

Probably the most prominent characters in the Book of Mormon whose name we do not know¹ is Lamoni's father, also referred to as "the old king". Notwithstanding his anonymity I have learned an important lesson from him.

This started as a semi-joking comparison of some relative worths that the old king mentions. In Alma 20:23, when the old king is concerned that Ammon can slay him with the sword, he exclaims: "If thou wilt spare me I will grant unto thee whatsoever thou wilt ask, even to half of the kingdom". One possible interpretation of that comment is: "If you want more than half the kingdom, kill me now – it isn't worth it to me."

Then if we flip over to Chapter 22, Aaron has taught the king about the gospel and the plan of salvation. The king now discovers something that is of more worth to him than the kingdom – his own soul: "Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy."

The semi-joking comment is that before the gospel, even his life was worth only half the kingdom. Now, the eternal salvation of his soul (which he may never have even appreciated before) is worth more than the entire kingdom. So apparently he is now worth at least twice as much as before!

However, one day as I was studying this chapter a little more carefully, I realized that there is a much more profound lesson here.

When Ammon met the old king, his kingdom was the most valuable thing he could imagine – more valuable even than his own life. The discovery of the gospel led him to reflect more carefully, and he realized that there was something of greater worth than his kingdom – his eternal salvation. But as he started to pray to God, to consider what it would take to gain eternal salvation, he understood that giving up the kingdom, no matter how great a sacrifice that may appear, was not the price that is required.

Reading on in 22:18, the old king prays: "I will give away all my sins to know thee." This is indeed the sacrifice that all of us are required to make to gain exaltation.

1 I won't argue whether the brother of Jared is more prominent, since I can dodge the whole discussion by just pointing out that Joseph Smith gave his name through revelation.

In the April 2004 general conference, D. Todd Christofferson discusses what is required of us in order to receive salvation. He states the following:

The gift or sacrifice He will accept now is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit." (3 Nephi 9:20) As you seek the blessing of conversion, you can offer the Lord the gift of your broken, or repentant, heart and your contrite, or obedient, spirit.

The true worth of our souls is beyond any earthly possession; but giving up earthly possessions will not assure the eternal life of our souls. We must come unto Christ, accept his atonement, and repent of our sins. No other sacrifice will do.

So the lesson of the old king is more than just what the worth of a soul is – it is a true understanding of the value we place on all things. When we value eternal salvation above all else, including our sins, then is the grace of Christ sufficient for us.