Man*

⁴¹ Doctrine and Covenants 135:3

⁴² Isaiah 64:6

⁴³ Galatians 2:16

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 11; *The sacramental emblems are partaken in remembrance of the flesh and blood of Christ— Beware of partaking unworthily.*

⁴⁵ Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 21:15-17, Acts 1:8 – *The Great Commission*

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:18

⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 4:3

⁴⁸ 1 Peter 3:15

⁴⁹ Numbers 21:8-9, 1 Nephi 17:41, 2 Nephi 25:20, Alma 33:19-21, Helaman 8:15; *The brass serpent on a pole*

⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:8