



Salt that has lost its savor

Matthew 5.¹³⁻¹⁶

Introduction

In two consecutive homilies, the first based on Isaiah 56.¹⁰⁻¹², the second on DC 101.⁴³⁻⁵¹, we explored the role that watchmen play in preserving the safety of their communities.

In the first, we found that ancient Israel's watchmen, symbolic of Israel's political and religious leaders, were derelict in their duties of watching for and warning about internal evils that threatened the body politic. We found that their dereliction of duty resulted from their own ineptitude, ignorance, unwillingness, self-interest, and contempt for the flock. Too often, Israel's religious and political leaders dehumanized their charges, viewing them only as tools: means to be used and abused to accomplish their own selfish ends. Because they did not issue warnings concerning the many societal evils, those evils ran rampant, causing the complete collapse of, first Israelite, and later Jewish society. In both instances, exile followed. The promised land, with its vast potential for good was lost.

In the second homily based on DC 101.⁴³⁻⁵¹, we found that Zion's watchmen, though well-intentioned unlike their ancient Israelite peers, were fatally impaired in fulfilling their duties because Zion's citizenry refused to advance the creation of the principle tool necessary to the watchmen—in this case a dominant watchtower, representative of the principle and practice of the economic law of consecration. Because of this disadvantage, the watchmen were

hindered from seeing, recognizing, and warning about many outside dangers that threatened the well-being of the community—among them, the materialistic idolatry that the world falsely preached as natural, inevitable, and even advantageous to society. As a result, Zion was lost—sold-out, really, by its own citizenry. Exile followed. Subsequent generations then delayed, procrastinated, forgot, abandoned, and, on occasion, denigrated all attempts at establishing a pure city—a city fully dedicated and consecrated to God and his purpose—and yielded to the Babylon’s false claims of inevitability. Babylon invaded, and, if it did not exactly conquer, it diminished Zion’s ability to fulfil its mission as ambassador of peace to a fractured world.

Ancient Israel’s story of loss, ancient Judah’s story of loss, and 19th century Mormons’ story of loss is each, essentially, the same story. As tragic as the consequences were for the citizens of these fallen communities, however, they were not the end, or even the worst of the consequences. Worse still, these failed communities left the rest of mankind with either no ambassadors of peace, or with ambassadors seriously debilitated, their message tragically diluted and compromised.

In this homily, we will briefly review these historical failures and consider their applicability in our own day.

Ancient Israel, its watchmen, and its failed ministry

Such critical judgements as those found above may seem harsh. But they are not mine. They are the Lord’s. We will begin with Israel’s call as Yahweh’s ambassador, and its failed ministry.

God had called ancient Israel, including, or course, Judah, as a servant.

“But thou, Israel, art my servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
the seed of Abraham my friend.

Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
and called thee from the chief men thereof,
and said unto thee, ‘Thou art my servant;’
I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.”¹

The nation was to be singularly committed to Yahweh and his purposes.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”²

“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

They were to establish a society—a society called Zion—that was governed by Yahweh’s principles of a just society.

“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah his pleasant plant:
and he looked for judgment [justice, equity],
but behold oppression;
for righteousness [i.e., right conduct, policy],
but behold a cry [of pain].”³

Seeing Zion’s example of a healthy and just society, the other nations of the earth would either appreciate and follow Zion’s example, thus conforming to God’s hope for a world bearing the image and likeness of God, or, engrave the number of the beast into its forehead and collapse under the weight of injustice. It was, then, essential that the nations of this world have an example—a preacher of righteousness.

But Israel failed in its ministry.

¹ Isaiah 41.⁸⁻⁹

² Exodus 20.³

³ Isaiah 5.⁷

“Hear, ye deaf;
and look, ye blind,
that ye may see.
Who is blind, but my servant?
or deaf, as my messenger that I sent?
who is blind as he that is perfect,
and blind as the LORD’s servant?”⁴

It abandoned Yahweh; trading him in for the Baals, masters of fertility, of economy, of profit, of Mammon.

“The priests said not,
‘Where is the LORD?’
And they that handle the law knew me not:
the pastors also transgressed against me,
and the prophets prophesied by Baal,
and walked after things that do not profit.”

“How canst thou say,
‘I am not polluted,
I have not gone after Baalim?’
See thy way in the valley,
know what thou hast done:
thou art a swift dromedary
traversing her ways;
a wild ass used to the wilderness,
that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure...”⁵

Israel abandoned Yahweh’s principles of the just society and adopted the unjust, oppressive, and enslaving principles of Babylonian consumption.

⁴ Isaiah 42.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

⁵ Jeremiah 2.^{8,23-24}

“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy,
even to make the poor of the land to fail,
Saying, ‘When will the new moon be gone,
that we may sell corn?
and the sabbath,
that we may set forth wheat,
making the ephah small,
and the shekel great,
and falsifying the balances by deceit?
That we may buy the poor for silver,
and the needy for a pair of shoes;
yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?’”⁶

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Ezekiel, they all speak with one voice and make this point... over, and over, and over again, and again, and again. By forsaking God, by dividing its interest between Yahweh and Baal, Israel and Judah not only did harm to themselves, but they left the rest of the world vulnerable to the most destructive forces imaginable. In our quotes above, we have not even scratched the surface of the prophet critique against these two failed disciples and ministers of Yahweh.

1⁹th century Zion, its watchmen, and its failed ministry

That the earliest Mormons, with their fellow Christian brethren, saw themselves as the new Israel, or as the Lord’s servants, messengers to the world, hardly seems in need of proof. It was none other than Jesus himself who extended the original call.

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men

⁶ Amos 8.⁴⁻⁶

light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”⁷

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”⁸

Nearly two millennia later, he renewed it in latter-day scripture.

“Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; for behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul...”⁹

According to our interpretation of the parable found in DC 101, latter-day Zion was to present—through doctrine, perhaps, but certainly through example—a society that would produce the fruit of peace. It was to be God’s ambassador for peace. Isaiah had predicted it anciently, and God renewed the assignment in the latter-days.

In days to come
the Mountain on which stands Yahweh’s temple
will be fixed above any other Mountain;
lifted above any other height.
All nations will come streaming to it;
many peoples will come, saying:
Come! Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain;
to the temple of the God of Ya‘qōb.
He will teach us his ways,
and we shall walk in his paths.
For Torah will come out of Şîyôn,
and the word of Yahweh from Y^crûšālāyim.

⁷ Matthew 5.¹³⁻¹⁶

⁸ Mark 16.¹⁵

⁹ DC 4.³⁻⁴

Then will He mediate between nations;
He will reconcile many peoples,
so that they will retool their swords into plow blades
and their spears into pruning instruments.
One nation will no longer lift the sword against another,
nor will they any longer train for warfare.
Come, Oh House of Ya‘qōb,
and let us walk in Yahweh’s light.”¹⁰

The latter-day Christians would do this through their work in the Lord’s vineyard, by building Zion. Key to their success would be their observance of the law of consecration.

But Zion’s citizenry revolted. They chose profit, Baal, over consecration to God.

“Might not this money be given to the exchangers?”¹¹

The Lord, Himself, confirms the parable’s insight, and identifies their “transgression,” or the “pollution” with which they defiled the land in, principally, economic terms. Zion’s citizenry engaged in “jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires.”¹² They refused to

“impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; and [were] not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom.”¹³

“In consequence of their transgressions,”¹⁴

Zion’s citizenry sold off and “polluted their inheritances.”¹⁵ Thus were they sent into exile. In other words, the latter-day Zion’s false citizenry was guilty of the same society-killing “Ba’alistic” idolatry of which ancient Israel was guilty.

¹⁰ Isaiah 2.²⁻⁵

¹¹ DC 101.⁴⁹

¹² DC 101.⁶

¹³ DC 101.³⁻⁴

¹⁴ DC 101.²

¹⁵ DC 101.⁶

But there was an even greater loss. The law of the celestial kingdom, otherwise known as the law of consecration, was one of the principle means by which Zion would bring peace to the world, and end its constant and continuous economic “jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires”—the principle causes of nearly all global conflicts. Again, Zion’s infidelity left the nations of the world without an effective example or ambassador, thus diminishing the peaceful intents for which Zion was made and to which it was called.

Again, this charge that latter-day Zion failed in its calling as minister of world peace is not mine. It is the Lord’s. We have already quoted what is, perhaps, Jesus’ earliest call to his followers to be world ministers, ambassadors of the gospel of peace and joy.

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”¹⁶

Our common “missionary reading” of this passage is entirely inadequate to the depth of the saying. There is so much more to this passage than the simple need for individuals to serve as good examples in hopes of others becoming members of “the Church.” This passage is applicable to the community as large and its need to set an example for society in general.

As examples of this saying’s deeper meaning, we can consider the only two occasions when this passage is referred to in the Doctrine and Covenants. Both readings are in relation to the saints’ failed attempt to be the kind of Christians who could abide celestial principles—particularly economic—as found in the community called “Zion.”

In its first occurrence at DC 101.³⁹⁻⁴¹, we read,

¹⁶ Matthew 5.¹³⁻¹⁶

“When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that a salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. Behold, here is wisdom concerning the children of Zion, even many, but not all; they were found transgressors, therefore they must needs be a chastened—”

The latter-day Zion of Jackson County was called to be the “salt of the earth.” But, by its refusal to abide by the celestial principle of consecration, Zion lost its savor, and so was “trodden under the feet of men,” or “chastened.”

The next reference to the call of Jesus’ followers as “the salt of the earth” is found in DC 103.⁷⁻¹⁰.

“And by hearkening to observe all the words which I, the Lord their God, shall speak unto them, they shall never cease to prevail until the kingdoms of the world are subdued under my feet, and the earth is given unto the saints, to possess it forever and ever. But inasmuch as they keep not my commandments, and hearken not to observe all my words, the kingdoms of the world shall prevail against them. For they were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men; and inasmuch as they are not the saviors of men, they are as salt that has lost its savor, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.”

Again, we hear the threat of being “cast out and trodden under foot of men.” This, as a consequence of their having failed as a “light to the world” and as “saviors of men.” This failure was the result of their economic “lusts” and unwillingness to live the celestial law of consecration.

As Israel did anciently, latter-day Zion left the world without effective “savor.” The would-be ambassador traded in its call for filthy lucre. This was a source of great pain for God. The following lament, found in Psalm 81, is so very, very near the words spoken by God in the sections of the DC that address latter-day Zion’s failure that they might as well have been

written for the latter-day failure.

“Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee:
O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;
‘There shall no strange god be in thee;
neither shalt thou worship any strange god.
I am the LORD thy God,
which brought thee out of the land of Egypt:
open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.’
But my people would not hearken to my voice;
and Israel would none of me.
So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust:
and they walked in their own counsels.”¹⁷

In the parable of DC 101, the nobleman of the vineyard laments that if his servants, citizens of his burgeoning kingdom, had done as they were asked they “could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer.”¹⁸ There is simply no way one can read this and not think, again, of Psalm 81.

“Oh that my people had hearkened unto me,
and Israel had walked in my ways!
I should soon have subdued their enemies,
and turned my hand against their adversaries.”¹⁹

By Zion’s refusal to abide by the celestial law, its enemies are not subdued. They are left in power. Their power is intact in such a way as to represent a perpetual threat and danger to Zion. Without the far-sighted watchtower of consecration, Babylon and the principles by which it operates, infiltrate the failed citizenry of Zion. This leaves Babylon without a

¹⁷ Psalm 81.⁸⁻¹²

¹⁸ DC 101.⁵⁴

¹⁹ Verses 13 and 14

committed and effective check on its ungodly lusts. The world's citizens are left with the false impression that such lust is completely normal and inevitable; that there are no viable alternatives to its blasphemy.

And now?

God, we are informed, called Joseph Smith “knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth.”²⁰ That same God inspired the prophet to establish a city set on a hill, protected by a watchtower. It was to be an ambassador of peace. Its principle resource for protecting the peace, and its principle example to the world for the maintenance of peace was the economic principle of consecration.

Zion would not abide by this celestial law by which peace is achieved and expanded. Because of this failure, the world—including, especially, that portion which might reasonably be considered Zion's most likely ally: American Christianity—has been left without a credible example. It is left without long-sighed watchmen on the battle ground against evil. The world remains a “dark and dreary waste”²¹ without a city set on a hill with its light that shines into the darkness. The world remains a tasteless wasteland without the savor of salt.

The salt has lost its savor.

This absence of credible watchmen means that one of the principle latter-day “calamities” is left unchecked and unchallenged. It has allowed the calamity to present itself as normal and inevitable. Sometimes, even noble. It has left the world, with our nation the most poisoned of all, subject to the destructive and debilitating power of consumerism, materialism, and inequality: the ever-persistent idolatry of Old Testament fame.

Thus, American Christianity, including the descendants of the latter-day's failed citizenry of

²⁰ DC 1.¹⁷

²¹ 1 Nephi 8.⁷

Zion, remain blind to and impotently silent concerning these evils. Worse, it participate in them with a gusto that can only be called “religious”—hence idolatrous. Little wonder, then, that Babylon continues to flourish and dominate the world stage. Left unexamined, without criticism, unchecked, and even embraced by those who have been taught and should know better, this consumerism, materialism, and inequality has become the driving force in the lives of individuals and society as a whole— “It’s the economy stupid.”

This idolatrous “driving force”—unopposed, and often enthusiastically adopted, by rank and file Christians and their poorly equipped watchmen—left American Society unarmed and vulnerable to Caligula’s blasphemous attack on all that is holy and good. It gave wind to the sails of Caligula’s pirate ship, with its obscene economic popularism. America vibrated to the false “Make America Great Again,” theme with its ungodly premise that Americas could, virtuously, and should, justifiably and emphatically, put themselves first.

More damning yet, unconscionable numbers of Christians and their short-sighted watchmen have fully embraced the wanna-be-emperor with his false doctrine and commensurate oppressive practices and policies.

Yes, there is a straight line from God’s prescient call of Joseph, to Joseph’s insight into the foundations of peace in this world and beyond, to Zion’s failure to live, itself, and outwardly proclaim that foundation (consecration), to America’s glutenous consumerism, materialism, and inequality, to Caligula and his election.

Because of America’s and American Christianity’s embrace of this latter-day calamity of consumerism, materialism, and inequality, along with its embrace of its latest false prophet, the dark and dreary waste will become yet darker and drearier. The entire globe will suffer for this choice.

God set his people on a hill so that the world, fully warned and encouraged, could be freely accountable.

“Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who

hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads.”²²

His people have failed in this call.

Whatever responsibility the public bears in yielding to the tempting song of this latest of sirens, it is less than that of their derelict Christian watchmen. They should have personally known better. They might then have been able to issue an authoritative and effectual warning. As it is, they bear the greater responsibility. According to what I call “The Law of the Watchman,” best articulated to Ezekiel, we, the failed early 21st century Christian watchmen may find that they have blood on their hands.

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

“When I say unto the wicked, ‘Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

“Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”²³

It seems that almost at the very same time, half a word away, another prophet had been made to understand the same “Law of the Watchman.”

“And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility,

²² DC 88.⁸¹⁻⁸²

²³ Ezekiel 3.¹⁷⁻²¹

answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.”²⁴

Conclusion

We Christians, with the guidance of our leaders, are called of God to be watchmen, not only for and amongst ourselves but for all the world. As the light of the world, we are not to hide our light, but to let it shine from such a height that not one spot on earth is left unlit by our unassailable example of God and the kind of Being He is—Holy, yes; consecrated, surely. We are to preserve and add flavor to a world that so often verges on rank rotteness and consumes with transient, tasteless appetites that are devoid of any nutritious substance.

We American Christians and our leaders have, to a large extent failed in this call and ministry. For decades, Christianity’s failed watchmen have remained silent concerning the rampant consumer and materialistic decadence that has resulted in an economic inequality that is diametrically opposed to the will of God and his plan of happiness—in time and eternity. The watchmen’s long and protracted dereliction of duty finally left the nation unprepared, undiscerning, and worse, enthusiastic supportive of Caligula and his unholy doctrine of self-centered idolatry and oppressive violence. A shamefully high percentage of Christians supported and continue to support the American Caligula, due to the watchmen’s inept and willing rebellion.

Like Caligula of the ancient Roman Empire, who was likely a principle source of “inspiration” for much of the apocalyptic found in the New Testament’s final book, the modern Caligula has called forth a renewed apocalyptic spirit. Perhaps it is all hysteria and exaggeration. Perhaps not. Still, the need for repentance seems unquestionably evident.

Is there still time for America’s religious and political watchmen, and we, their charges, to

²⁴ Jacob 1. ¹⁹

step up, faithfully execute our responsibilities, issue our warning from the watchtower, and deliver not only the nation but the world from a looming conflagration?

The Old Testament Seer, Joel, saw and warned of “alarm,” “gloominess,” “thick darkness,” “devouring flames,” “desolate wildernesses,” “pained” faces that “gather blackness.” In the midst of his apocalyptic vision, he asked, with wonder, “Who can abide it?”

And yet, he knew, as Paul after him, that God is more powerful than human weaknesses. In His strength He can, as Micah concludes, subdue any, and all sin.

“Who is a God like unto thee,
that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression
of the remnant of his heritage?
he retaineth not his anger for ever,
because he delighteth in mercy.
He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us;
he will subdue our iniquities;
and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”²⁵

He *will* subdue any, and all sin. Yet, we are agents. In forgiving us, He will not act *upon* us, he will act *with* us.

“Wash you,
make you clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;
cease to do evil;
¹⁷Learn to do well;
seek judgment,
relieve the oppressed,

²⁵ Micah 7.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

judge the fatherless,
plead for the widow.
¹⁸Come now, and let us reason together,
saith the LORD:
though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.”²⁶

In the end, I must hope that it is not too late. I must believe that even if the light that Jesus asked us to be is no more than a flickering candle, it can draw the “hungry and helpless and cold” out of the desert and into the arms of the Good Shepherd.²⁷ It may very well be, in fact, that the prophesied time has come when God’s longed-for “day of power” may come. The day when God prepares

“a feast of fat things... for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined...unto which all the nations shall be invited. First, the rich and the learned, and wise and the noble [who by implication, refuse it].
“And *after that cometh the day of my power*; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come.”²⁸

Yes, I must believe, like Joel, that the day of repentance has not passed. But we must awake from our slumber. There can be no delay or equivocation. And we must acknowledge and confess our own willful rebellion, and break our stubbornly wandering hearts if we are going to act the part of healers to a sick and dying world.

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD,
turn ye even to me with all your heart,
and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

²⁶ Isaiah 1. ¹⁶⁻¹⁸

²⁷ See Hymn, “Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd”

²⁸ See DC 58. ⁷⁻¹¹

And rend your heart,
and not your garments,
and turn unto the LORD your God:
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and of great kindness,
and repenteth him of the evil.
Who knoweth if he will return and repent,
and leave a blessing behind him...”²⁹

²⁹ Joel 2.¹²⁻¹⁴