

Why the Church

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It is worth pausing to consider why Jesus Christ chooses to use a church, His Church, to carry out His and His Father’s work.

Throughout my life, general conferences of the Church have been exhilarating spiritual events, and the Church itself has been a place to come to know the Lord. I realize that there are those who consider themselves religious or spiritual and yet reject participation in a church or even the need for such an institution. Religious practice is for them purely personal. Yet the Church is the creation of Him in whom our spirituality is centered—Jesus Christ. It is worth pausing to consider why He chooses to use a church, His Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to carry out His and His Father’s work “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”¹

Beginning with Adam, the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached, and the essential ordinances of salvation, such as baptism, were administered through a family-based priesthood order.² As societies grew more complex than simply extended families, God also called other prophets, messengers, and teachers. In Moses’s time, we read of a more formal structure, including elders, priests, and judges. In Book of Mormon history, Alma established a church with priests and teachers.

Then, in the meridian of time, Jesus organized His work in such a way that the gospel could be established simultaneously in multiple nations and among diverse peoples. That organization, the Church of Jesus Christ, was founded on “apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”³ It included additional officers, such as seventies, elders, bishops, priests, teachers, and deacons. Jesus similarly established the Church in the Western Hemisphere after His Resurrection.

Following the apostasy and disintegration of the Church He had organized while on the earth, the Lord reestablished the Church of Jesus Christ once again through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The ancient purpose remains: that is, to preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and administer the ordinances of salvation—in other words, to bring people to Christ.⁴ And now, through the instrumentality of this restored Church, the promise of redemption is placed within reach even of the spirits of the dead who in their mortal lifetime

knew little or nothing of the Savior's grace.

How does His Church accomplish the Lord's purposes? It is important to recognize that God's ultimate purpose is our progress. His desire is that we continue "from grace to grace, until [we receive] a fulness"⁵ of all He can give. That requires more than simply being nice or feeling spiritual. It requires faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism of water and of the Spirit, and enduring in faith to the end.⁶ One cannot fully achieve this in isolation, so a major reason the Lord has a church is to create a community of Saints that will sustain one another in the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life."⁷

"And [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

"... For the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."⁸

Jesus Christ is "the author and the finisher of [our] faith."⁹ Uniting ourselves to the body of Christ—the Church—is an important part of taking His name upon us.¹⁰ We are told that the ancient Church "did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls"¹¹ "and to hear the word of the Lord."¹² So it is in the Church today. Joined in faith, we teach and edify one another and strive to approach the full measure of discipleship, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We strive to help one another come to "the knowledge of the Son of God,"¹³ until that day when "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, ... saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."¹⁴

In the Church we not only learn divine doctrine; we also experience its application. As the body of Christ, the members of the Church minister to one another in the reality of day-to-day life. All of us are imperfect; we may offend and be offended. We often test one another with our personal idiosyncrasies. In the body of Christ, we have to go beyond concepts and exalted words and have a real "hands-on" experience as we learn to "live together in love."¹⁵

This religion is not concerned only with self; rather, we are all called to serve. We are the eyes, hands, head, feet, and other members of the body of Christ, and even "those members ... which seem to be more feeble, are necessary."¹⁶ We need these callings, and we need to serve.

One of the men in my ward grew up not only without parental support but with parental opposition to his activity in the Church. He made this observation in a sacrament meeting: "My father cannot understand why anyone would go to church when they could go skiing, but I really like going to church. In the Church, we are all on the same journey, and I am inspired in that journey by strong youth, pure children, and what I see and learn from other adults. I am strengthened by the association and excited with the joy of living the gospel."

The wards and branches of the Church offer a weekly gathering of respite and renewal, a time and place to leave the world behind—the Sabbath. It is a day to “delight thyself in the Lord,”¹⁷ to experience the spiritual healing that comes with the sacrament, and to receive the renewed promise of His Spirit to be with us.¹⁸

One of the greatest blessings of being part of the body of Christ, though it may not seem like a blessing in the moment, is being reproved of sin and error. We are prone to excuse and rationalize our faults, and sometimes we simply do not know where we should improve or how to do it. Without those who can reprove us “betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost,”¹⁹ we might lack the courage to change and more perfectly follow the Master. Repentance is individual, but fellowship on that sometimes painful path is in the Church.²⁰

In this discussion of the Church as the body of Christ, we must always bear in mind two things. One, we do not strive for conversion to the Church but to Christ and His gospel, a conversion that is facilitated by the Church.²¹ The Book of Mormon expresses it best when it says that the people “were *converted unto the Lord*, and were *united unto the church of Christ*.”²² Two, we must remember that in the beginning, the Church was the family, and even today as separate institutions, the family and the Church serve and strengthen one another. Neither supplants the other, and certainly the Church, even at its best, cannot substitute for parents. The point of gospel teaching and priesthood ordinances administered by the Church is that families may qualify for eternal life.

There is a second major reason the Savior works through a church, His Church, and that is to achieve needful things that cannot be accomplished by individuals or smaller groups. One clear example is dealing with poverty. It is true that as individuals and families we look after the physical needs of others, “imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants.”²³ But together in the Church, the ability to care for the poor and needy is multiplied to meet the broader need, and hoped-for self-reliance is made a reality for very many.²⁴ Further, the Church, its Relief Societies, and its priesthood quorums have the capacity to provide relief to many people in many places affected by natural disasters, war, and persecution.

Without the capabilities of His Church in place, the Savior’s commission to take the gospel to all the world could not be realized.²⁵ There would not be the apostolic keys, the structure, the financial means, and the devotion and sacrifice of thousands upon thousands of missionaries needed to carry out the work. Remember, “this Gospel of the Kingdom [must] be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.”²⁶

The Church can build and operate temples, houses of the Lord, where vital ordinances and covenants may be administered. Joseph Smith stated that God’s objective in gathering His people in any age is “to build unto the Lord a house whereby He [can] reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose.”²⁷

If one believes that all roads lead to heaven or that there are no particular requirements for salvation, he or she will see no need for proclaiming the gospel or for ordinances and covenants in redeeming either the living or the dead. But we speak not just of immortality but also of eternal life, and for that the gospel path and gospel covenants are essential. And the Savior needs a church to make them available to all of God's children—both the living and the dead.

The final reason I will mention for the Lord to have established His Church is the most unique—the Church is, after all, the kingdom of God on the earth.

As The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was being established in the 1830s, the Lord said to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Lift up your hearts and rejoice, for unto you the kingdom, or in other words, the keys of the church have been given.”²⁸ In the authority of these keys, the Church's priesthood officers preserve the purity of the Savior's doctrine and the integrity of His saving ordinances.²⁹ They help prepare those who wish to receive them, judge the qualification and worthiness of those who apply, and then perform them.

With the keys of the kingdom, the Lord's servants can identify both truth and falsehood and once again authoritatively state, “Thus saith the Lord.” Regrettably, some resent the Church because they want to define their own truth, but in reality it is a surpassing blessing to receive a “knowledge of things as they [truly] are, and as they were, and as they are to come”³⁰ insofar as the Lord wills to reveal it. The Church safeguards and publishes God's revelations—the canon of scripture.

When Daniel interpreted the dream of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, making known to the king “what shall be in the latter days,”³¹ he declared that “the God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all [other] kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”³² The Church is that prophesied latter-day kingdom, not created by man but set up by the God of heaven and rolling forth as a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands” to fill the earth.³³

Its destiny is to establish Zion in preparation for the return and millennial rule of Jesus Christ. Before that day, it will not be a kingdom in any political sense—as the Savior said, “My kingdom is not of *this* world.”³⁴ Rather, it is the repository of His authority in the earth, the administrator of His holy covenants, the custodian of His temples, the protector and proclaimer of His truth, the gathering place for scattered Israel, and “a defense, and ... a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.”³⁵

I end with the Prophet's plea and prayer:

“Call upon the Lord, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.

“Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, mayest be glorified in heaven so on earth, that thine enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power and glory, forever and ever.”³⁶

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Moses 1:39.

2. “The Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost.

“And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance” (Moses 5:58–59; see also Moses 6:22–23).

3. Ephesians 2:20.

4. “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized by God to assist in His work to bring to pass the salvation and exaltation of His children. ...

“In fulfilling its purpose to help individuals and families qualify for exaltation, the Church focuses on divinely appointed responsibilities. These include helping members live the gospel of Jesus Christ, gathering Israel through missionary work, caring for the poor and needy, and enabling the salvation of the dead by building temples and performing vicarious ordinances” (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 2.2).

5. Doctrine and Covenants 93:13.

6. See 2 Nephi 31:17–20.

7. 2 Nephi 31:18.

8. Ephesians 4:11–13.

9. Moroni 6:4.

10. See 3 Nephi 27:5–7.

11. Moroni 6:5.

12. 4 Nephi 1:12.

13. Ephesians 4:13.

14. Jeremiah 31:34; see also Hebrews 8:11.

15. Doctrine and Covenants 42:45.

16. 1 Corinthians 12:22. Paul also declared: “Now [we are] many members, yet but one body. ... And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:20, 26; see also Mosiah 18:9).

17. Isaiah 58:14.

18. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 59:9–12.

19. Doctrine and Covenants 121:43.

20. See 3 Nephi 18:21–23, 30–32.

21. See Donald L. Hallstrom, “Converted to His Gospel through His Church,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 13–15.

22. 3 Nephi 28:23; emphasis added.

23. Mosiah 18:29.

24. One example is what we call “the Lord’s storehouse”: “The Lord’s storehouse is not limited to a building used to distribute food and clothing to the poor. It also includes Church members’ offerings of time, talents, compassion, materials, and financial means that are made available to the bishop to help care for the poor and needy. The Lord’s storehouse, then, exists in each ward” (*Handbook 2*, 6.1.3).

25. See Matthew 28:19–20; Doctrine and Covenants 112:28–29.

26. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31.

27. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 416.

28. Doctrine and Covenants 42:69; see also Doctrine and Covenants 90:3.

29. See Articles of Faith 1:5.

30. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.

31. Daniel 2:28.

32. Daniel 2:44.

33. Daniel 2:45; see also verse 35.

34. John 18:36; emphasis added.

35. Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.

36. Doctrine and Covenants 65:5–6.

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