

What Every Aaronic Priesthood Holder Needs to Understand

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Your Aaronic Priesthood ordination is central to helping God's children receive Christ's atoning power.

Brethren, it is a privilege to be with you in this historic conference. When I was a new mission president, I was excited to receive our first group of new missionaries. A few of our more experienced missionaries were preparing for a brief meeting with them. I noticed that they had arranged children's chairs in a semicircle.

"What's up with the little chairs?" I asked.

The missionaries, somewhat sheepishly, said, "For the new missionaries."

I believe the way we see others significantly impacts their perception of who they are and what they can become.¹ Our new missionaries sat on adult chairs that day.

Sometimes, I fear, we figuratively give our young men of the Aaronic Priesthood children's chairs to sit on rather than helping them see that God has given them a sacred trust and a vital work to do.

President Thomas S. Monson counseled us that young men need to understand "what it means ... to be bearers of the priesthood of God. They need to be guided to a spiritual awareness of the sacredness of their ordained calling."²

Today I pray that the Holy Ghost will guide us to a greater understanding of the power and sacredness of the Aaronic Priesthood and inspire us to focus more diligently on our priesthood duties. My message is for all Aaronic Priesthood holders, including those who also hold the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Elder Dale G. Renlund taught that the purpose of the priesthood is to provide God's children access to the atoning power of Jesus Christ.³ To receive Christ's atoning power in our lives, we must believe in Him, repent of our sins, make and keep sacred covenants through ordinances, and receive the Holy Ghost.⁴ These are not principles we engage in just once; rather, they work together, reinforcing and building on each other in a continuing process of upward progression to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him."⁵

So, what is the role of the Aaronic Priesthood in this? How does it help us gain access to Christ's atoning power? I believe the answer lies in the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood—the keys of the ministering of angels and of the preparatory gospel.⁶

The Ministering of Angels

Let's begin with one aspect of the ministering of angels. Before God's children can have faith in Jesus Christ, they need to know of Him and be taught His gospel. As the Apostle Paul said:

"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? ...

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."⁷

From the beginning of time, God has "sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest ... the coming of Christ."⁸ Angels are heavenly beings bearing God's message.⁹ In both Hebrew and Greek, the root word of *angel* is "messenger."¹⁰

In much the same way that angels are authorized messengers sent by God to declare His word and thereby build faith, we who hold the Aaronic Priesthood have been ordained to "teach, and invite all to come unto Christ."¹¹ To preach the gospel is a priesthood duty. And the power associated with this duty is not just for prophets or even just for missionaries. It is for you!¹²

So how do we get this power? How does a 12-year-old deacon—or any of us—bring faith in Christ to the hearts of God's children? We start by treasuring up His word so its power is within us.¹³ He has promised that if we do, we will have "the power of God unto the convincing of men."¹⁴ It may be an opportunity to teach in a quorum meeting or visit the home of a member. It may be something less formal, like a conversation with a friend or family member. In any of these settings, if we have prepared, we can teach the gospel the way angels do: by the power of the Holy Ghost.¹⁵

I recently heard Jacob, an Aaronic Priesthood holder in Papua New Guinea, testify of the power of the Book of Mormon and how it has helped him resist evil and follow the Spirit. His words increased my faith and the faith of others. My faith has also grown as I have heard Aaronic Priesthood holders teach and testify in their quorum meetings.

Young men, you are authorized messengers. Through your words and actions, you can bring faith in Christ to the hearts of God's children.¹⁶ As President Russell M. Nelson said, "To them you will be as a ministering angel."¹⁷

The Preparatory Gospel

Increased faith in Christ always leads to a desire to change or repent.¹⁸ So it is logical that the key of the ministering of angels would be accompanied by the key of the preparatory gospel, "the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins."¹⁹

As you study your Aaronic Priesthood duties, you will see a clear charge to invite others to repent and improve.²⁰ That does not mean we stand on a street corner shouting, "Repent ye!" More often, it means that we repent, we forgive, and as we minister to others, we offer the hope and peace that repentance brings—because we have experienced it ourselves.

I have been with Aaronic Priesthood holders as they visited fellow quorum members. I have witnessed their care soften hearts and help their brothers feel God's love. I heard one young man bear testimony to his peers of the power of repentance. As he did, hearts were softened, commitments were made, and the healing power of Christ was felt.

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: "It is one thing to repent. It is another to have our sins remitted or forgiven. The power to bring this about is found in the Aaronic Priesthood."²¹ The Aaronic Priesthood ordinances of baptism and the sacrament witness and complete our repentance for a remission of sins.²² President Dallin H. Oaks explained it this way: "We are commanded to repent of our sins and to come to the Lord with a broken heart and a contrite spirit and partake of the sacrament. ... When we renew our baptismal covenants in this way, the Lord renews the cleansing effect of our baptism."²³

Brethren, it is a sacred privilege to administer ordinances that bring a remission of sins to repentant hearts through the Savior's atoning power.²⁴

I was recently told of a priest who struggles to express himself who was blessing the sacrament for the first time. As he did, a powerful spirit came over him and the congregation. Later in the meeting, he bore a simple but clear testimony of the power of God he felt during that ordinance.

In Sydney, Australia, four members of a priests quorum baptized members of the Mbuelongo family. The mother of one of these priests related to me how this experience powerfully impacted her son. These priests came to understand what it means to be "commissioned of Jesus Christ."²⁵

As you know, priests can now officiate in performing proxy baptisms in the temple. My 17-year-old son recently baptized me for some of our ancestors. We both felt deep gratitude for the Aaronic Priesthood and the privilege of acting for the salvation of God's children.

Young men, as you diligently engage in your priesthood duties, you participate with God in His work "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."²⁶ Experiences like these increase your desire and prepare you to teach repentance and baptize converts as missionaries. They also prepare you for lifelong service in the Melchizedek Priesthood.

John the Baptist, Our Example

Aaronic Priesthood holders, we have the privilege and duty to be fellow servants with John the Baptist. John was sent as an authorized messenger to bear witness of Christ and invite all to repent and be baptized—that is, he exercised the Aaronic Priesthood keys we have discussed. John then declared, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I ... : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."²⁷

Thus, the Aaronic Priesthood, with the keys of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel, prepares the way for God's children to receive, through the Melchizedek Priesthood, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the greatest gift we can receive in this life.²⁸

What a profound responsibility God has given to Aaronic Priesthood holders!

An Invitation and Promise

Parents and priesthood leaders, can you sense the importance of President Monson's counsel to help young men understand "what it means ... to be bearers of the priesthood of God"?²⁹ Understanding and magnifying the Aaronic Priesthood will prepare them to be faithful Melchizedek Priesthood holders, power-filled missionaries, and righteous husbands and fathers. Through their service, they will understand and feel the reality of priesthood power, the power to act in the name of Christ for the salvation of God's children.

Young men, God has a work for you to do.³⁰ Your Aaronic Priesthood ordination is central to helping His children receive Christ's atoning power. I promise that as you put these sacred duties at the center of your life, you will feel the power of God as never before. You will understand your identity as a son of God, called with a holy calling to do His work. And, like John the Baptist, you will help prepare the way for the coming of His Son. Of these truths I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.