





By Elder
Robert D. Hales
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

The Savior's Atonement:

FOUNDATION OF TRUE CHRISTIANITY

*We will all be resurrected and become immortal because of
the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*

The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) was asked, “What are the fundamental principles of your religion?” He answered, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”¹

I want to give my voice to the Prophet Joseph’s statement. The center of all we believe is our Savior and His atoning sacrifice—“the condescension of God” (1 Nephi 11:16) whereby the Father sent His Son to earth to accomplish the Atonement. The central purpose for the life of Jesus Christ was to complete the atoning sacrifice. The Atonement is the foundation of true Christianity.

Why is the Savior’s Atonement the central gospel principle in the Church and in our lives?

Articles of Faith 1:3

The third article of faith reads, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

“Saved” in this context refers to reaching the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom. Resurrection is granted to all who come to earth, but to receive eternal life, the full blessings of eternal progression, each person must obey the laws, receive the ordinances, and make the covenants of the gospel.

Why could Jesus Christ, and only He, atone for the sins of the world? He met all of the qualifications.

God Loved Him and Trusted Him

Jesus was born of Heavenly Parents in a premortal world. He was the Firstborn of our Heavenly Father. He was chosen from the beginning. He was obedient to His Father's will. The scriptures often speak of the joy Heavenly Father has in His Son.

In Matthew we read, "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Luke records, "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Luke 9:35).

And at the temple in the land Bountiful following the Savior's Resurrection, the people heard the Father's voice: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3 Nephi 11:7).

It particularly touches my heart when I read that while Jesus was suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Father, out of His great love and compassion for His Only Begotten Son, sent an angel to comfort and strengthen Him (see Luke 22:43).

Jesus Used His Agency to Obey

Jesus had to willingly give His life for us.

In the great Council in Heaven, Lucifer, "son of the morning" (Isaiah 14:12; D&C 76:26–27), said:

"Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

"But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever" (Moses 4:1–2; see also Abraham 3:27).

Because of the great love the Son has for His Father and for each of us, He said, "Send me." When He said "send me," He used His agency.

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . .

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

"No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:15, 17–18).

Had the Savior desired, legions of angels could have taken Him from the cross directly home to His Father. But He used His agency to sacrifice Himself for us, to complete His mission in mortality, and to endure to the end, completing the atoning sacrifice.

Jesus wanted to come to earth, and He was qualified. And when He came, He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38).

Jesus Was Foreordained

Peter taught that Jesus "was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (see 1 Peter 1:19–21).

Prophets in all dispensations foretold of the coming of Jesus Christ and what His mission would be. Through great faith, Enoch was shown a marvelous vision of the birth, death, Ascension, and Second Coming of the Savior:

"And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world. . . .



ECCE HOMO. BY J. KIRK RICHARDS

“And the Lord said unto Enoch: Look, and he looked and beheld the Son of Man lifted up on the cross, after the manner of men;

“And he heard a loud voice; and the heavens were veiled; and all the creations of God mourned; and the earth groaned; and the rocks were rent; and the saints arose, and were crowned at the right hand of the Son of Man, with crowns of glory. . . .

“And Enoch beheld the Son of Man ascend up unto the Father. . . .

“And it came to pass that Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, in the last days, to dwell on the earth in righteousness for the space of a thousand years” (Moses 7:47, 55–56, 59, 65).

About 75 years before the birth of Christ, Amulek testified: “Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Alma 34:8).

Jesus Had Unique Qualifications

Only Jesus Christ could make the atoning sacrifice—being born of a mortal mother, Mary, and having received the power of life from His Father (see John 5:26). Because of this power of life, He overcame death, the grave’s power was nullified, and He became our Savior and Mediator and the Master of the Resurrection—the means whereby salvation and immortality are given to us all. We will all be resurrected and become immortal because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Willingly Atoned for Adam’s Transgression

The second article of faith states, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.”

Through the use of our agency, we choose to exercise our faith. With diligence, we can repent; without the Atonement, we cannot.

In Moses we are taught, “Hence came the saying abroad



GRAY DAY GOLGOTHA BY J. KIRK RICHARDS

among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children” (Moses 6:54).

In 2 Nephi we are given a great teaching:

“For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

“Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:6–7).

Jesus Was the Only Perfect Being

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Savior says, “Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified” (D&C 45:4).

Jesus was the only human being who was perfect, without sin. Sacrifice in the Old Testament meant a blood

sacrifice—pointing forward to the sacrifice of our Lord and Redeemer upon the cross to fulfill the atoning sacrifice. When blood sacrifices were made in ancient temples, the priests sacrificed an unblemished lamb, perfect in every way. The Savior is often referred to in the scriptures as “the Lamb of God” because of His purity (see, for example, John 1:29, 36; 1 Nephi 12:6; 14:10; D&C 88:106).

Peter taught that we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

Jesus Took Away the Sins of the World

The following verses make clear that through His Atonement, the Savior paid the price for our sins:

“All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” (Mosiah 14:6).

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . .

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

“And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. . . .

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:8, 10–11, 19).

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17).

“But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice. . . .

“And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of

the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery” (Alma 42:23, 26).

Jesus Endured to the End

Jesus Christ endured the trials, suffering, sacrifice, and tribulations of Gethsemane, as well as the anguish of Golgotha upon the cross. Then, finally, He could say, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He had completed His work in mortality and endured to the end, thus completing the atoning sacrifice.

In the garden He said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

In the Doctrine and Covenants we are taught:

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of 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 19:18–19).

Jesus said to his Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).



WHERE HAVE THEY TAKEN HIM? BY J. KIRK RICHARDS

Then, upon the cross, “when Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30).

Jesus came to earth, kept His divinity so that He could perform the atoning sacrifice, and endured to the end.

Remember Him through the Sacrament

Today we remember the Savior’s atoning sacrifice with the emblems of bread and water—symbols of His body and blood—as instituted at the Lord’s Last Supper with His Apostles.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

“Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19–20).

In John 11:25–26 we read:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

We also read: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

“The life of the world” means eternal life.

We need to prepare ourselves and our families weekly to be worthy to partake of the sacrament and to renew our covenants with repentant hearts.

The Father and the Son Love Us

The Father sent His Son to earth—the condescension—to allow Him to be crucified and to go through all He had to go through. In John we read:

“Jesus saith . . . , I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (John 14:6–7).



DOUBT NOT, THOMAS, BY J. KIRK RICHARDS

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Propitiation means reconciliation or appeasement.

Conclusion

Everyone who comes to the earth and receives a mortal body will be resurrected, but we have to work to receive the blessing of exaltation through our faithfulness, our agency, our obedience, and our repentance. Mercy will be meted out with justice, allowing repentance.

Because we have chosen to follow and accept Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, we take His name upon us at baptism. We take on the law of obedience. We promise we will always remember Him and keep His commandments. We renew our covenants when we partake of the sacrament.

By renewing our covenants, we are given the promise of having His Spirit to be with us always. If we allow His Spirit to come into our lives and direct our lives, we can return to the presence of Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, which is Their plan of happiness for us—the plan of salvation. ■

From an address, “The Atonement,” delivered during the seminar for new mission presidents at the Provo Missionary Training Center on June 24, 2008.

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49.