



*"We lived and dwelt with [our Father in Heaven] before
the foundations of this earth were laid."*



The Plan of Salvation

“Our Father in heaven established a plan of salvation for his spirit children . . . to enable them to advance and progress until they obtain eternal life.”

From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith

On April 29, 1901, Joseph Fielding Smith’s 18-year-old sister Alice died after an extended illness. Joseph was just finishing a full-time mission in England. His response to the news of Alice’s passing revealed his love for his family and his testimony of the plan of salvation. “It is a dreadful blow to us all,” he recorded in his journal. “I did not realize the seriousness of her illness although I knew she was sick. I fully expected to meet her again with the rest of the family within a few weeks, but the will of God be done. It is at such times that the hopes which the gospel present[s] to us are most welcome. We shall all meet again on the other side to enjoy the pleasures and blessings of each other’s presence, where family ties will no more be broken, but where we shall all live to receive the blessings, and realize the tender mercies of our Father in heaven. May I always walk in the path of truth, and honor the name I bear, that the meetings with my kindred may be to me indeed most sweet and everlasting, is my humble prayer.”¹

Serving as an Apostle and later as President of the Church, President Joseph Fielding Smith repeatedly testified of the hope that comes through an understanding of the gospel. He taught, “We have the plan of salvation; we administer the gospel; and the gospel is the sole hope of the world, the one way that will bring peace on earth and right the wrongs that exist in all nations.”²

Teachings of Joseph Fielding Smith

1

In the premortal spirit world, we rejoiced to learn of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation.

We are all members of the family of our Father in Heaven. We lived and dwelt with Him before the foundations of this earth were laid. We saw His face, felt His love, and heard His teachings, and He ordained the laws whereby we are able to advance and progress and gain eternal family units of our own.³

Our Father in heaven established a plan of salvation for his spirit children. This plan was designed to enable them to advance and progress until they obtain eternal life, which is the name of the kind of life our Father in Heaven lives. This plan is to enable the children of God to become like him and have the power and wisdom and knowledge which he possesses.⁴

We learn from the Pearl of Great Price, that there was a council held in heaven, when the Lord called before him the spirits of his children and presented to them a plan by which they should come down on this earth, partake of mortal life and physical bodies, pass through a probation of mortality and then go on to a higher exaltation through the resurrection which should be brought about through the atonement of his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ [see Moses 4:1–2; Abraham 3:22–28]. The thought of passing through mortality and partaking of all the vicissitudes of earth life in which they would gain experiences through suffering, pain, sorrow, temptation and affliction, as well as the pleasures of life in this mundane existence, and then, if faithful, passing on through the resurrection to eternal life in the kingdom of God, to be like him [see 1 John 3:2], filled them with the spirit of rejoicing, and they “shouted for joy.” [See Job 38:4–7.] The experience and knowledge obtained in this mortal life, they could not get in any other way, and the receiving of a physical body was essential to their exaltation.⁵



The Fall of Adam and Eve “brought pain, it brought sorrow, it brought death; but . . . it brought blessings also.”

2

**The Fall of Adam and Eve was
part of Heavenly Father’s plan.**

The plan of salvation, or code of laws, which is known as the gospel of Jesus Christ, was adopted in the heavens, before the foundation of the world was laid. It was appointed there that Adam our father should come to this earth and stand at the head of the whole human family. It was a part of this great plan, that he should partake of the forbidden fruit and fall, thus bringing suffering and death into the world, even for the ultimate good of his children.⁶

The Fall was an essential part of man’s mortal probation. . . . Had Adam and Eve not partaken, the great gift of mortality would not have come to them. Moreover, they would have had no posterity, and the great commandment given to them by the Lord would not have been fulfilled.⁷

The fall of Adam brought to pass all of the vicissitudes of mortality. It brought pain, it brought sorrow, it brought death; but we must not lose sight of the fact that it brought blessings also. . . . It brought the blessing of knowledge and understanding and mortal life.⁸



**Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice
to save us from the Fall and from our sins.**

Adam's transgression brought these two deaths, spiritual and temporal—man being banished from the presence of God, and becoming mortal and subject to all the ills of the flesh. In order that he should be brought back again, there had to be a reparation of the broken law. Justice demanded it.⁹

It is most natural and just that he who commits the wrong should pay the penalty—atone for his wrongdoing. Therefore, when Adam was the transgressor of the law, justice demanded that he, and none else, should answer for the sin and pay the penalty with his life. But Adam, in breaking the law, himself became subject to the curse, and being under the curse could not atone, or undo what he had done. Neither could his children, for they also were under the curse, and it required one who was not subject to the curse to atone for that original sin. Moreover, since we were all under the curse, we were also powerless to atone for our individual sins. It therefore became necessary for the Father to send his Only Begotten Son, who was free from sin, to atone for our sins as well as for Adam's transgression, which justice demanded should be done. He accordingly offered himself a sacrifice for sins, and through his death upon the cross took upon himself both Adam's transgression and our individual sins, thereby redeeming us from the fall, and from our sins, on condition of repentance.¹⁰

It is our duty to teach the mission of Jesus Christ. Why did he come? What did he do for us? How are we benefited? What did it cost him to do it? Why it cost his life, yes, more than his life! What did he do besides being nailed on the cross? Why was he nailed there? He was nailed there that his blood might be shed to redeem us from this most terrible penalty that could ever come, banishment from the presence of God. He died on the cross to bring us back again, to have our bodies and spirits reunited. He gave us that privilege. If we will only believe in him and keep his commandments, he died for us that we might receive a remission of our sins and not be called upon to pay penalty. He paid the price. . . .

. . . No man could do what he did for us. He did not have to die, he could have refused. He did it voluntarily. He did it because it was a commandment from his Father. He knew what the suffering was going to be; and yet, because of his love for us, he was willing to do it. . . .

The driving of the nails into his hands and into the Savior's feet was the least part of his suffering. We get into the habit, I think, of feeling, or thinking that his great suffering was being nailed to the cross and left to hang there. Well, that was a period in the world's history when thousands of men suffered that way. So his suffering, so far as that is concerned, was not any more than the suffering of other men who have been so crucified. What, then, was his great suffering? I wish we could impress this fact upon the minds of every member of this Church: His great suffering occurred before he ever went to the cross. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane, so the scriptures tell us, that blood oozed from every pore of his body; and in the extreme agony of his soul, he cried to his Father. It was not the nails driven into his hands and feet. Now do not ask me how that was done because I do not know. Nobody knows. All we know is that in some way he took upon himself that extreme penalty. He took upon him our transgressions, and paid a price, a price of torment.

Think of the Savior carrying the united burden of every individual—torment—in some way which I say, I cannot understand; I just accept—which caused him to suffer an agony of pain, compared to which the driving of the nails in his hands and feet was very little. He cried in His anguish, to His Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass!" and it could not pass [see Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42]. Let me read you just a word or two here of what the Lord says in regard to that:

"For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

"But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

"Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of the pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

“Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.” [D&C 19:16–19.]

When I read that it humbles me. His love for humanity, for the world, was so great that he was willing to carry a burden that no mortal man could carry, and pay an awful price that no other person ever could have paid, that we might escape.¹¹

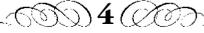
The Son of God [said]: “I’ll go down and pay the price. I’ll be the Redeemer and redeem men from Adam’s transgression. I’ll take upon me the sins of the world and redeem or save every soul from his own sins who will repent.”¹²

Let us illustrate: A man walking along the road happens to fall into a pit so deep and dark that he cannot climb to the surface and regain his freedom. How can he save himself from his predicament? Not by any exertions on his own part, for there is no means of escape in the pit. He calls for help, and some kindly disposed soul, hearing his cries for relief, hastens to his assistance and by lowering a ladder, gives to him the means by which he may climb again to the surface of the earth. This was precisely the condition that Adam placed himself and his posterity in, when he partook of the forbidden fruit. All being together in the pit, none could gain the surface and relieve the others. The pit was banishment from the presence of the Lord and temporal death, the dissolution of the body. And all being subject to death, none could provide the means of escape.¹³

The Savior comes along, not subject to that pit, and lowers the ladder. He comes down into the pit and makes it possible for us to use the ladder to escape.¹⁴

In his infinite mercy, the Father heard the cries of his children and sent his Only Begotten Son, who was not subject to death nor to sin, to provide the means of escape. This he did through his infinite atonement and the everlasting gospel.¹⁵

The gratitude of our hearts should be filled to overflowing in love and obedience for [the Savior’s] great and tender mercy. For what he has done we should never fail him. He bought us with a price, the price of his great suffering and the spilling of his blood in sacrifice on the cross.¹⁶



Building on the foundation of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we work out our salvation during mortality.

Our Savior Jesus Christ is the central figure in this great plan of progression and salvation.¹⁷

Building on the foundation of the atonement, the plan of salvation consists of the following things:

First, we must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; we must accept him as the Son of God; we must put our trust in him, rely upon his word, and desire to gain the blessings which come by obedience to his laws.

Second, we must repent of our sins; we must forsake the world; we must determine in our hearts, without reservation, that we will live godly and upright lives.

Third, we must be baptized in water, under the hands of a legal administrator, who has power to bind on earth and seal in heaven; we must, through this sacred ordinance, enter into a covenant to serve the Lord and keep his commandments.

Fourth, we must receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; we must be born again; we must have sin and iniquity burned out of our souls as though by fire; we must gain a new creation by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Fifth, we must endure to the end; we must keep the commandments after baptism; we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord; we must so live as to acquire the attributes of godliness and become the kind of people who can enjoy the glory and wonders of the celestial kingdom.¹⁸

Now I testify that these laws which men must obey to gain salvation, and which comprise the gospel of Jesus Christ, have been revealed in this day to prophets and apostles, and that they are now administered by his church, which he has again established upon the earth.¹⁹

We are, all of us here in this mortal world, on probation. We were sent here primarily to obtain tabernacles [bodies] for our eternal



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spirits; secondly, to be proved by trial, to have tribulation as well as the abundant joy and happiness that can be obtained through a sacred covenant of obedience to the eternal principles of the gospel. Mortality, as Lehi informed his children, is a “probationary state.” (2 Nephi 2:21.) It is here where we are to be tried and tested to see if we will, when shut out of the presence of our Eternal Father but still instructed in the way of eternal life, love and revere him and be true to his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.²⁰

We came here to be tested and proved by coming in contact with evil as well as the good. . . . The Father has permitted Satan and

his hosts to tempt us, but by the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord and the commandments given through revelation, we are prepared to make our choice. If we do evil, we have been promised that we will be punished; if we do good, we will receive the eternal reward of righteousness.²¹

This mortal probation [is] a brief period, just a short span linking the eternity past with the eternity future. Yet it [is] a period of tremendous importance. . . . This life is the most vital period in our eternal existence.²²



**All people will receive the blessing of resurrection
through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.**

We came into this world to die. That was understood before we came here. It is part of the plan, all discussed and arranged long before men were placed upon the earth. . . . We were ready and willing to make that journey from the presence of God in the spirit world to the mortal world, here to suffer all that pertains to this life, its pleasures and its sorrows, and to die; and death is just as essential as birth.²³

Physical death, or the death of the mortal man, is not a permanent separation of the spirit and the tabernacle of flesh, notwithstanding the fact that the body returns again to the elements, but is only a temporary separation which shall cease at the resurrection day when the body shall be called forth from the dust to live again animated by spirit. This blessing comes to all men through the atonement of Christ, irrespective of their goodness or wickedness while in mortality. Paul said there should be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15), and the Savior said that all who were in their graves should hear his voice and should come forth “they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).²⁴

Every fundamental part of every body will be restored to its proper place again in the resurrection, no matter what may become of the body in death. If it be burned by fire, eaten by sharks, no matter what. Every fundamental part of it will be restored to its own proper place.²⁵

Spirits cannot be made perfect without the body of flesh and bones. This body and its spirit are brought to immortality and blessings of salvation through the resurrection. After the resurrection there can be no separation again, body and spirit become inseparably connected that man may receive a fulness of joy. In no other way, other than birth into this life and the resurrection, can spirits become like our eternal Father.²⁶



The faithful will inherit eternal life with their families in the presence of Heavenly Father.

Some men inherit wealth through the industry of their fathers. Some men are through inheritance raised to worldly thrones, to power, and position, among their fellow men. Some seek for the inheritance of worldly knowledge and renown through the application of their own industry and perseverance; but there is one inheritance which is worth more than all, it is the inheritance of eternal exaltation.

The Scriptures say that eternal life—which is the life possessed by our Eternal Father and his Son, Jesus Christ,—is the greatest gift of God [see D&C 14:7]. Only those shall receive it who are cleansed from all sin. It is promised to those “who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true. They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things.” [D&C 76:53–55; see also verse 52.]²⁷

This plan of salvation is family centered. . . . [It] is designed to enable us to create eternal family units of our own.²⁸

Those who receive the exaltation in the celestial kingdom will have the “continuation of the seeds forever.” They will live in the family relationship.²⁹

We are taught in the gospel of Jesus Christ that the family organization will be, so far as celestial exaltation is concerned, one that is complete, an organization linked from father and mother and children of one generation to the father and mother and children of the next generation, and thus expanding and spreading out down to the end of time.³⁰

These glorious blessings of eternal inheritance . . . do not come except through willingness to keep the commandments and even to suffer with Christ if need be. In other words, candidates for eternal life—the greatest gift of God—are expected to place all that they have on the altar, should it be required, for even then, and should they be required to lay down their lives for his cause, they could never pay him for the abundant blessings which are received and promised based on obedience to his laws and commandments.³¹

When we have come out of the world and have received the gospel in its fulness, we are candidates for celestial glory; nay, we are more than candidates, if we are faithful, for the Lord has given unto us the assurance that through our faithfulness, we shall enter into the celestial kingdom. . . .

. . . Let us live so that we will be assured of our place, and so we will know, through the lives we live, that we shall enter into His presence and dwell with Him, receiving the fulness of the blessings that have been promised. Who among the Latter-day Saints will be content with anything short of the fulness of salvation which is promised us? . . . It is necessary for us, in our humility, and in the spirit of repentance, to press on and on; keeping the commandments unto the end, for our hope and our goal is eternal life, and that is life in the presence of the Father and of the Son; “And this is life eternal,” said the Lord,” that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” [John 17:3.]³²

I stand now, in what I might call the twilight of life, with the realization that in a not-far-distant day I shall be called upon to give an account of my mortal stewardship. . . .

I am sure that we all love the Lord. I know that he lives, and I look forward to that day when I shall see his face, and I hope to hear his voice say unto me: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34.)

And I pray that this may be the happy lot of all of us, in our own due time.³³

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- As you read the journal entry in “From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith,” think of a time when you found comfort in your testimony of the plan of salvation. How might you help a family member or friend receive such comfort?
- How can President Smith’s teachings about the council in heaven help us when we face trials? (See section 1.)
- President Smith taught that “we must not lose sight of the fact that [the Fall of Adam and Eve] brought blessings” (section 2). Why do you think it is important to remember this truth? What are some blessings you have received as a result of the Fall?
- In section 3, how does President Smith’s example of a man falling into a pit relate to our lives? Reflect on how the Savior has rescued you through His Atonement.
- What do President Smith’s words in section 4 suggest about the purpose of our life on the earth? What has the Lord given us to help us pass safely through this time of testing?
- How might you help someone understand President Smith’s declaration in section 5 that “death is just as essential as birth”? How has the doctrine of resurrection influenced your life?
- In what ways is worldly wealth different from the “eternal inheritance” we can receive through the plan of salvation? (See section 6.) How can an understanding of these differences help us prepare for eternal life?

Related Scriptures

Job 38:4–7; 2 Nephi 2:15–29; 9:5–27; Alma 12:20–35; D&C 19:16–19; Moses 5:10–12

Teaching Help

“To help us teach from the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets, the Church has produced lesson manuals and other materials. There is little need for commentaries or other reference material” (*Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* [1999], 52).

Notes

1. In Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (1972), 117–18.
2. “To the Saints in Great Britain,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1971, 4.
3. In “Pres. Smith Tells of Parents’ Duty,” *Church News*, Apr. 3, 1971, 10.
4. Address at the Logan Utah Institute of Religion, Jan. 10, 1971, 3; unpublished manuscript.
5. “Is Man Immortal?” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1916, 318; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:58.
6. *Elijah the Prophet and His Mission and Salvation Universal* (1957), 65–66.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 59.
8. “Principles of the Gospel: The Infinite Atonement—Redemption, Salvation, Exaltation,” *Deseret News*, Church section, Apr. 22, 1939, 3; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:115.
9. “The Atonement,” *Deseret News*, Church section, Mar. 2, 1935, 7; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:122.
10. *Elijah the Prophet and His Mission and Salvation Universal*, 79–80.
11. *Seek Ye Earnestly*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. (1970), 118–20.
12. “Principles of the Gospel: The Infinite Atonement—Redemption, Salvation, Exaltation,” 5; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:123.
13. *Elijah the Prophet and His Mission and Salvation Universal*, 80–81.
14. “Principles of the Gospel: The Infinite Atonement—Redemption, Salvation, Exaltation,” 5; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:123.
15. *Elijah the Prophet and His Mission and Salvation Universal*, 81.
16. “Purpose and Value of Mortal Probation,” *Deseret News*, Church section, June 12, 1949, 21; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:132.
17. Address at the Logan Utah Institute of Religion, Jan. 10, 1971, 3; unpublished manuscript.
18. “The Plan of Salvation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1971, 5.
19. “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1971, 26.
20. In Conference Report, Apr. 1965, 11.
21. In Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 107–8.
22. “Purpose and Value of Mortal Probation,” 21; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:69.
23. In “Services for Miss Nell Sumsion,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Jan. 1938, 10–11.
24. “What Is Spiritual Death?” *Improvement Era*, Jan. 1918, 191–92; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:216–17.
25. *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 5:103; italics removed.
26. “The Law of Chastity,” *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1931, 643; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:85–86.
27. *The Way to Perfection* (1931), 21–22.
28. *Sealing Power and Salvation*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Jan. 12, 1971), 2.
29. Personal correspondence, quoted in *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:287; italics removed.
30. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 26; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:175.
31. *The Way to Perfection*, 23.
32. In Conference Report, Apr. 1922, 61–62.
33. “Let the Spirit of Oneness Prevail,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1971, 136.