

Exceeding Great and Precious Promises

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Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness includes the doctrine, the ordinances, the covenants, and the exceeding great and precious promises whereby we can become partakers of the divine nature.

One of the great challenges each of us faces every day is to not allow the concerns of this world to so dominate our time and energy that we neglect the eternal things that matter most.¹ We can be too easily diverted from remembering and focusing upon essential spiritual priorities because of our many responsibilities and busy schedules. Sometimes we try to run so fast that we may forget where we are going and why we are running.

The Apostle Peter reminds us that for disciples of Jesus Christ, "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto *life and godliness*, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

"Whereby are given unto us *exceeding great and precious promises*: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."²

My message emphasizes the importance of the exceeding great and precious promises described by Peter as true reminders of where we are going in our mortal journey and why. I also will discuss the respective roles of the Sabbath day, the holy temple, and our homes in helping us to remember these important spiritual promises.

I earnestly pray that the Holy Ghost will instruct each of us as we consider together these important truths.

Our Divine Identity

Our Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness includes the doctrine, the ordinances, the covenants, and the exceeding great and precious promises whereby we can become partakers of the divine nature. His plan defines our eternal identity and the pathway we must follow to learn, change, grow, and ultimately dwell with Him forever.

As explained in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. ...

“In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”³

God promises His children that if they follow the precepts of His plan and the example of His Beloved Son, keep the commandments, and endure in faith to the end, then by virtue of the Savior’s Redemption, they “shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.”⁴ Eternal life is the ultimate exceeding great and precious promise.

Spiritual Rebirth

We comprehend more fully the exceeding great and precious promises and begin to partake of the divine nature by responding affirmatively to the call from the Lord to glory and virtue. As described by Peter, this call is fulfilled by striving to escape the corruption that is in the world.

As we press forward submissively with faith in the Savior, then because of His Atonement and by the power of the Holy Ghost, “a mighty change [takes place] in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”⁵ We are “born again; yea, born of God, changed from [our] carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God.”⁶ “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”⁷

Such a comprehensive change in our nature typically does not occur quickly or all at once. Like the Savior, we also receive “not of the fulness at the first, but [receive] grace for grace.”⁸ “For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom.”⁹

Priesthood ordinances and sacred covenants are essential in this ongoing process of spiritual rebirth; they also are the means God has appointed whereby we receive His exceeding great and precious promises. Ordinances that are received worthily and remembered continually open the heavenly channels through which the power of godliness can flow into our lives. Covenants that are honored steadfastly and

remembered always provide purpose and the assurance of blessings in both mortality and for eternity.

For example, God promises us, according to our faithfulness, the constant companionship of the third member of the Godhead, even the Holy Ghost,¹⁰ that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can receive and always retain a remission of our sins,¹¹ that we can receive peace in this world,¹² that the Savior has broken the bands of death and was victorious over the grave,¹³ and that families can be together for all eternity.

Understandably, all of the exceeding great and precious promises Heavenly Father offers to His children cannot be counted or described comprehensively. However, even the partial list of promised blessings I just presented should cause each of us to “stand all amazed”¹⁴ and “fall down and worship the Father”¹⁵ in the name of Jesus Christ.

Remembering the Promises

President Lorenzo Snow warned, “We are too apt to forget the great object of life, the motive of our Heavenly Father in sending us here to put on mortality, as well as the holy calling with which we have been called; and hence, instead of rising above the little transitory things ... , we too often allow ourselves to come down to the level of the world without availing ourselves of the divine help which God has instituted, which alone can enable us to overcome [those transitory things].”¹⁶

The Sabbath day and the holy temple are two specific sources of divine help instituted by God to assist us in rising above the level and corruption of the world. We initially may think that the overarching purposes of keeping the Sabbath day holy and attending the temple are related but distinctive. I believe, however, that those two purposes are precisely the same and work together to strengthen us spiritually as individuals and in our homes.

The Sabbath

After God created all things, He rested on the seventh day and commanded that one day each week be a time of rest to help people remember Him.¹⁷ The Sabbath is God’s time, a **sacred time** specifically set apart for worshipping Him and for receiving and remembering His great and precious promises.

The Lord has directed in this dispensation:

“That thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

“For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High.”¹⁸

Thus, on the Sabbath we worship the Father in the name of the Son by participating in ordinances and learning about, receiving, remembering, and renewing covenants. On His holy day, our thoughts, actions, and demeanor are signs we give to God and an indicator of our love for Him.¹⁹

An additional purpose of the Sabbath is to elevate our vision from the things of the world to the blessings of eternity. Removed during this sacred time from many of the regular routines of our busy lives, we can “look to God and live”²⁰ by receiving and remembering the great and precious promises whereby we become partakers of the divine nature.

The Holy Temple

The Lord always has commanded His people to build temples, holy places in which worthy Saints perform sacred gospel ceremonies and ordinances for themselves and for the dead. Temples are the most holy of all places of worship. A temple literally is the house of the Lord, a **sacred space** specifically set apart for worshipping God and for receiving and remembering His great and precious promises.

The Lord has directed in this dispensation, “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”²¹ The principal focus of temple worship is participating in ordinances and learning about, receiving, and remembering covenants. We think, act, and dress differently in the temple than in other spaces that we may frequent.

A principal purpose of the temple is to elevate our vision from the things of the world to the blessings of eternity. Removed for a short time from the worldly settings with which we are familiar, we can “look to God and live”²² by receiving and remembering the great and precious promises whereby we become partakers of the divine nature.

Please note that the Sabbath day and the temple, respectively, are a *sacred time* and a *sacred space* specifically set apart for worshipping God and for receiving and remembering His exceeding great and precious promises to His children. As instituted by God, the principal purposes of these two divine sources of help are exactly the same: to powerfully and repeatedly focus our attention upon our Heavenly Father, His Only Begotten Son, the Holy Ghost, and the promises associated with the ordinances and covenants of the Savior’s restored gospel.

Our Homes

Importantly, a home should be the ultimate combination of ***time and space*** wherein individuals and families remember most effectively God's great and precious promises. Leaving our homes to spend time in Sunday meetings and to enter the sacred space of a temple is vital but insufficient. Only as we bring the spirit and strength derived from those holy activities back with us into our homes can we sustain our focus upon the great purposes of mortal life and overcome the corruption that is in the world. Our Sabbath and temple experiences should be spiritual catalysts that imbue individuals and families and our homes with continual reminders of key lessons learned, with the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, with ongoing and deepening conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ, and with "a perfect brightness of hope"²³ in God's eternal promises.

The Sabbath and the temple can help us to establish in our homes "a more excellent way"²⁴ as we "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."²⁵ What we do in our homes with His *sacred time* and with what we learn in His *sacred space* is pivotal to becoming partakers of the divine nature.

Promise and Testimony

We easily can be overcome by the routine and mundane matters of mortality. Sleeping, eating, dressing, working, playing, exercising, and many other customary activities are necessary and important. But ultimately, what we become is the result of our knowledge of and willingness to learn from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; it is not merely the sum total of our daily pursuits over the course of a lifetime.

The gospel is so much more than a routine checklist of discrete tasks to be performed; rather, it is a magnificent tapestry of truth "fitly framed"²⁶ and woven together, designed to help us become like our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, even partakers of the divine nature. Truly, we are blinded "by looking beyond the mark"²⁷ when this overarching spiritual reality is overshadowed by the cares, concerns, and casualness of the world.

As we are wise and invite the Holy Spirit to be our guide,²⁸ I promise He will teach us what is true. "He will testify of Christ, [and] light our minds with heaven's view"²⁹ as we strive to fulfill our eternal destiny and become partakers of the divine nature.

I bear my witness that the exceeding great and precious promises associated with our ordinances and covenants are sure. The Lord has so declared:

"I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation.

"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise."³⁰

I witness that our Heavenly Father lives and is the author of the plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten Son, our Savior and Redeemer. He lives. And I testify that the Father's plan and promises, the Savior's Atonement, and the companionship of the Holy Ghost make possible "peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come."³¹ Of these things I testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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