

The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead

October 2018 General Conference

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I testify that the vision President Joseph F. Smith received is true. I bear witness that every person can come to know it is true.

My brothers and sisters, my talk was prepared some time before the passing of my dear wife, Barbara. My family and I thank you for your love and your outreach of kindness. I pray the Lord will bless me as I speak to you this morning.

In October 1918, 100 years ago, President Joseph F. Smith received a glorious vision. After almost 65 years of dedicated service to the Lord in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and just a few weeks before his death on November 19, 1918, he sat in his room pondering Christ's atoning sacrifice and reading the Apostle Peter's description of the Savior's ministry in the spirit world after His Crucifixion.

He recorded: "As I read I was greatly impressed. ... As I pondered over these things ... , the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead."¹ The full text of the vision is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 138.

Let me provide some background so that we may more fully appreciate Joseph F.'s lifetime of preparation to receive this remarkable revelation.

When he was President of the Church, he visited Nauvoo in 1906 and reflected on a memory he had when he was just five years old. He said: "This is the exact spot where I stood when [Joseph, my uncle, and my father, Hyrum] came riding up on their way to Carthage. Without getting off his horse father leaned over in his saddle and picked me up off the ground. He kissed me good-bye and put me down again and I saw him ride away."²

The next time Joseph F. saw them, his mother, Mary Fielding Smith, lifted him up to see the martyrs lying side by side after being brutally murdered in Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844.

Two years later, Joseph F., along with his family and faithful mother, Mary Fielding Smith, left his home in Nauvoo for Winter Quarters. Although not yet eight years old, Joseph F. was required to drive one of the oxtteams from Montrose, Iowa, to Winter Quarters and then later on to the Salt Lake Valley, arriving when he was almost 10. I hope you boys and young men are listening and will realize the responsibility and expectation placed on Joseph F. during his boyhood.

Just four years later, in 1852, when he was 13, his beloved mother died—leaving Joseph and his siblings orphans.³

Joseph F. was called to serve a mission in the Hawaiian Islands in 1854 when he was 15 years old. This mission, which lasted more than three years, was the beginning of a life of service in

the Church.

Upon his return to Utah, Joseph F. married in 1859.⁴ For the next few years, his life was filled with work, family duties, and two additional missions. On July 1, 1866, at the age of 27, Joseph F. had his life forever changed when he was ordained an Apostle by Brigham Young. In October the following year, he filled a vacancy in the Council of the Twelve.⁵ He served as a counselor to Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow before becoming President himself in 1901.⁶

Joseph F. and his wife Julina welcomed their first child, Mercy Josephine, into the family.⁷ She was only two and a half years old when she passed away. Shortly after, Joseph F. recorded: "It is one month yesterday since my ... darling Josephine died. O! that I could have saved her to grow up to womanhood. I miss her every day and I am lonely. ... God forgive my weakness if it is wrong to love my little ones as I love them."⁸

During his lifetime, President Smith lost his father, his mother, one brother, two sisters, two wives, and thirteen children. He was well acquainted with sorrow and losing loved ones.

When his son Albert Jesse died, Joseph F. wrote to his sister Martha Ann that he had pled with the Lord to save him and asked, "Why is it so? O. God why had it to be?"⁹

Despite his prayers at that time, Joseph F. received no answer on this matter.¹⁰ He told Martha Ann that "the heavens [seemed like] brass over our heads" on the subject of death and the spirit world. Nevertheless, his faith in the Lord's eternal promises were firm and steadfast.

In the Lord's due time, the additional answers, comfort, and understanding about the spirit world President Smith sought came to him through the marvelous vision he received in October 1918.

That year was particularly painful for him. He grieved over the death toll in the Great World War that continued to climb to over 20 million people killed. Additionally, a flu pandemic was spreading around the world, taking the lives of as many as 100 million people.

During the year, President Smith also lost three more precious family members. Elder Hyrum Mack Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, his firstborn son and my grandfather, died suddenly of a ruptured appendix.

President Smith wrote: "I am speechless—[numb] with grief! ... My heart is broken; and flutters for life! ... O! I loved him! ... I will love him forever more. And so it is and ever will be with all my sons and daughters, but he is my first born son, the first to bring me the joy and hope of an endless, honorable name among men. ... From the depths of my soul I thank God for him! But ... O! I needed him! We all needed him! He was most useful to the Church. ... And now, ... O! what can I do! ... O! God help me!"¹¹

The next month, President Smith's son-in-law, Alonzo Kesler, died in a tragic accident.¹² President Smith noted in his journal, "This most terrible and heart-rending fatal accident, has again cast a pall of gloom over all my family."¹³

Seven months later, in September 1918, President Smith's daughter-in-law and my grandmother, Ida Bowman Smith, died after giving birth to her fifth child, my uncle Hyrum.¹⁴

And so it was on October 3, 1918, having experienced intense sorrow over the millions who had died in the world through war and disease as well as the deaths of his own family members, President Smith received the heavenly revelation known as “the vision of the redemption of the dead.”

He alluded to the revelation the following day in the opening session of the October general conference. President Smith's health was failing, yet he spoke briefly: “I will not, I dare not, attempt to enter upon many things that are resting upon my mind this morning, and I shall postpone until some future time, the Lord be willing, my attempt to tell you some of the things that are in my mind, and that dwell in my heart. I have not lived alone these [last] five months. I have dwelt in the spirit of prayer, of supplication, of faith and of determination; and I have had my communication with the Spirit of the Lord continuously.”¹⁵

The revelation he received on October 3 comforted his heart and provided answers to many of his questions. We too can be comforted and learn more about our own future when we and our loved ones die and go to the spirit world by studying this revelation and pondering its significance in the way we live our lives each day.

Among the many things President Smith saw was the Savior's visit to the faithful in the spirit world after His own death on the cross. From the vision I quote:

“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 women];¹⁶ and thus was the gospel preached to the dead. ...

“These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands,

“And all other principles of the gospel that were necessary for them to know in order to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. ...

“For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage.

“These the Lord taught, and gave them power to come forth, after his resurrection from the dead, to enter into his Father's kingdom, there to be crowned with immortality and eternal life,

“And continue thenceforth their labor as had been promised by the Lord, and be partakers of all blessings which were held in reserve for them that love him.”¹⁷

In the vision, President Smith saw his father, Hyrum, and the Prophet Joseph Smith. It had been 74 years since he had last seen them as a small boy in Nauvoo. We can only imagine his joy at seeing his beloved father and uncle. He must have been inspired and comforted to know that all spirits retain the likeness of their mortal body and that they are anxiously awaiting the day of their promised resurrection. The vision revealed more fully the depth and breadth of Heavenly Father's plan for His children and Christ's redeeming love and the matchless power of His Atonement.¹⁸

On this special 100th anniversary, I invite you to thoroughly and thoughtfully read this revelation. As you do so, may the Lord bless you to more fully understand and appreciate God's love and His plan of salvation and happiness for His children.

I testify that the vision President Joseph F. Smith received is true. I bear witness that every person can read it and come to know it is true. Those who do not receive this knowledge in this life will surely come to know its truthfulness when everyone will arrive in the spirit world. There, all will love and praise God and the Lord Jesus Christ for the great plan of salvation and the blessing of the promised Resurrection when body and spirit will once again be reunited, never to be separated again.¹⁹

How grateful I am to know where my precious Barbara is and that we will be together again, with our family, for all eternity. May the peace of the Lord sustain us now and forever is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.