



The Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

“We shall rise from mortal death to have life everlasting, because of the atoning sacrifice and resurrection of the Savior.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

On March 20, 1934, Howard and Claire Hunter’s first child was born, a son they named Howard William Hunter Jr. and called Billy. During the summer they noticed that Billy seemed lethargic. Doctors diagnosed him with anemia, and Howard twice gave blood for transfusions, but Billy’s condition did not improve. Further tests revealed a severe intestinal problem that was causing Billy to lose blood. Doctors performed surgery, with Howard lying beside his son to give blood, but the results were not encouraging. Three days later, on October 11, 1934, little Billy died quietly as his parents sat beside his bed. “We were grief-stricken and numb as we left the hospital into the night,” Howard wrote.¹

Through the experiences of Billy’s death and the deaths of other loved ones, President Hunter was sustained by his testimony of the Savior’s Atonement and Resurrection. “It is our firm belief that [the Atonement] is a reality,” he testified, “and nothing is more important in the entire divine plan of salvation than the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We believe that salvation comes because of the atonement. In its absence the whole plan of creation would come to naught. . . . Without this atoning sacrifice, temporal death would be the end, and there would be no resurrection and no purpose in our spiritual lives. There would be no hope of eternal life.”²

During the April general conferences, which are held around the time of Easter, President Hunter often spoke about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the April 1983 general conference he said:



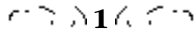
*The Savior's empty tomb "proclaims to all the world,
'He is not here, but is risen'" (Luke 24:6).*

“At this Easter season, I feel strongly the importance of my commission to testify of the reality of the Savior’s resurrection. My brothers and sisters, there is a God in the heavens who loves and cares about you and me. We have a Father in Heaven, who sent his Firstborn of spirit children, his Only Begotten in the flesh, to be an earthly example for us, to take upon himself the sins of the world, and subsequently to be crucified for the sins of the world and be resurrected. . . .

“It is truly a beautiful message—there will be life after death; we can return to live with our Father in Heaven once again, because of the sacrifice the Savior has made for us, and because of our own repentance and obedience to the commandments.

“In the glorious dawn of Easter morning, when the thoughts of the Christian world are turned to the resurrection of Jesus for a few fleeting moments, let us express appreciation to our Heavenly Father for the great plan of salvation that has been provided for us.”³

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter



The Atonement was a supreme act of love by our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ was a foreordained assignment by our Heavenly Father to redeem his children after their fallen state. It was an act of love by our Heavenly Father to permit his Only Begotten to make an atoning sacrifice. And it was a supreme act of love by his beloved Son to carry out the Atonement.

I have stood in the garden of Gethsemane on many occasions. I’ve contemplated in my mind the suffering, the agony of the Savior—that agony that was experienced when our Heavenly Father permitted him, in a way our minds cannot even comprehend, to take upon himself the pain and sins of all mankind. My soul was filled with sorrow as I’ve thought of his great sacrifice for mankind.

I’ve stood beneath Golgotha, the place of the skull, and contemplated the humiliation of the crucifixion which led to our Savior’s mortal death, but which brought to pass his and all mankind’s immortality. And again my soul has been subdued.

And I've stood in front of the garden tomb and imagined that glorious day of resurrection when the Savior emerged from the tomb alive, resurrected, immortal. In that contemplation my heart has swelled with joy.

Through these experiences I've felt to pour out my soul in thanksgiving and appreciation to our Heavenly Father for the love which he and his Son have given to us through the glorious atoning sacrifice. In the words of Charles Gabriel, "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me, confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me. I tremble to know that for me he was crucified, that for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me enough to die for me. Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me." . . .

I bear you my testimony, my brethren and sisters, that our Heavenly Father sent his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to fulfill the conditions upon which the plan of salvation would be operated. The Atonement represents his great love for us.⁴

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**The Savior took upon Himself all of our  
sins, infirmities, grief, and pain.**

As they met to celebrate the Passover, Jesus and his Apostles partook of the sacramental emblems that he initiated in this last supper together, and then walked to the Mount of Olives.

Always the teacher to the very end, he continued his discourse on the theme of the sacrificial lamb. He told them he would be smitten, and that they would be scattered as sheep without a shepherd (see Matthew 26:31). "But after I am risen again," he said, "I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32).

In the hours that followed, he sweat drops of blood, was scourged by the very leaders who claimed to be custodians of his law, and was crucified in the company of thieves. It was as King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon prophesied: "He shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from

every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. . . .

“He cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men . . . ; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him” (Mosiah 3:7, 9).

We are indebted to the prophet Alma for our knowledge of the full measure of his suffering: “He shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

“And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

Think of it! When his body was taken from the cross and hastily placed in a borrowed tomb, he, the sinless Son of God, had already taken upon him not only the sins and temptations of every human soul who will repent, but all of our sickness and grief and pain of every kind. He suffered these afflictions as we suffer them, according to the flesh. He suffered them all. He did this to perfect his mercy and his ability to lift us above every earthly trial.<sup>5</sup>

We may, in fact, make wrong choices, bad choices, hurtful choices. And sometimes we do just that, but that is where the mission and mercy of Jesus Christ comes into full force and glory. . . . He has provided a mediating atonement for the wrong choices we make. He is our advocate with the Father and has paid, in advance, for the faults and foolishness we often see in the exercise of our freedom. We must accept his gift, repent of those mistakes, and follow his commandments in order to take full advantage of this redemption. The offer is always there; the way is always open. We can always, even in our darkest hour and most disastrous errors, look to the Son of God and live.<sup>6</sup>



**Jesus Christ arose from the grave and was  
the firstfruits of the Resurrection.**

Go with me back in time to those final scenes in the Holy Land. The end of our Lord's mortal life was near. He had healed the sick, raised the dead, and expounded the scriptures, including those prophecies of his own death and resurrection. He said to his disciples:

“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

“And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again” (Matthew 20:18–19). . . .

As the dawn of that third day was beginning, Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” had come to the sepulchre in which his lifeless body had been laid [Matthew 28:1; see also Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10]. Earlier, the chief priests and the Pharisees had gone to Pilate and persuaded him to place a guard at the door of the sepulchre, “lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead” (Matthew 27:64). But two mighty angels had rolled the stone from the door of the tomb, and the would-be guards had fled in terror at the sight.

When the women came to the tomb, they found it open and empty. The angels had tarried to tell them the greatest news ever to fall on human ears: “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:6).<sup>7</sup>

No doctrine in the Christian canon is more important to all mankind than the doctrine of the resurrection of the Son of God. Through him came the resurrection of all men, women, and children who have ever been—or ever will be—born into the world.

In spite of the great importance we place upon the resurrection in our doctrine, perhaps many of us may not yet have fully glimpsed its spiritual significance and eternal grandeur. If we had, we would marvel at its beauty as did Jacob, the brother of Nephi,



*Jesus Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene shortly after  
He was resurrected (see John 20:1–18).*

and we would shudder at the alternative we would have faced had we not received this divine gift. Jacob wrote:

“O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that

angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:8).

Surely the resurrection is the center of every Christian’s faith; it is the greatest of all of the miracles performed by the Savior of the world. Without it, we are indeed left hopeless. Let me borrow the words of Paul: “If there be no resurrection of the dead, . . . then is our preaching vain, . . . and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ. . . . If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:13–15, 17).<sup>8</sup>

Without the Resurrection, the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a litany of wise sayings and seemingly unexplainable miracles—but sayings and miracles with no ultimate triumph. No, the ultimate triumph is in the ultimate miracle: for the first time in the history of mankind, one who was dead raised himself into living immortality. He *was* the Son of God, the Son of our immortal Father in Heaven, and his triumph over physical and spiritual death is the good news every Christian tongue should speak.

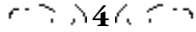
The eternal truth is that Jesus Christ arose from the grave and was the firstfruits of the Resurrection. (See 1 Cor. 15:23.) The witnesses of this wonderful occurrence cannot be impeached.

Among the chosen witnesses are the Lord’s Apostles. Indeed, the call to the holy apostleship is one of bearing witness to the world of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith said, “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.” (*History of the Church*, 3:30.) . . .

In teaching his Apostles, Christ made known to them “that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31.) So it was. He was crucified and placed in the tomb. On the third day, he did arise to live again—the Savior of all mankind and the firstfruits of the Resurrection. Through this atoning sacrifice, all men shall be saved from the grave and shall



live again. This always has been the testimony of the Apostles, to which I add my witness.<sup>9</sup>



### **Jesus appeared to many after His Resurrection.**

In the days that followed his resurrection, the Lord appeared unto many. He displayed his five special wounds to them. He walked and talked and ate with them, as if to prove beyond a doubt that a resurrected body is indeed a physical body of tangible flesh and bones. Later he ministered to the Nephites, whom he commanded to “arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

“And . . . the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come” (3 Nephi 11:14–15).

It is the responsibility and joy of all men and women everywhere to “seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have [testified]” (Ether 12:41) and to have the spiritual witness of his divinity. It is the right and blessing of all who humbly seek, to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness of the Father and his resurrected Son.<sup>10</sup>

The testimony of those who saw [Jesus] as a living person after his death has never been contradicted. He appeared at least ten or eleven times: to Mary Magdalene and the other women in the garden, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to Peter at Jerusalem, to the apostles when Thomas was absent and again when he was present, to the apostles at the Sea of Galilee, and on a mountain to over 500 brethren at once, to James the brother of the Lord, and to the apostles at the time of the ascension.<sup>11</sup>

As one called and ordained to bear witness of the name of Jesus Christ to all the world, I testify at this Easter season that he lives. He has a glorified, immortal body of flesh and bones. He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh. He is the Savior, the Light and Life of the world. Following his crucifixion and death, he appeared as a resurrected being to Mary, to Peter, to Paul, and to many others. He showed himself to the Nephites. He has shown himself to Joseph Smith, the boy prophet, and to many others in our dispensation.<sup>12</sup>

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**We shall rise from death and have life everlasting.**

Easter is the celebration of the free gift of immortality given to all men, restoring life and healing all wounds. Though all will die as part of the eternal plan of growth and development, nevertheless we can all find comfort in the Psalmist's statement, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5.)

It was Job who posed what might be called the question of the ages: "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14.) Christ's answer rings down through time to this very hour: "Because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19.)<sup>13</sup>

There is a separation of the spirit and the body at the time of death. The resurrection will again unite the spirit with the body, and the body becomes a spiritual body, one of flesh and bones but quickened by the spirit instead of blood. Thus, our bodies after the resurrection, quickened by the spirit, shall become immortal and never die. This is the meaning of the statements of Paul that "there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" and "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" [see 1 Corinthians 15:44, 50]. The natural body is flesh and blood, but quickened by the spirit instead of blood, it can and will enter the kingdom. . . .

I have a conviction that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. As Paul bore testimony to the saints of Corinth by his letter at that Easter season many years ago, I add my witness that we shall rise from mortal death to have life everlasting, because of the atoning

sacrifice and resurrection of the Savior. In my mind I picture him with arms outstretched to all who will hear:

“. . . 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.” (John 11:25–26.)<sup>14</sup>

Christ’s resurrection ushers in the blessing of immortality and the possibility of eternal life. His empty tomb proclaims to all the world, “He is not here, but is risen.” (Luke 24:6.) These words contain all the hope, assurance, and belief necessary to sustain us in our challenging and sometimes grief-filled lives.<sup>15</sup>

## **Suggestions for Study and Teaching**

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### *Questions*

- How does the Atonement demonstrate the love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ for us? (See section 1.) How can we show gratitude for this gift of love? (See D&C 42:29.)
- As you review section 2, look for the many ways the Atonement blesses us. How do President Hunter’s teachings and use of the scriptures enhance your understanding of the Atonement? What experiences have strengthened your testimony of the Atonement? How can the power of the Atonement strengthen you during your trials?
- What are your impressions as you study President Hunter’s teachings about the Resurrection? (See section 3.) How might we better appreciate the significance of the Resurrection?
- Review section 4, in which President Hunter details many witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why is the testimony of these witnesses significant?
- Consider President Hunter’s teaching that the Resurrection provides “all the hope, assurance, and belief necessary to sustain us in our challenging and sometimes grief-filled lives” (section 5). How is the Resurrection a source of hope and consolation for you? How has a testimony of the Resurrection enriched your life?

### *Related Scriptures*

John 10:17–18; 2 Nephi 2:6–9, 22–27; 9:19–25; 3 Nephi 27:13–16; D&C 18:10–16; 19:15–20; Moses 6:59–60

### *Study Help*

“Plan study activities that will build your faith in the Savior” (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], 22). For instance, as you study you might ask yourself questions such as the following: “How might these teachings help me increase my understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ? How can these teachings help me become more like the Savior?”

### **Notes**

1. In Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* (1994), 88; see also 86–87.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1968, 139.
3. “Evidences of the Resurrection,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 16.
4. “The Atonement of Jesus Christ” (address given at mission presidents’ seminar, June 24, 1988), 2–3, 7, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; see also *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 8–9.
5. “He Is Risen,” *Ensign*, May 1988, 16–17.
6. “The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 18.
7. “He Is Risen,” 16–17.
8. “He Is Risen,” 16.
9. “An Apostle’s Witness of the Resurrection,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 16–17.
10. “He Is Risen,” 17.
11. In Conference Report, Apr. 1963, 106.
12. “He Is Risen,” 17.
13. “An Apostle’s Witness of the Resurrection,” 16.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 138–39.
15. “An Apostle’s Witness of the Resurrection,” 15–16.