Finding Religion

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 18-20, using his own words

CHARACTERS (4 – 2 males, 1 female, 1 angel)

Phineas Wolcott Cook (PWC)

Ann Eliza (his new wife)

Angel

Preacher

(Phineas and Ann Eliza enter)

PWC: My dear, now that we're finally married, I think I need to find religion.

Ann Eliza: And why is it you waited until we were married, Phineas?

PWC: I've been very busy helping my Pa make a farm, and have never had the opportunity. But I've kept it in my heart all this time since I was sick two years ago. After the preacher and the doctor had all but given up on me, an angel came into my room. Twice, in a still small voice, he asked me a question:

Angel: Would you like to serve the Lord if you knew the right way?

PWC: At the time, I made a covenant to serve the Lord. Since then I've thought I should follow religion, but have not yet found any preachers.

Ann Eliza: Are you thinking about the revival meetings at Gull Corners?

PWC: Yes, would you go with me?

Ann Eliza: You know I'm already a Methodist, and there will be Methodists there. I'd be happy to go with you.

PWC: I hope it doesn't take long. I need to get religion, but I have a lot to do if I'm going to support our family.

(Phineas and Ann Eliza move to the middle of the stage, but close enough to speak into the microphone. A Preacher comes to the microphone and speaks in an animated voice)

Preacher: My friends, I'll get right to the point. Unless you get religion you will surely go to hell. Most of mankind have not been chosen to go to heaven, but *you*—right here in this group--have been chosen. You have heard the message of faith. You can have faith and become a Christian. Perhaps you think your faith is not strong enough yet. Just come forward so we can pray for you to be converted.

PWC: I am determined not to neglect anything on my part. *(He walks next to the preacher)* I want faith. If I come forward, will you pray for me to have faith?

Preacher: And what is your name, friend?

PWC: I'm Phineas Wolcott Cook from Richland.

Preacher: Stand right here, Phineas Wolcott Cook from Richland. *(Turns and speaks to the audience)* Brothers and sisters in this audience. Pray for this man. He wants faith. Pray as hard as you can for him. He is a true seeker of faith and religion. Pray! Pray! Pray for Phineas Cook.
(He turns to PWC) Brother Cook, do you feel converted?

PWC: Well, I feel about as common as before.

Preacher: That's perfectly all right. If you continue to come to the anxious seat every night all week, then at length you should be converted.

PWC: I'll do whatever you ask. I really want to have religion.

(Phineas and Ann Eliza leave the stage.)

Preacher: Some of you have been with us all week, and still haven't professed your faith. *(While the preacher speaks Phineas and Ann Eliza come in.)* For instance, this man has been to the Anxious Seat and we have prayed for him every day this week. But still he cannot bear witness or feel the spirit. There is only one thing for you Phineas Wolcott Cook.

PWC: What is that?

Preacher: You must take up your cross and kneel down, brother. Then you must pray aloud before the victory can be gained.

PWC: I've never prayed aloud for anyone.

Ann Eliza: I know you can do it. Just walk up there and pretend none of us are here. You have been in the habit of praying since childhood. It just feels different praying aloud in front of other people.

PWC: I'll do it. *(Kneels down)* Dear God, please help me to know the truth so I can be converted.

Preacher: And how do you feel? Will you bear witness?

PWC: I did feel the spirit, but I do not know that I have anything to testify to.

Preacher: Just join our church. At length you will be a Christian.

PWC: My problem is that I can't tell which church to join because there are so many of them.

Preacher: That makes no difference. All churches are on the way to heaven, with small differences in the discipline. Just make a choice right now.

PWC: I'm looking for a church that can heal the sick as they did in old times. That would be the church for me.

Preacher: Oh dear, that would be miracles. (*You could hold up the "Miracles" sign*.) They were done away with the death of the ancient apostles. Miracles were only given to establish the early church. Since that time they have not been needed. *(Throw the sign on the floor)*

PWC: But I have read in the Bible that the Lord changes not, that his course is one eternal round. I can hardly give that up.

Preacher: Well, you'll have to give up something.

Ann Eliza: Just join the church, Phineas. In time you'll learn what you're seeking.

PWC: Then I'll join the Methodists. They're as near right as any.

Preacher: Yes! Come the 12th day of May at our next three-days meeting and present yourself for membership. You have made the right choice.

(Everyone leaves the stage except Phineas)

PWC: I <u>hope</u> I've made the right choice. I don't know what else to do. It all depends on how I feel and what I learn. I think I will know when the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is taught because I'll feel it. I'm sure after I've heard the truth, I'll know the right way to serve the Lord.

Family Discussion

Why couldn't Phineas just bear witness when the preacher told him to?

He wanted to be converted. What was he waiting for?

Phineas was open to hearing discussions about religion, but he was so completely honest he couldn't just bear witness because someone told him to. He needed to know with his whole heart and soul. He had promised the angel and felt the spirit when he did so. And he knew he would feel the spirit again when the true gospel was preached.

Once one has felt the spirit he never forgets it. Phineas knew that feeling and was determined to search until he felt it again. It was that memory of the power of the Holy Ghost which drove him to search for the truth, even when he found it difficult and embarrassing.

Elder Robert D. Hales reminds us this is the same process by which the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ was revealed. He said:

> "The revealed truths of the restored gospel came through the pattern of seeking in prayer and then receiving and following the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
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> "Regarding his boyhood reading of James 1:5, the Prophet Joseph recounted, 'Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine.' The power described by Joseph Smith was the influence of the Holy Ghost. As a result, Joseph went into a grove of trees near his home and knelt down to ask of God. The First Vision that followed was truly momentous and magnificent. But the path to that in-person visitation of the Father and the Son began with a prompting from the Holy Ghost to pray." ("The Holy Ghost," by Elder Robert D. Hales, Ensign, May, 2016, p. 105.)

Those who have known the truth since childhood have the same challenge. We may know the feeling of having the spirit, but must continually work to maintain it. Phineas searched for the truth; we must retain the truth. He promised an angel, but we make promises too. Clearly, the truth of the gospel was restored and is maintained by those willing to seek the witness of the Holy Ghost.

MIRACLES