

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just heard from Elder Joseph Anderson.

We shall now hear from Elder

Theodore M. Burton, an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve.

After the remarks of Brother Burton, the congregation and chorus will join in singing, "O Say, What Is Truth?"

Elder Theodore M. Burton

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

● My brethren, sisters, friends: the focal point of all our activity in this church centers around Jesus Christ. The Church bears his name. All ordinance work done in the Church is done in the name of Jesus Christ by those who bear the priesthood, i.e., who hold this power of Jesus Christ.

Witness of Christ's divinity

This devout worship of Jesus Christ is in accord with the instruction given in the Book of Mormon, where King Benjamin taught his people:

"And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh. . . ." (Mosiah 5:8.)

The Book of Mormon then explains why this scripture was written: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." (2 Ne. 25:23.)

It is for this reason that the Book of Mormon is known as a second witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

". . . we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins." (2 Ne. 25:26.)

Doctrine from Isaiah

I turn then to Jesus Christ for my subject for this sermon. Jesus taught the following doctrine one Sabbath day as he stood up in the synagogue to

teach the people who called themselves the children of God.

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. [We write his name today as Isaiah.] And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

"To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

"And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

"And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:17-21.)

Liberty to captives

Such a statement filled his listeners with many doubts and apprehensions, yet the doctrine is so important that I would like to quote this passage again as it is now written in Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God. . . ." (Isa. 61:1-2.)

It is amazing to see what happened in the minds of his listeners when Jesus Christ proclaimed this marvelous

doctrine and told the people that this work of salvation was his assigned task.

"And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

"And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

"But he passing through the midst of them went his way." (Luke 4:28-30.)

Rejection of saving work

Thus Jesus Christ was rejected by the people because he told them what saving work he would do for the captives then confined to a spiritual prison and for those who had been bruised in their souls through iniquity. Instead of rejoicing in this liberation, the people hated Jesus for being so presumptuous as to tell them that he had been anointed to open the prison doors. Even his very life was threatened. Nevertheless, he continued to preach this doctrine even more clearly, in the hopes that people would understand him and the importance of the work he had been called to do. Thus he explained:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

"Verily, verily I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.

"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:24-26.)

Gospel preached to dead

It was for this concept of his saving grace that Jesus gave his life. Peter informs us that the gospel actually was preached to those who were dead, just as Jesus prophesied he would do. Jesus actually *did* open the gates of the spiritual prison, that those confined therein might live and even be exalted if they would accept his doctrine.

"For Christ also hath once suffered

for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

"By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

"Which sometimes were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." (1 Pet. 3:18-20.)

Peter also explained why Jesus did this work for the dead:

"For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." (1 Pet. 4:6.)

Importance in our day

Now, how does all this affect us? Perhaps I can state it in this way. If Jesus Christ made such a point of stressing this doctrine in his day, it must be just as important for us in our day also. Jesus taught that it was important that his gospel be preached to those who lived before he was born as well as to those then living. It must be just as important for that gospel to be preached since his day to those who have died without hearing these glad tidings, as well as to those now living on the earth.

Where, however, in the so-called Christian churches of our day do you find that deep concern for those good men and women who died without a knowledge of the gospel? Far from being considered, they are ignored by some and even damned by others. Why are such persons condemned to everlasting damnation, as many church leaders have done in the past and still do today, simply because such people were born at a time and in a place where they could never hear of Jesus Christ, let alone learn of the message of the resurrection and eternal life?

Saviors on Mt. Zion

How can the physically dead who nevertheless still live in the spirit be prepared for that resurrection which Paul proclaimed applied to every per-

son born upon this earth? This preaching of the word of God can only be done in the way in which Jesus taught that it has to be done. We who are living today must assist in this work as was prophesied by Obadiah when he said of the last days:

"And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." (Obad. 21.)

Thus, those living today must perform the physical ordinance work on the earth that will qualify persons in the spirit world to receive that proxy work done for them, even as we living today receive the proxy work done for us by Jesus Christ. In other words, we work in partnership here on the earth with those missionaries in the spirit world who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to those persons living in the spirit world, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh. This combination effort can free them from their spiritual prison and heal their bruised souls through Jesus Christ. This is why the members of the Church who can qualify through righteous living must go to the temple in ever-increasing numbers and why they must attend the temple more frequently than they have ever done in the past.

Restoration of keys

The full understanding in our day of the importance of Christ's work for the dead as well as for the living came slowly. Although not understood fully at the time, when the angel Moroni came to teach Joseph Smith at the opening of this gospel dispensation, he quoted Malachi as follows:

"Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

"And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

"If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming." (D&C 2:1-3.)

Thus it was the power of the priest-

hood that was to make this uniting of all generations possible, both those dead and those living. The power to do this work was subject to the restoration of the keys controlling the sealing power that Elijah was to give again to the earth when so requested by Jesus Christ.

Universality of Jesus' mission

Before the Church was officially established, when the so-called "constitution" of the Church was laid down by revelation in Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, a statement of the universality of the mission of Jesus Christ was given which included the dead as well as the living:

"Not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, *but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, . . . should have eternal life.*" (D&C 20:26. Italics added.)

Much of the work we do in the Church is preparatory work for us to qualify ourselves so that we can be of service not only to our fellowmen now living on the earth, but to those who lived before us. These good men and women are our ancestors, our fathers and our mothers through whose blood we receive our bodies and our life. What a debt we owe them to see that they too receive eternal life in Jesus Christ through the work and sacrifices we make in their behalf.

Uniting the family of God

This work of salvation for the dead is so important that Paul stated that they who are dead cannot be made perfect without our help. (Heb. 11:40.) Joseph Smith added that neither can we be made perfect without doing proxy ordinance work for our deceased ancestors. (D&C 128:18.) The power of the priesthood was restored so that this perfection in uniting all the family of God who lived in all ages could be accomplished. This priesthood power was given when Elijah restored the sealing power to Joseph Smith in these latter days so that the work of perfection could be continued. As Joseph Smith said:

"Then what you seal on earth, by the keys of Elijah, is sealed in heaven; and this is the power of Elijah, and this is the difference between the spirit and power of Elias and Elijah; for while the spirit of Elias is a forerunner, *the power of Elijah is sufficient to make our calling and election sure; and the same doctrine*, where we are exhorted to go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, &c.

"We cannot be perfect without our fathers, &c. We must have revelation from them, and we can see that the doctrine of revelation far transcends the doctrine of no revelation; for one truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [12th ed.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961], p. 338. Italics added.)

Salvation for living and dead

I testify of the need to understand the importance of this work of Elijah—this work of salvation for the dead as well as for the living. I testify of the divinity of this doctrine of Jesus Christ,

which applies to both those living and those dead. I testify of the power of the priesthood by which revelation is received and say that Elias has already come and so has Elijah. The keys they revealed are being used today in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to do the total work of salvation for which Jesus Christ gave his life to accomplish. Thus through this doctrine and through this priesthood power we can unite the whole family of God into everlasting life.

In the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen. ○

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just listened to Elder Theodore M. Burton. The congregation and chorus will now join in singing, "O Say, What Is Truth?"

After the singing, Elder Marvin J. Ashton, Assistant to the Twelve, will be the speaker.

The congregation and chorus sang the hymn, "O Say, What Is Truth?"

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

● Years ago while walking with a wise friend of mine, we passed one of his neighbors as he stood in the front yard of his home. My friend greeted the man with, "How are you, Bill? It's good to see you." To this greeting, Bill didn't even look up. He didn't even respond.

"He is an old grouch today, isn't he?" I snapped.

"Oh, he is always that way," my friend responded.

"Then why are you so friendly to him?" I asked.

"Why not?" responded my mature friend. "Why should I let him decide how I am going to act?"

Action or reaction

I hope I will never forget the lesson of that evening. The important word was "act." My friend acted toward people. Most of us react. At the time it was a strange attitude to me, because I was in grade school and following the practice of "if you speak to an acquaintance and he does not respond, that is the last time you have to bother," or "if someone shoves you on the school playground, you shove him back."

I have thought many times since this experience that many of us are perpetual reactors. We let other people determine our actions and attitudes.