

## Elder Boyd K. Packer

of the Council of the Twelve

I have reason, my brothers and sisters, to feel very deeply about the subject that I have chosen for today, and to feel more than the usual need for your sustaining prayers, because of its very sacred nature.

### "I am the way . . ."

When the Lord was upon the earth He made it very clear that there was one way, and one way only, by which man may be saved. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6.) To proceed on that way, these two things emerge as being very fixed. First, in His name rests the authority to secure the salvation of mankind. "For there is none other name under heaven given . . . whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.) And next, there is an essential ordinance—baptism—standing as a gate through which every soul must pass to obtain eternal life.

The Lord was neither hesitant nor was He apologetic in proclaiming exclusive authority over those processes, all of them in total, by which we may return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. This ideal was clear in the minds of His apostles also, and their preaching provided for one way, and one way only, for men to save themselves.

Over the centuries men saw that many, indeed most, never found that way. This became very hard to explain. Perhaps they thought it to be generous to admit that there are other ways. So they tempered or tampered with the doctrine.

### Baptism essential

This rigid emphasis on "one Lord and one baptism," was thought to be too restrictive, and too exclusive, even

though the Lord Himself had described it as being narrow, for, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." (Matt. 7:14.)

Since baptism is essential there must be an urgent concern to carry the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. That came as a commandment from Him.

His true servants will be out to convert all who will hear to the principles of the gospel and they will offer them that one baptism which He proclaimed as essential. The preaching of the gospel is evident to one degree or another in most Christian churches. Most, however, are content to enjoy whatever they can gain from membership in their church without any real effort to see that others hear about it.

### Convert the world

The powerful missionary spirit and the vigorous missionary activity in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes a very significant witness that the true gospel and that the authority are possessed here in the Church. We accept the responsibility to preach the gospel to every person on earth. And if the question is asked, "You mean you are out to convert the entire world?" the answer is, "Yes. We will try to reach every living soul."

Some who measure that challenge quickly say, "Why, that's impossible! It cannot be done!"

To that we simply say, "Perhaps, but we shall do it anyway."

Against the insinuation that it cannot be done, we are willing to commit every resource that can be righteously accumulated to this work. Now, while our effort may seem modest when measured against the challenge, it is hard to ignore when measured against

what is being accomplished, or even what is being attempted, elsewhere.

### Missionary effort

Presently we have over 21,000 missionaries serving in the field—and paying for the privilege. And that's only part of the effort. Now I do not suggest that the number should be impressive, for we do not feel we are doing nearly as well as we should be. And more important than that, any one of them would be evidence enough if we knew the source of the individual conviction that each carries.

We ask no relief of the assignment to seek out every living soul, teach them the gospel, and offer them baptism. And we're not discouraged, for there is a great power in this work and that can be verified by anyone who is sincerely inquiring.

### Baptism for the dead

Now there is another characteristic that identifies His Church and also has to do with baptism. There is a very provoking and a very disturbing question about those who died without baptism. What about them? If there is none other name given under heaven whereby man must be saved (and that is true), and they have lived and died without even hearing that name, and if baptism is essential (and it is), and they died without even the invitation to accept it, where are they now?

That is hard to explain. It describes most of the human family.

There are several religions larger than most Christian denominations, and together they are larger than all of them combined. Their adherents for centuries have lived and died and never heard the word baptism. What is the answer for them?

That is a most disturbing question. What power would establish one Lord and one baptism, and then allow it to be that most of the human family never comes within its influence? With that

question unanswered, the vast majority of the human family must be admitted to be lost, and against any reasonable application of the law of justice or of mercy, either. How could Christianity itself be sustained?

When you find the true church you will find the answer to that disturbing question.

If a church has no answer for that, how can it lay claim to be His Church? He is not willing to write off the majority of the human family who were never baptized.

Those who admit in puzzled frustration that they have no answer to this cannot lay claim to authority to administer to the affairs of the Lord on the earth, or to oversee the work by which all mankind must be saved.

Since they had no answer concerning the fate of those who had not been baptized, Christians came to believe that baptism itself was not critical in importance, and that the name of Christ may not be all that essential. There must, they supposed, be other names whereby man could be saved.

### Answers through revelation

The answers to that puzzling challenge could not be invented by men, but was *revealed*. I underline the word *revealed*. Revelation too is an essential characteristic of His Church. Communication with him through revelation was established when the Church was established. It has not ceased and it is constant in the Church today.

As I address myself to the question of those who died without baptism, I do so with the deepest reverence, for it touches on a sacred work. Little known to the world, we move obediently forward in a work that is so marvelous in its prospects, transcendent above what man might have dreamed of, supernal, inspired, and true. In it lies the answer.

In the earliest days of the Church the Prophet was given direction through revelation that work should commence

on the building of a temple, akin to the temples that had been constructed anciently. There was revealed ordinance work to be performed there for the salvation of mankind.

Then another ancient scripture, ignored or overlooked by the Christian world in general, was understood and moved into significant prominence: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:29.)

### Life after death

Here then, was the answer. With proper authority an individual could be baptized for and in behalf of someone who had never had the opportunity. That individual would then accept or reject the baptism, according to his own desire.

This work came as a great reaffirmation of something very basic that the Christian world now only partly believes; and that is that there is life after death. Mortal death is no more an ending than birth was a beginning. The great work of redemption goes on beyond the veil as well as here in mortality.

The Lord said, "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." (John 5:25.)

### A marvelous vision

On October 3, 1918, President Joseph F. Smith was pondering on the scriptures, including this one from Peter: "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.)

There was opened to him a marvelous vision. In it he saw the courses of the righteous. And he saw Christ ministering among them. Then he saw those who had not had the op-

portunity, and those who had not been valiant. And he saw the work for their redemption. And I quote his record of this vision:

"I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; but behold, from among the righteous he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men. And thus was the gospel preached to the dead." ("Vision of the Redemption of the Dead," *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Jan. 1919, p. 3.)

### Authorization given

We have been authorized to perform baptisms vicariously so that when they hear the gospel preached and desire to accept it, that essential ordinance will have been performed. They need not ask for any exemption from that essential ordinance. Indeed, the Lord Himself was not exempted from it.

Here and now then, we move to accomplish the work to which we are assigned. We are busily engaged in that kind of baptism. We gather the records of our kindred dead, indeed, the records of the entire human family; and in sacred temples in baptismal fonts designed as those were anciently, we perform these sacred ordinances.

"Strange," one may say. It is passing strange. It is transcendent and supernal. The very nature of the work testifies that He is our Lord, that baptism is essential, that He taught the truth.

### A great challenge

And so the question may be asked, "You mean you are out to provide baptism for all who have ever lived?"

And the answer is simply, "Yes." For we have been commanded to do so.

"You mean for the entire human

family? Why, that is impossible. If the preaching of the gospel to all who are living is a formidable challenge, then the vicarious work for all who have ever lived is impossible indeed."

To that we say, "Perhaps, but we shall do it anyway."

And once again we certify that we are not discouraged. We ask no relief of the assignment, no excuse from fulfilling it. Our effort today is modest indeed when viewed against the challenge. But since nothing is being done for them elsewhere, our accomplishments, we have come to know, have been pleasing to the Lord.

Already we have collected hundreds of millions of names, and the work goes forward in the temples and will go on in other temples that will be built. The size of the effort we do not suggest should be impressive, for we are not doing nearly as well as we should be.

Those who thoughtfully consider the work inquire about those names that cannot be collected. "What about those for whom no record was ever kept? Surely you will fail there. There is no way you can search out those names."

To this I simply observe, "You have forgotten revelation." Already we have been directed to many records through that process. Revelation comes to individual members as they are led to discover their family records in ways that are miraculous indeed. And there is a feeling of inspiration attending this work that can be found in no other. When we have done all that we can do, we shall be given the rest. The way will be opened up.

### **Our responsibility**

Every Latter-day Saint is responsible for this work. Without this work, the saving ordinances of the gospel would apply to so few who have ever lived that it could not be claimed to be true.

There is another benefit from this work that relates to the living. It has to

do with family life and the eternal preservation of it. It has to do with that which we hold most sacred and dear—the association with our loved ones in our own family circle.

Something of the spirit of this can be sensed as I quote from a letter from my own family records. I quote a letter dated January the 17th, 1889, Safford, Graham County, in Arizona. It concerns my great-grandfather, who was the first of our line in the Church, and who died a few days later, Jonathan Taylor Packer. This letter was written by a daughter-in-law to the family.

After describing the distress and difficulty he had suffered for several weeks, she wrote:

"But I will do all I can for him for I consider it my duty. I will do for him as I would like someone to do for my dear mother, for I am afraid I shall never see her again in this world."

And then she wrote this: "Your father says for you all to be faithful to the principles of the gospel and asks the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob upon you all, and bids you all goodbye until he meets you in the morning of the resurrection.

"Well, Martha, I can't hardly see the lines for tears, so I will stop writing. From your loving sister, Mary Ann Packer."

I know that I shall see this great-grandfather beyond the veil, and my grandfather, and my father. And I know that I shall there also meet those of my ancestors who lived when the fulness of the gospel was not upon the earth; those who lived and died without ever hearing His name, nor having the invitation to be baptized.

### **A great cause**

I say that no point of doctrine sets this church apart from the other claimants as this one does. Save for it, we would, with all of the others, have to accept the clarity with which the New Testament declares baptism to be essential and then admit that most of

the human family could never have it.

But we have the revelations. We have those sacred ordinances. The revelation that places upon us the obligation for this baptism for the dead is section 128 in the Doctrine and Covenants. And I should like to read in closing two or three of the closing verses of that section.

"Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; . . .

"Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! . . .

"Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteous-

ness; and let us present in his holy temple . . . a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance." (D&C 128:22-24.)

I bear witness that this work is true, that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that there is on this earth today a prophet of God to lead modern Israel in this great obligation. I know that the Lord lives and that He broods anxiously over the work for the redemption of the dead, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **President N. Eldon Tanner**

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder George Patrick Lee, newly appointed member of the First Quorum of Seventy, and General Authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and president of the Arizona-Holbrook Mission.

He will be followed by Elder Rex D. Pinegar of the First Council of Seventy.

## **Elder George P. Lee**

of the First Quorum of Seventy

Brothers and sisters, I finally realized how General Custer must have felt. . . .

I want you to know that it is a great honor and privilege to be in your presence today, and in the presence of our Prophet, and all those that assist him in the kingdom of God.

### **Proud of heritage**

I am proud to declare to you today, brothers and sisters, that I am a descendant of Lehi, Nephi, and all the great Book of Mormon prophets. I am proud

to be a child of the Book of Mormon people. I have found my true heritage; I have found my true identity. I am a son of God, a child of God, a child of the Book of Mormon, a child of Lehi, a rich heritage that extends all the way back to my Heavenly Father, through Moses, and Abraham, and other great prophets.

I am also proud to be a descendant of great Indian chiefs of our country. I am proud to be a descendant of Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, Chee Dodge, Chief Crazy Horse and all these great Indian chiefs that did so well as leaders of their people. I want you to