





By Elder D. Todd
Christofferson

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

WHY BAPTISMS FOR THE DEAD

The vicarious ordinances we perform in temples, beginning with baptism, make possible an eternal welding link between generations that fulfills the purpose of the earth's creation.

Christian thinkers have long wrestled with the question, “What is the destiny of the countless billions who have lived and died with no knowledge of Jesus?” The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches how the unbaptized dead are redeemed and how God can be “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

While yet in life, Jesus prophesied that He would also preach to the dead (see John 5:25). Peter tells us this happened in the interval between the Savior’s Crucifixion and Resurrection (see 1 Peter 3:18–19). President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) witnessed in vision that the Savior visited the spirit world and “from among the righteous [spirits] . . . organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness. . . .

“These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, [and] the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands” (D&C 138:30, 33).

Restoring the Doctrine of Baptism for the Dead

The doctrine that the living can provide baptism and other essential ordinances to the dead, vicariously, was revealed anew to the Prophet Joseph Smith (see D&C 124, 128, 132). He learned that the spirits awaiting resurrection are not only



OUR CHARGE
EXTENDS
AS FAR AND AS
DEEP AS THE
LOVE OF GOD
TO ENCOMPASS
HIS CHILDREN
OF EVERY TIME
AND PLACE.

offered individual salvation but that they can be bound in heaven as husband and wife and be sealed to their fathers and mothers of all generations past and have sealed to them their children of all generations future. The Lord instructed the Prophet that these sacred rites are appropriately performed only in a house built to His name, a temple (see D&C 124:29–36).

As President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) expressed: “I think that vicarious work for the dead more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Savior Himself than any other work of which I know. It is given with love, without hope of compensation, or repayment or anything of the kind. What a glorious principle.”¹

Why Your Role Is So Important

Our anxiety to redeem the dead, and the time and resources we put behind that

commitment, are, above all, an expression of our witness concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we can make concerning His divine character and mission. It testifies, first, of Christ’s Resurrection; second, of the infinite reach of His Atonement; third, that He is the sole source of salvation; fourth, that He has established the conditions for salvation; and, fifth, that He will come again.

What we do for those who have passed on matters tremendously because they live today as spirits and shall live again as immortal souls, and that because of Jesus Christ. We believe His words when He said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). By the baptisms we perform in behalf of the dead, we testify that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Conditions of Salvation Set by Christ

Because we believe that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, we also accept His authority to establish the conditions by which we may receive His grace. Otherwise we would not concern ourselves with being baptized for the dead.

As many as will believe and be baptized—including by proxy—and endure in faith, shall be saved, “not only those who believed after [Christ] came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came” (D&C 20:26). It is for this reason that the gospel is preached “also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Peter 4:6).

Temple Ordinances Save and Bind Families

The vicarious ordinances we perform in temples, beginning with baptism, make possible an eternal welding link between generations that fulfills the purpose of the earth’s creation. Without this, “the whole earth would be utterly wasted at [Christ’s] coming” (D&C 2:3). Elijah has, in fact, come as promised to confer the priesthood power that turns hearts and establishes the welding links between the fathers and the children so that once again what is bound on earth “shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). When he came, Elijah declared, “The keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors” (D&C 110:16).

That is why we anxiously search out our fathers and mothers of generations past to bind them to us and us to them. Is not this the strongest possible evidence of our conviction

that Jesus Christ will come again to reign upon the earth? We know He will, and we know what He expects we will have done in preparation for His return.

The Prisoners Shall Go Free

In the scriptures, the spirits of the dead are sometimes referred to as being in darkness or in prison.² Contemplating God’s glorious plan for the redemption of these, His children, the Prophet Joseph Smith penned this psalm: “Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free” (D&C 128:22).

Our charge extends as far and as deep as the love of God to encompass His children of every time and place. Our efforts on behalf of the dead bear eloquent witness that Jesus Christ is the divine Redeemer of all mankind. His grace and promises reach even those who in life do not find Him. Because of Him, the prisoners shall indeed go free. **NE**

From an October 2000 general conference address.

NOTES

1. “Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1998, 73.
2. See Isaiah 24:22; 1 Peter 3:19; Alma 40:12–13; D&C 38:5; D&C 138:22, 30. Even the righteous spirits are spoken of as faithful “captives” awaiting deliverance from the bands of death (see D&C 138:18–19).

