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THE MEDIATOR

By Boyd K. Packer

And

THE MEDIATOR: THE SEQUEL

With Commentary

By Eli Brayley

THE MEDIATOR

"There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.

He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.

So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn't worry too much about it, for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important.

The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.

Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.

'I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,' he confessed.

'Then,' said the creditor, 'we will exercise the contract, take your possessions and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.'

'Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?' the debtor begged. 'Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?'

The creditor replied, 'Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?'

'I believed in justice when I signed the contract,' the debtor said. 'It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.'

'It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,' the creditor replied. 'That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.'

There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

'If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,' the debtor pleaded.

'If I do, there will be no justice,' was the reply.

Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?

There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended--but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.

'I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.'

As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, 'You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.'

And so the creditor agreed.

The mediator turned then to the debtor. 'If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?'

'Oh yes, yes,' cried the debtor. 'You saved me from prison and show mercy to me.'

'Then,' said the benefactor, 'you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.'

And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.

The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was satisfied" (taken from *Ids.org* in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, pp. 79-80; or *Ensign*, May 1977, pp. 54-55).

THE MEDIATOR: THE SEQUEL

So the man turned and returned home, eager to start afresh with his friend as his new creditor. He was full of hope and full of desire to keep the new contract that had so mercifully redeemed him.

At first the arrangement worked quite well. He was consistent in making his payments, and always on time. He enjoyed working hard with his hands.

But it came to pass in the process of time that his heart was again drawn away by his old desires. Because he could not tell himself "no", he began spending the money that he owed to his friend on the things that he desired. He would think to himself, "My friend was merciful to me once, and I know that he is a kind man. He will have mercy on me again." And so it was that he justified his behavior.

The man became comfortable in his practice. He thought of new excuses that he could say to his friend the next time he saw him. "Business was slow." "I've been trying my best." "I really needed these other things." He continued to make token payments now and again, and as time went on, the day of reckoning seemed to him like it would really never come.

But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.

'Spare me, my friend,' he pleaded, 'for times have been tough, and I can't make the payment.'

But the friend replied, 'Other debtors of mine have been able to make their payments. And my own business, which is the same as yours, has done just fine. I see no reason why you cannot pay.'

Then the man said, 'But I tried my best. Will you not have mercy on me again?'

“I do not believe you tried your very best, for could you not have done better? Did you not spend your money and time in recreation, as your own acquaintances have told me?”

The man gulped, for he knew that his creditor had found him out. Then, realizing the seriousness of the situation, and that his friend was able to cast him into prison, he began to cry and beg, “Please, my friend! Have mercy on me! For I know that you are a kind man and ready to forgive. Will you please forgive my debt?”

His friend crossed his arms. “You are asking me for mercy, but justice demands that you pay for your debts. I gave you plenty of time to work off the contract. Do you not remember that I told you that it wouldn’t be easy but that it would be possible? Since it was possible for you, and since you chose not to take advantage of my mercy, I have no other choice but to enforce the contract.”

The man fell down on his face. “No please! Have mercy.” But it was hopeless. He thought perhaps another mediator might step in between him and his friend, but there was no one else.

And so it was that all the man’s possessions were taken from him and given to the friend, who then saw to it that the man was clasped in irons and thrown into prison. The man became a proverb and a byword among his neighbors, and could be heard weeping and wailing and gnashing his teeth as he remained in the horrible prison, paying for his folly. And the debt was very great.

A WORD TO THE READER

Dear friend, does this story trouble you? The story of the Mediator was created by Boyd K. Packer, one of the apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and can be found within the L.D.S. church manual entitled “Gospel Principles” in the chapter on the Atonement. In the story, Packer describes by analogy the atonement of Jesus Christ as it is understood in Mormonism. The man in the story represents you and me, sinners who incur a debt to God and his law by our negligence. The creditor and his contract represent God and his law. The friend who pays the man’s debt and then becomes his new creditor represents Jesus Christ. According to Mormonism, Jesus Christ made the atonement for all mankind on the cross and in the garden of Gethsemane, paying our debts to God and his law so that we could have the opportunity to be forgiven. However, the atonement is not a free ride, nor is forgiveness guaranteed. Each and every person now has become a debtor to Jesus, and we must pay him back if we are to receive the forgiveness of our sins. Like the first contract, failure to fulfill our duty to Jesus will result in being cast into prison (hell), only this time it will be worse because we have sinned against greater light and mercy. Does this picture trouble you? What if you do not pay Jesus back?

The Book of Mormon states that God never commands us to do something that we are unable to do (1 Nephi 3:7, 17:3, 50). This is what is meant by “It won’t be easy, but it will be possible.” Since the contract is possible to keep, failure to keep it is inexcusable. But what exactly is the contract?

The Book of Mormon states: “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23) Since grace is conditional upon “all we can do”, the question necessarily is, what is “all we can do?” The answer would be all that God requires us to do, for he does not require us to do anything which we cannot do.

The last exhortation in the Book of Mormon sums up the contract that Jesus expects Mormons to fulfill if they are to receive his grace and the forgiveness of their sins. “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.” (Moroni 10:32) As in 2 Nephi 25:23, notice how grace is conditioned upon meeting a certain requirement, and whereas in 2 Nephi 25:23 the condition is “all we can do”, in Moroni 10:32 “all we can do” is explained to be “deny yourself of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength.”

Thus the message of the Book of Mormon is as follows: you are a sinner who has broken God’s law, but Jesus has paid your fine to God so that you don’t have to go to hell; but though he paid your fine, you are now a debtor to Jesus, who has given you a second chance to make up for your sins. In order for you to be forgiven you must deny yourself of all your sins and love God with all your might, mind and strength. If, and only if you do this, you will be forgiven; but if you do not stop your sins and love God with everything within you, then Jesus will personally send you away to the place where

you would have gone in the first place.

I ask again, does this picture trouble you? My dear friend, it should, for this message is not the true good news of Jesus Christ as it is in the Bible. According to this message of the Book of Mormon, Jesus really doesn't do any saving at all, but simply gives you a second chance to redeem yourself. In essence, Jesus refinances your loan. Consider this example: if the government pays for your schooling by student loans, and later you pay them back, you are the one who ultimately paid for your schooling. It would be wrong to say that the government paid for it. They just gave you the opportunity to pay for it. So it is with the Jesus of Mormonism: forgiveness is by no means a free gift that he pays for, but something that you must work for and earn yourself. Granted, he provides the opportunity; but providing the opportunity for us to be saved is not the same as saving us himself. If we are to be saved, we must do that. This really is no message of salvation at all, and is certainly not the message of salvation by the grace of Jesus Christ as it is in the Bible. It is not a message of salvation at all because it points to us instead of to Christ as the savior, and to what we must do rather than to what He has already done. And, as we shall see, saving ourselves is actually impossible.

The reason why salvation through our own works is impossible is because the Bible tells us that we are all sinners who are hostile to the law of God. Being a sinner does not just mean that you sin, but it explains why you sin. It has to do with who you are, not just what you do. Being a sinner means that you are sinful. "Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked." (1 Samuel 24:13) "There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18) "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12) "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Romans 7:18) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Therefore, because we are sinners, the commandments of God are never going to help us, but are only going to condemn us.

The Bible makes this point very clear: there was never any law given that could have given us life because we are sinners, and the purpose that God gave the law is to show us our sin. Read the following Scriptures carefully: "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." (Galatians 3:21-22) "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20) "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Galatians 2:16)

The story of the Mediator offers no good news for sinners because the contract, which represents God's law, can never help us but can only condemn us. In the story, Jesus doesn't deliver you from the law, but gives you a second chance ... to fail worse than before. You are, so to speak, lifted out of one pot of boiling water and are subsequently put into another and bigger one that is again in the process of boiling over.

The good news of the gospel is that God so loves the world, that is, that God loves sinners so much, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die on the cross for our sins – to pay the full penalty that we deserve – not so that He might become our new creditor thereby giving us a second chance to save ourselves, but so that we could be forgiven of our sins and delivered from the law as a totally free gift of His grace. He Himself is the Savior, and there is no paying Him back! This is the extraordinary message of the gospel in the Bible. It is not about us trying to keep a contract. It is not about us proving to God that we are good. It is not about us trying to coax God to forgive us of our sins. God already knows that we are sinners and that no one is good. God knows that we have broken the contract and that we would break it again if given the chance. So what is it all about? It is about believing the good news that even though we are sinners God loves us and He is forgiving toward us and that Christ has paid for our debt in full so that we can go free! We do not earn God's forgiveness by our worthiness, but by faith we simply receive the gift of forgiveness that is already being extended to us through Jesus Christ! You don't deserve it, but someone wants to pay your debts for free. Why? God wants you to know how much He loves you, and His amazing grace is the only way for you to see. Can you not see what this all means? Do you not see how much He loves you?

"But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but

ut have everlasting life.Â” (John 3:16)

Â”For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.Â” (Romans 3:23-24)

Â”But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.Â” (Ephesians 2:4-7)

Dear reader, God loves you so much that He is willing to pay your entire fine that you have incurred through sin, that you may go completely free. Will you believe the love that God has for you and accept the gift that He offers, or will you disbelieve the goodness of God, and continue to try and pay off your contract? According to the Bible you will never succeed. There is only one way to be saved. Believe the true gospel of Jesus Christ today.

Â”For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.Â” (Romans 6:23)