

A Living Witness of the Living Christ

By Bishop Gérald Caussé
Presiding Bishop

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On a sunny spring day in 2017, the open house for the Paris France Temple was well underway when one of the tour guides was approached by a man with a sorrowful expression on his face. He said he lived next to the temple and admitted he had been an active opponent of its construction. He related that one day as he was gazing out of his apartment window, he watched a large crane lower a statue of Jesus from the heavens and softly place it on the temple grounds. The man declared that this experience completely changed his feelings toward our Church. He realized we were followers of Jesus Christ and begged our forgiveness for the previous harm he might have caused.

The statue of the *Christus*, which adorns the grounds of the Paris Temple and other Church properties, testifies of our love for the Savior. The original marble statue is the work of the Danish artist Bertel Thorvaldsen, who sculpted it in 1820—the same year as the First Vision. The statue stands in stark contrast to most of the artistic renderings of that period, which largely portray the suffering Christ on the cross. Thorvaldsen’s work presents the living Christ, who gained victory over death and, with open arms, invites all to come unto Him. Only the prints of the nails in His hands and feet and the wound in His side testify of the indescribable agony He endured to save all mankind.

Perhaps one reason we as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints love this statue is that it reminds us of the description given in the Book of Mormon of the Savior’s appearance on the American continent:

“And behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them. ...

“And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, ...

“... I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world.”¹

Then He invited each man, woman, and child to come forth and thrust their hands into His side and feel the prints of the nails in His hands and feet, thereby receiving a personal witness that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah.²

This sublime scene is the climax of the Book of Mormon. The entire “good news” of the gospel is contained in this image of the Savior tenderly extending His “arms of mercy”³ to invite each individual to come unto Him and receive the blessings of His Atonement.

The central message of the Book of Mormon is to restore the true knowledge of the essential role of Jesus Christ in the salvation and exaltation of mankind. This theme reverberates from the introductory page through the very last words of the last chapter. Through centuries of apostasy and spiritual confusion, the deeper meaning of what Christ did in Gethsemane and on Golgotha became lost or corrupted. How excited Joseph Smith must have felt when, as he was translating 1 Nephi, he discovered this marvelous promise: “These last records [the Book of Mormon] ... shall establish the truth of the first [the Bible] ... and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.”⁴

Plain and precious truths about the Savior’s Atonement resound throughout the Book of Mormon. As I list several of these truths, I invite you to reflect on how they have changed or could change your life.

1. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is a free gift offered to *all* who *have* lived, who *currently* live, and who *will* live on the earth.⁵
2. In addition to bearing the burden of our sins, the Christ took upon Himself our sorrows, infirmities, sufferings, and sicknesses and all the afflictions inherent in the mortal condition of man. There is no anguish, no pain or sadness that He did not suffer for us.⁶
3. The atoning sacrifice of the Savior allows us to overcome the negative consequences of Adam’s Fall, including physical death. Because of Christ, all of God’s children born on this earth, regardless of their righteousness, will experience the reuniting of their spirits and bodies through the power of the Resurrection⁷ and return to Him to “be judged ... according to [their] works.”⁸
4. In contrast, receiving the full blessings of the Savior’s Atonement is conditioned upon our diligence⁹ in living the “doctrine of Christ.”¹⁰ In his dream, Lehi saw the “strait and narrow path”¹¹ that leads to the tree of life. Its fruit, which represents the love of God as expressed through the exquisite blessings of Christ’s Atonement, “is most precious and most desirable ... [and] is the greatest of all the gifts of God.”¹² In order to access this fruit, we must exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repent, “hearken unto the word of God,”¹³ receive essential ordinances, and keep sacred covenants until the end of our lives.¹⁴

5. Through His Atonement, Jesus Christ not only washes away our sins, but He also provides *enabling* power through which His disciples may “[put] off the natural man,”¹⁵ progress “line upon line,”¹⁶ and increase in holiness¹⁷ so that one day they might become perfect beings in the image of Christ,¹⁸ qualified to live again with God¹⁹ and inherit all the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.²⁰

Another comforting truth contained in the Book of Mormon is that, although infinite and universal in its reach, the Lord’s Atonement is a remarkably personal and intimate gift, suited to each of us individually.²¹ Just as Jesus invited each one of the Nephite disciples to feel His wounds, He died for each one of us, personally, as if you or I were the only person on earth. He extends to us a personal invitation to come unto Him and draw upon the marvelous blessings of His Atonement.²²

The personal nature of Christ’s Atonement becomes even more real as we consider the examples of remarkable men and women in the Book of Mormon. Among them are Enos, Alma, Zeezrom, King Lamoni and his wife, and the people of King Benjamin. Their conversion stories and vibrant testimonies provide a living witness of how our hearts can be changed and our lives transformed through the Lord’s infinite goodness and mercy.²³

The prophet Alma asked his people this burning question. He said, “If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so *now*?”²⁴ This question is vital today, because as disciples of the Lord, we need His redeeming power to accompany us, motivate us, and change us each and every day.

Alma’s question could also be rephrased to ask, when was the last time you felt the sweet influence of the Savior’s Atonement in your life? This happens when you feel an “exquisite and sweet” joy²⁵ come over you that bears witness to your soul that your sins are forgiven; or when painful trials suddenly become lighter to bear; or when your heart is softened and you are able to express forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. Or it may be each time you notice your capacity to love and serve others has increased or that the process of sanctification is making you a different person, patterned after the Savior’s example.²⁶

I bear witness that all these experiences are real and are evidence that lives can be changed through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. The Book of Mormon clarifies and expands our knowledge of this supernal gift. As you study this book, you will hear the voice of the living Christ inviting you to come unto Him. I promise that if you accept this invitation and pattern your life after His example, His redemptive influence will come into your life. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, the Savior will transform you day after day “until the perfect day”²⁷ when you will, as He declared, “see my face and know that I am.”²⁸ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.