

Hosanna and Hallelujah—The Living Jesus Christ: The Heart of Restoration and Easter

By Elder Gerrit W. Gong
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

At this season of hosanna and hallelujah, sing hallelujah—for He shall reign forever and ever!

Dear brothers and sisters: with hosanna and hallelujah, we celebrate the living Jesus Christ at this season of continuing Restoration and Easter. With perfect love, our Savior assures us: “In me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”¹

Some years ago, as Sister Gong and I met a lovely family, their young daughter, Ivy, shyly brought out her violin case. She lifted out the violin bow, tightened and put rosin on it. Then she put the bow back in the case, curtsied, and sat down. A new beginner, she had just shared all she knew about the violin. Now, years later, Ivy plays the violin beautifully.

In this mortal period, we are all a little like Ivy and her violin. We begin at the beginning. With practice and persistence, we grow and improve. With the passage of time, moral agency and mortal experiences help us become more like our Savior as we labor with Him in His vineyard² and follow His covenant path.

Anniversaries, including this bicentennial, highlight patterns of restoration.³ In celebrating the ongoing Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we also prepare for Easter. In both, we rejoice in the return of Jesus Christ. He lives—not only then, but now; not just for some, but for all. He came and comes to heal the brokenhearted, deliver the captives, recover sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are bruised.⁴ That’s each of us. His redeeming promises apply, no matter our past, our present, or concerns for our future.

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. Traditionally, palms are a sacred symbol to express joy in our Lord, as in *Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*, where “much people ... took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him.”⁵ (You may be interested to know the original of this Harry Anderson painting hangs in President Russell M. Nelson’s office, just behind his desk.) In the book of Revelation, those who praise God and the Lamb do so “clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”⁶ Along with “robes of righteousness” and “crowns of glory,” palms are included in the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer.⁷

Of course, the significance of Palm Sunday goes beyond crowds greeting Jesus with palms. On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem in ways the faithful recognized as fulfillment of prophecy. As Zechariah⁸ and the Psalmist prophetically foretold, our Lord entered Jerusalem riding a colt as multitudes knowingly cried, “Hosanna in

the highest.”⁹ Hosanna means “save now.”¹⁰ Then, as now, we rejoice, “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”¹¹

A week following Palm Sunday is Easter Sunday. President Russell M. Nelson teaches that Jesus Christ “came to pay a debt He didn’t owe because we owed a debt we couldn’t pay.”¹² Indeed, through the Atonement of Christ, all God’s children “may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”¹³ At Easter, we sing hallelujah. Hallelujah means “praise ye the Lord Jehovah.”¹⁴ The “Hallelujah Chorus” in Handel’s *Messiah* is a beloved Easter declaration that He is “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”¹⁵

The sacred events between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday are the story of hosanna and hallelujah. Hosanna is our plea for God to save. Hallelujah expresses our praise to the Lord for the hope of salvation and exaltation. In hosanna and hallelujah we recognize the living Jesus Christ as the heart of Easter and latter-day restoration.

Latter-day restoration begins with theophany—the literal appearance of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to the young prophet Joseph Smith. Said the Prophet Joseph, “Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.”¹⁶ Because the heavens are again open, we know and “believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost”¹⁷—the divine Godhead.

On Easter Sunday, April 3, 1836, in the early days of the Restoration, the living Jesus Christ appeared after the Kirtland Temple was dedicated. Those who saw Him there testified of Him in complementary contrasts of fire and water: “His eyes were as a flame of *fire*; the hair of his head was white like the *pure snow*; his countenance shone above the *brightness of the sun*; and his voice was as the sound of the *rushing of great waters*, even the voice of Jehovah.”¹⁸

On that occasion, our Savior declared, “I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.”¹⁹ Again, complementary contrasts—first and last, living and slain. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,²⁰ the author and finisher of our faith.²¹

Following the appearance of Jesus Christ, Moses, Elias, and Elijah also came. By divine direction, these great prophets of old restored priesthood keys and authority. Thus, “the keys of this dispensation are committed”²² within His restored Church to bless all God’s children.

The coming of Elijah in the Kirtland Temple also fulfilled Malachi’s Old Testament prophecy that Elijah would return “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”²³ In doing so, Elijah’s appearance coincided, though not by coincidence, with the Jewish Passover season, which tradition reverently anticipates Elijah’s return.

Many devout Jewish families set a place for Elijah at their Passover table. Many fill a cup to the brim to invite and welcome him. And some, during the traditional

Passover Seder, send a child to the door, sometimes left partly open, to see if Elijah is outside waiting to be invited in.²⁴

In fulfillment of prophecy and as part of the promised restoration of all things,²⁵ Elijah did come as promised, at Easter and the onset of Passover. He brought the sealing authority to bind families on earth and in heaven. As Moroni taught the Prophet Joseph, Elijah “shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so,” Moroni continued, “the whole earth would be utterly wasted at [the Lord’s] coming.”²⁶ The spirit of Elijah, a manifestation of the Holy Ghost, draws us to our generations—past, present, and future—in our genealogies, histories, and temple service.

Let us also briefly recall what Passover signifies. Passover remembers the deliverance of the children of Israel from 400 years of bondage. The book of Exodus relates how this deliverance came after plagues of frogs, lice, flies, the death of cattle, boils, blains, hail and fire, locusts, and thick darkness. The final plague threatened the death of the firstborn in the land but not in the house of Israel if—if those households put the blood of an unblemished firstling lamb on the lintels of their doors.²⁷

The angel of death passed by the houses marked with the symbolic blood of the lamb.²⁸ That passing by, or pass over, represents Jesus Christ ultimately overcoming death. Indeed, the atoning blood of the Lamb of God gives our Good Shepherd power to gather His people in all places and circumstances into the safety of His fold on both sides of the veil.

Significantly, the Book of Mormon describes the “power and resurrection of Christ”²⁹—the essence of Easter—in terms of two restorations.

First, resurrection includes physical restoration of our “proper and perfect frame”; “every limb and joint,” “even a hair of the head shall not be lost.”³⁰ This promise gives hope to those who have lost limbs; those who have lost ability to see, hear, or walk; or those thought lost to relentless disease, mental illness, or other diminished capacity. He finds us. He makes us whole.

A second promise of Easter and our Lord’s Atonement is that, spiritually, “all things shall be restored to their proper order.”³¹ This spiritual restoration reflects our works and desires. Like bread upon the water,³² it restores “that which is good,” “righteous,” “just,” and “merciful.”³³ No wonder the prophet Alma uses the word *restore* 22 times³⁴ as he urges us to “deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually.”³⁵

Because “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world,”³⁶ the Lord’s Atonement can make whole not only what was but also what can be. Because He knows our pains, afflictions, sicknesses, our “temptations of every kind,”³⁷ He can, with mercy, succor us according to our infirmities.³⁸ Because God is “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also,” the plan of mercy can “appease the demands of

justice.”³⁹ We repent and do all we can. He encircles us eternally “in the arms of his love.”⁴⁰

Today we celebrate restoration and resurrection. With you, I rejoice in the ongoing Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As began 200 years ago this spring, light and revelation continue to come forth through the Lord’s living prophet and His Church called in His name—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and through personal revelation and inspiration by the supernal gift of the Holy Ghost.

With you, at this Easter season, I testify of God, our Eternal Father, and His Beloved Son, the living Jesus Christ. Mortal men were cruelly crucified and later resurrected. But only the living Jesus Christ in His perfect resurrected form still bears the marks of crucifixion in His hands, feet, and side. Only He can say, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”⁴¹ Only He can say: “I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God.”⁴²

Like little Ivy and her violin, we are in some ways still beginning. Truly, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”⁴³ In these times, we can learn much of God’s goodness and our divine potential for God’s love to grow in us as we seek Him and reach out to each other. In new ways and new places, we can do and become, line upon line, kindness upon kindness, individually and together.

Dear brothers and sisters everywhere, as we meet and learn together, your faith and goodness fill me with a sense of gospel adventure and gratitude. Your testimony and gospel journey enrich my testimony and gospel journey. Your concerns and joys, your love for the household of God and community of Saints, and your lived understanding of restored truth and light increase my fulness of the restored gospel, with the living Jesus Christ at its heart. Together we trust, “thru cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.”⁴⁴ Unitedly we know, amidst our loads and cares, we can count our many blessings.⁴⁵ In the daily details and small and simple things, we can see great things brought to pass in our lives.⁴⁶

“And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion, singing with songs of everlasting joy.”⁴⁷ At this season of hosanna and hallelujah, sing hallelujah—for He shall reign forever and ever! Shout hosanna, to God and the Lamb! In the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.