

Kingdoms of Glory

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We have a loving Heavenly Father who will see that we receive every blessing and every advantage that our own desires and choices allow.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are frequently asked, “How is your church different from other Christian churches?” Among the answers we give is the fulness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Foremost among that doctrine is the fact that our Heavenly Father loves all His children so much that He wants us all to live in a kingdom of glory forever. Moreover, He wants us to live with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, eternally. His plan gives us the teachings and the opportunity to make the choices that will assure us the destiny and the life we choose.

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From modern revelation we know that the ultimate destiny of all who live on the earth is not the inadequate idea of heaven for the righteous and the eternal sufferings of hell for the rest. God’s loving plan for His children includes this reality taught by our Savior, Jesus Christ: “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”¹

The revealed doctrine of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that *all the children of God*—with exceptions too limited to consider here—will ultimately inherit one of three kingdoms of glory, even the least of which “surpasses all understanding.”² After a period in which the disobedient suffer for their sins, which suffering prepares them for what is to follow, all will be resurrected and proceed to the Final Judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. There, our loving Savior, who, we are taught, “glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands,”³ will send all the children of God to one of these kingdoms of glory according to the desires manifested through their choices.

Another unique doctrine and practice of the restored Church is the revealed commandments and covenants that offer *all the children of God* the sacred privilege of qualifying for the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom. That highest destination—exaltation in the celestial kingdom—is the focus of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

From modern revelation, Latter-day Saints have this unique understanding of God’s plan of happiness for His children. That plan begins with our life as spirits before we were born, and it reveals the purpose and conditions of our chosen journey in mortality and our desired destination thereafter.

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We know from modern revelation that “all kingdoms have a law given”⁴ and that the kingdom of glory we receive in the Final Judgment is determined by the laws we choose to follow in our mortal journey. Under that loving plan, there are multiple kingdoms—many mansions—so that all of God’s children will inherit a kingdom of glory whose laws they can comfortably “abide.”

As we describe the nature and requirements of each of the three kingdoms in the Father’s plan, we begin with the highest, which is the focus of the divine commandments and ordinances God has revealed through The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the “celestial” glory⁵ there are three levels,⁶ of which the highest is exaltation in the celestial kingdom. This is the dwelling of those “who have received of his fulness, and of his glory,” wherefore, “they are gods, even the sons [and daughters] of God”⁷ and “dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever.”⁸ Through revelation, God has revealed the eternal laws, ordinances, and covenants that must be observed to develop the godly attributes necessary to realize this divine potential. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints focuses on these because the purpose of this restored Church is to prepare God’s children for salvation in the celestial glory and, more particularly, for exaltation in its highest degree.

God’s plan, founded on eternal truth, requires that exaltation can be attained only through faithfulness to the covenants of an eternal marriage between a man and a woman in the holy temple,⁹ which marriage will ultimately be available to all the faithful. That is why we teach that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”¹⁰

A uniquely valuable teaching to help us prepare for exaltation is the 1995 proclamation on the family.¹¹ Its declarations clarify the requirements that prepare us to live with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who do not fully understand the Father’s loving plan for His children may consider this family proclamation no more than a changeable statement of policy. In contrast, we affirm that the family proclamation, founded on irrevocable doctrine, defines the mortal family relationship where the most important part of our eternal development can occur.

The Apostle Paul describes the three degrees of glory, likening them to the glories of the sun, moon, and stars.¹² He names the highest “celestial” and the second “terrestrial.”¹³ He does not name the lowest, but a revelation to Joseph Smith added its name: “telestial.”¹⁴ Another revelation also describes the nature of the persons to be assigned to each of these kingdoms of glory. Those who do not choose “to abide the law of a celestial kingdom”¹⁵ will inherit another kingdom of glory, lesser than the celestial but suited to the laws they have chosen and can comfortably “abide.” That word *abide*, so common in the scriptures, means a secure placement.¹⁶ For example, those in the terrestrial kingdom—comparable to the popular concept of heaven—“are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father.”¹⁷ They were “honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men,”¹⁸ but “not valiant in the testimony of Jesus.”¹⁹

The revealing description of those assigned to the lowest of the kingdoms of glory, the telestial, is “he who cannot abide ... a terrestrial glory.”²⁰ That describes those who reject the Savior and have observed no divine limits on their behavior. This is the kingdom where the wicked abide,

after they have suffered for their sins. These are described in modern revelation as “they who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus. ...

“These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie.”²¹

Speaking of the three kingdoms of glory with his prophetic vision, President Russell M. Nelson recently wrote: “Mortal lifetime is barely a nanosecond compared with eternity. But what a crucial nanosecond it is! Consider carefully how it works: During this mortal life you get to choose which laws you are willing to obey—those of the celestial kingdom, or the terrestrial, or the telestial—and, therefore, in which kingdom of glory you will live forever. What a plan! It is a plan that completely honors *your* agency.”²²

III.

The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord’s teachings and commandments were given that we may all attain “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”²³ That process requires far more than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough to be *convinced* of the gospel; we must act so that we are *converted* by it. In contrast to other preaching, which teaches us to *know* something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to *become* something.

From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is based on the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*. We qualify for eternal life through a process of *conversion*. As used here, this word of many meanings signifies a profound change of nature. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.²⁴

IV.

Because of Jesus Christ and His Atonement, when we fall short in this life, we can repent and rejoin the covenant path that leads to what our Heavenly Father desires for us.

The Book of Mormon teaches that “this life is the time for [us] to prepare to meet God.”²⁵ But that challenging limitation to “this life” was given a hopeful context (at least to some extent for some persons) by what the Lord revealed to President Joseph F. Smith, now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 138. “I beheld,” the prophet wrote, “that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.

“The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,

“And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation.”²⁶

In addition, we know that the Millennium, the thousand years that follow the Second Coming of the Savior, will be a time to perform the required ordinances for those who have not received them in their mortal lives.²⁷

There is much we do not know about the three major periods in the plan of salvation and their relationship to one another: (1) the premortal spirit world, (2) mortality, and (3) the next life. But we do know these eternal truths: “Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.”²⁸ We have a loving Heavenly Father who will see that we receive every blessing and every advantage that our own desires and choices allow. We also know that He will force no one into a sealing relationship against his or her will. The blessings of a sealed relationship are assured for all who keep their covenants but never by forcing a sealed relationship on another person who is unworthy or unwilling.

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify of the truth of these things. I testify of our Lord Jesus Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith,”²⁹ whose Atonement, under the plan of our Father in Heaven, makes it all possible, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. John 14:2.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 76:89.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 76:43.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 88:36.
5. 1 Corinthians 15:40; see also Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 15:40 (in 1 Corinthians 15:40, footnote *a*).
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 76:56, 58.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 76:62.
9. See 1 Corinthians 11:11; Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
10. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
11. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
12. See 1 Corinthians 15:41.
13. 1 Corinthians 15:40.
14. Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 15:40 (in 1 Corinthians 15:40, footnote *a*).
15. Doctrine and Covenants 88:22.
16. See Topical Guide, “Abide”; John 15:4–7, 10.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 76:77.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 76:75.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 76:79.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 88:23.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 76:82, 103.
22. Russell M. Nelson, *Heart of the Matter* (2023), 45.
23. Ephesians 4:13.
24. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–34; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 40–43.
25. Alma 34:32.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 138:57–59.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:11; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 413–14.
28. Russell M. Nelson, “Come, Follow Me,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 89.
29. Hebrews 12:2; see also Moroni 6:4.