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Temple Worship

THE KEY TO KNOWING GOD

In the temple we can learn to live as Christ lived on earth and prepare to live as He and the Father live now.

I well recall one of the first anxious and earnest conversations with a temple attender after my service as temple president began in the Salt Lake Temple. A very thoughtful young lady had read through the relevant verses concerning the function of the temple as a house of learning and of instruction. She was perceptive enough to recognize that to know God and Christ, “the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,” is “life eternal” (John 17:3). She knew also that we learn to know our Father and ultimately return to Him through Christ.

My testimony to her was that, for me, everything in the temple points ultimately to Christ and to our Father. The efficacy of the ordinances and covenants is in His atoning love and delegated authority—the authority of “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3). But she had not yet made a clear connection in her own mind and heart how temple worship can become a critical key to knowing the Lord. . . .

Christ, Scriptures, Temple, Home

The temple is of utmost importance in providing the setting for purifying and therefore sanctifying ourselves, which, as we learn about Christ, can lead us to that

personal knowledge of Him and witness of Him that lead to the most precious of life’s gifts.

Temple learning and worship can be the university of eternal life through Jesus Christ. In the prayer of dedication at Kirtland, this petition was offered to the Lord: “Do thou grant, Holy Father, that all those who shall worship in this house may be taught words of wisdom . . . ;

“And that they may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 109:14–15).

Is this accomplished by ceremonies and ritual? Yes, in part, if we understand the purpose, the symbolism, even as Adam and Eve were brought to understand it in the earliest days of mortality. But basically we learn through the substance of the message, the principles of eternal progression, of eternal life. It is around a few simple principles that we make covenants with the Lord. Recall Paul’s statement to the Romans that we are reconciled to God by Christ’s death, and saved “by his life” (Romans 5:10). To me this says that the principles of His holy life lead us to that fulness of salvation known as exaltation—loving, learning, serving, growing, creative life on a Godly level with loved ones and with the Father and the Son. In the temple we can learn to live as Christ lived on earth and as He and the Father live.



Central Principles of Christ's Life

What are those principles which are central in His life that are taught in the temple and that relate to the covenants we make with the Lord? . . .

He loved in a way that perhaps only He and the Father really yet understand. But we are here to learn that, to learn to love enough to give. On battlefields and in hospital rooms and in the quiet heroic circumstances of unselfish devotion to parent or child, it has been demonstrated for me that there are people who have learned truly to love and sacrifice in His way.

As we choose and follow a course of giving, of caring, of graciousness and kindness, we come to understand that this is not an optional element of the gospel; it is the heart of it. Decency and honor, unselfishness, good manners, and good taste are expected of us. What really matters, after all, is what kind of people we are, what we are willing to give. . . . This we decide daily, hourly, as we learn and accept the direction of the Lord.

After the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Savior, something happened to the surviving disciples, led by Peter, who in a time of stress had failed Him. Pentecost occurred—the coming of the Spirit—and those who had wavered stood strong in testimony and testifying. Chapters 1 to 5 of the book of Acts tell the story. The last verses of chapter 5 have dramatic impact. Gamaliel has intervened with his associates to give the disciples another chance, a little more time. So they are warned again to cease teaching and preaching Christ, are beaten once more, and released. The record says they departed the premises rejoicing that they were found worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. Then, “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

In like manner something should happen to us as we depart the temple in the spirit of 3 Nephi 17:3: “Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.”

The Purifying Power of Temple Worship

A purifying spirit can cause us, acquainted now in a special way with the path followed and lighted by the Lord—and loving Him—to be new persons, practicing love and brotherhood, rallying to the will of the Lord, serving, sharing, loving, loyal to wholesome standards, seeking first the kingdom of God.

We need to purify our family lives and make our homes places where we “teach and preach” Jesus Christ daily but follow Him always. Our homes, our families, our individual lives should become centers of learning, centers of unselfishness and service. In the words of Rufus Jones, “Saints are not made for haloes and for inward thrills. They are made to become focus points of light and power. The true saint is a good mother, a good neighbor, a good constructive force in society, a fragrance and a blessing. The true saint is a dynamic Christian who exhibits in some definite spot the type of life which is fully realized in heaven.”¹

Consider what to me is a clear and forceful key to the meaning of temples and temple worship. The Lord



PHOTOGRAPH OF MANILA, PHILIPPINES TEMPLE; A WOMAN OF SAMARIA, BY HARRY ANDERSON

revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1836 the prayer that was offered at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. The prayer became section 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants. One who sincerely desires to understand basic temple meaning could well read it over and over, especially its first touching, powerful two dozen verses. Verse 5 is a beautiful statement that merits deep consideration: “For thou knowest that we have done this work through great tribulation; and out of our poverty we have given of our substance to build a house to thy name, *that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people*” (D&C 109:5; emphasis added).

How does He manifest Himself to His people in the temple?

Chiefly, I believe, through the beauty and compelling cogency of temple principles, ordinances, and covenants, through temple worship—through the spirit of revelation and other blessings of the Spirit available there for those whose minds and hearts are in tune, and who are patient and anxious to learn and to move their own lives toward Christlike ideals (see 3 Nephi 27:21, 27).

One example may suffice in illustrating the spiritual strength that comes to those who persevere in the service of the Lord in temples. I came into the temple one morning about 4:30 a.m., grateful to have been able to plow through heavy snow from our home to get there. In a secluded room, sitting thoughtfully as he leaned forward on his cane, I chanced upon an older, deeply admired friend. Like I, he was dressed in white, temple workers’ white. I greeted him cheerily and inquired what he was doing there at that hour of the morning.

He said, “You know what I am doing here, President Hanks. I am an ordinance worker here to fulfill my assignment.”

“I do know that,” I said, “but I am wondering how you got here through the snow storm. I just heard on the radio that Parley’s Canyon is closed to all traffic, indeed barricaded.”

He said, “I have a four-wheeler that will climb trees.”

I said, “So do I, or I would not be here, and I live only a few miles away.”



I then asked him how he had managed to get through the barricades that the news announcements had said were in place in the canyon. His answer was not atypical of this rancher and stake president whom I had first seen as a robust, strong man astride his horse when I spent an afternoon with him prior to stake conference meetings. Arthritis and age had literally shrunk him now and would soon take his life. He had much pain in moving about. His answer that morning was, “Now, President Hanks, I have known those highway officers, many of them, since they were born. They know I must get through and that if necessary I might try to go overland! They also know my truck and my experience, and they just move their barricades if they need to.”

He was there, faithful and loyal at that hour of the morning, to begin his sacred work. It is such individuals with such faith and devotion that temples help to develop. ■

*From an address delivered in February 1993 at Brigham Young University; the full text is printed in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (1994).*

NOTE

1. *Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time* (1961), 199.