



Sealing Power and Temple Blessings

“Elijah came to restore to the earth . . . the fulness of the power of priesthood. This priesthood holds the keys of binding and sealing on earth and in heaven of all the ordinances and principles pertaining to the salvation of man.”

From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith

In 1902 Joseph Fielding Smith traveled to the state of Massachusetts, where he was able to find information about his Smith ancestors. While he was there, he met a genealogist named Sidney Perley. Mr. Perley told him, “It is my ambition, if I can do it, to search out the records of every individual who came to Essex County before the year 1700.”

President Smith later recounted: “I said to him, ‘Mr. Perley, you have cut out for yourself a big work, haven’t you?’ He replied, ‘Yes, and I am afraid I’ll never finish it.’ Then I said to him, ‘Why are you doing this work?’ He thought a moment and looked rather puzzled and then replied, ‘I do not know why, but I got started, and I cannot stop.’ I said, ‘I can tell you why you are doing this and why you cannot stop, but if I did, you would not believe me and would laugh at me.’

“‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I don’t know. If you can tell me, I am sure I will be interested.’ Then I told him of the prophecy concerning Elijah and the fulfilment of this promise to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple, and how this spirit of research had taken hold of many people, and they had turned their hearts to the seeking after the dead in fulfilment of this great promise which was to come before the second coming, so that



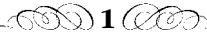
All members of the family can participate in family history work.

the earth would not be smitten with a curse. Now the children were turning their hearts toward their fathers, and we were doing the ordinance work for the dead that they might find redemption and have the privilege of coming into the kingdom of God, although dead.

“When I got through, he laughed and said, ‘It is a very pretty story, but I do not believe it.’ Yet he admitted that there was something compelling him to carry on this research, and he could not stop. I have met a great many others who also started and could not stop, men and women who are not members of the Church. So we find today thousands of men and women searching out the records of the dead. They do not know why, but it is so that we can obtain these compiled records and go into our temples and do the work for our dead.”¹

President Smith taught that family history is about more than finding names, dates, and places and gathering stories. It is about providing temple ordinances that unite families for eternity, sealing faithful people of all generations as members of the family of God. “Parents must be sealed to each other, and children to parents in order to receive the blessings of the celestial kingdom,” he said. “Therefore our salvation and progression depends upon the salvation of our worthy dead with whom we must be joined in family ties. This can only be accomplished in our Temples.”² Before offering the dedicatory prayer in the Ogden Utah Temple, he said, “May I remind you that when we dedicate a house to the Lord, what we really do is dedicate ourselves to the Lord’s service, with a covenant that we shall use the house in the way he intends that it shall be used.”³

Teachings of Joseph Fielding Smith



Elijah restored the power to seal, or bind, on earth and in heaven.

Malachi, the last of the prophets of the Old Testament, closed his predictions with these words:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Mal. 4:5–6.)

It seems to be most fitting that the last of the old prophets should close his words with a promise to future generations, and in that promise predict a time to come when there would be a linking of the dispensations past with those of later times. . . .

We have a much clearer interpretation of the words of Malachi given by the Nephite prophet Moroni, who appeared to Joseph Smith September 21, 1823. This is the way the angel quoted them:

“Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

“And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

“If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.” (D&C 2:1–3.)

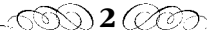
Moroni informed Joseph Smith that this prediction was about to be fulfilled. The fulfillment came some twelve years later, on April 3, 1836. On this day Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple and there conferred upon them . . . the power to bind, or seal, on earth and in heaven. The keys of this priesthood were held by Elijah, to whom the Lord gave power over the elements as well as over men, with the authority to seal for time and eternity on the righteous all the ordinances pertaining to the fullness of salvation.⁴

Some members of the Church have been confused in thinking that Elijah came with the keys of baptism for the dead or of salvation for the dead. Elijah’s keys were greater than that. They were the keys of sealing, and those keys of sealing pertain to the living and embrace the dead who are willing to repent.⁵

Elijah came to restore to the earth, by conferring on mortal prophets duly commissioned of the Lord, the fulness of the power of Priesthood. This Priesthood holds the keys of binding and sealing

on earth and in heaven of all the ordinances and principles pertaining to the salvation of man, that they may thus become valid in the celestial kingdom of God. . . .

It is by virtue of this authority that ordinances are performed in the temples for both the living and the dead. It is the power which unites for eternity husbands and wives when they enter into marriage according to the eternal plan. It is the authority by which parents obtain the claim of parenthood concerning their children through all eternity and not only for time, which makes eternal the family in the Kingdom of God.⁶



The restoration of the sealing authority saves the earth from being utterly wasted at the coming of Jesus Christ.

If Elijah had not come we are led to believe that all the work of past ages would have been of little avail, for the Lord said the whole earth, under such conditions, would be utterly wasted at his coming. Therefore his mission was of vast importance to the world. It is not the question of baptism for the dead alone, but also the sealing of parents and children to parents, so that there should be a “whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys and powers and glories,” from the beginning down to the end of time [see D&C 128:18]. If this sealing power were not on the earth, then confusion would reign and disorder would take place of order in that day when the Lord shall come, and, of course, this could not be, for all things are governed and controlled by perfect law in the kingdom of God.⁷

Why would the earth be wasted? Simply because if there is not a welding link between the fathers and the children—which is the work for the dead—then we will all stand rejected; the whole work of God will fail and be utterly wasted. Such a condition, of course, shall not be.⁸

The restoration of this [sealing] authority is the leaven that saves the earth from being utterly wasted at the coming of Jesus Christ. When we get this truth firmly and clearly fixed in our minds, it is easy to see that there would be only confusion and disaster should Christ come and the power of sealing not be here.⁹



The sealing power of the priesthood “unites for eternity husbands and wives when they enter into marriage according to the eternal plan.”

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To prepare for salvation in its fullest, we must receive temple ordinances through the sealing power.

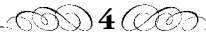
The Lord [has] given unto us privileges and blessings, and the opportunity of entering into covenants, accepting ordinances that pertain to our salvation beyond what is preached in the world, beyond the principles of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance from sin and baptism for the remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost; and these principles and covenants are received nowhere else but in the temple of God.¹⁰

Temple work is so interwoven with the plan of salvation, that one cannot exist without the other. In other words, there can be no salvation where there [are] no temple ordinances peculiarly belonging to the temple.¹¹

There are thousands of Latter-day Saints who . . . are willing to go to meeting, willing to pay their tithing and attend to the regular duties of the Church, but they do not seem to feel or understand the importance of receiving the blessings in the temple of the Lord which will bring them into exaltation. It is a strange thing. People seem to be content just to slide along without taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them and without receiving these necessary covenants that will bring them back into the presence of God as sons and daughters.¹²

If you want salvation in the fullest, that is exaltation in the kingdom of God, . . . you have got to go into the temple of the Lord and receive these holy ordinances which belong to that house, which cannot be had elsewhere. No man shall receive the fulness of eternity, of exaltation alone; no woman shall receive that blessing alone; but man and wife, when they receive the sealing power in the temple of the Lord, shall pass on to exaltation, and shall continue and become like the Lord. And that is the destiny of men, that is what the Lord desires for His children.¹³

Note: To read some of President Smith's words of hope and promise for faithful people who are unable to receive all the ordinances of the temple in their lifetimes, see chapter 15 in this book.



**Because of the sealing power, we can
perform saving ordinances for those who
have died without receiving them.**

Who are the fathers spoken of by Malachi, and who are the children? The fathers are our dead ancestors who died without the privilege of receiving the Gospel, but who received the promise that the time would come when that privilege would be granted them. The children are those now living who are preparing genealogical data and who are performing the vicarious ordinances in the Temples.¹⁴

Elijah came, having the keys of sealing, and the power has been given unto us by which we may reach out after the dead. This sealing power embraces those who are dead who are willing to repent and to receive the Gospel who died without that knowledge, just the same as it reaches out for those who repent who are living.¹⁵

The Lord has decreed that all of his spirit children, every soul who has lived or shall live on earth, shall have a fair and just opportunity to believe and obey the laws of his everlasting gospel. Those who accept the gospel and live in harmony with its laws, including baptism and celestial marriage, shall have eternal life.

It is obvious that only a small portion of mankind has so far heard the word of revealed truth from the voice of one of the Lord's true servants. In the wisdom and justice of the Lord, all must do so. As Peter said:

“For this cause was the gospel 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.)

Those who did not have the opportunity to hear the message of salvation in this life but who would have accepted it with all their hearts if such an opportunity had come to them—they are the ones who will accept it in the spirit world; they are the ones for whom we shall perform the ordinances in the temples; and they are the ones who shall, in this way, become heirs with us of salvation and eternal life.¹⁶

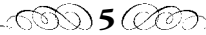
The turning of the hearts of fathers to children and of children to fathers, is the power of salvation for the dead, by means of the vicarious work which the children may perform for their fathers, and is in every sense reasonable and consistent. I have heard it said many times by those who oppose this work that it is impossible for one person to stand vicariously for another. Those who express themselves in this way overlook the fact that the entire work of salvation is a vicarious work, Jesus Christ standing as the propitiator, redeeming us from death, for which we were not responsible, and also redeeming us from the responsibility of our own sins, on condition of our repentance and acceptance of the gospel. He has done this on a grand infinite scale and by the same principle he has delegated authority to the members of his Church to act for the dead who are helpless to perform the saving ordinances for themselves.¹⁷

I think sometimes we look at this work for the salvation of the dead rather narrowly. It is a wrong conception to think of the people for whom we are doing work in the temple of the Lord as being

dead. We should think of them as living; and the living proxy but represents them in receiving the blessings which they should have received and would have received in this life had they been living in a gospel dispensation. Therefore every dead person for whom work is done in the temple is considered to be living at the time the ordinance is given.¹⁸

This doctrine of salvation for the dead is one of the most glorious principles ever revealed to man. It is the way in which the gospel shall be offered to all men. It establishes the fact that God is no respecter of persons [see Acts 10:34]; that every soul is precious in His sight; and that all men will, in fact and in reality, be judged according to their works.

Now, I thank the Lord that He has restored His everlasting gospel to us in this day. I thank Him for the sealing power returned to earth by the Prophet Elijah. I thank Him for the eternal family unit, for the privilege we have of being sealed ourselves in his holy temples, and for then making available these sealing blessings to be given to our ancestors who died without a knowledge of the gospel.¹⁹

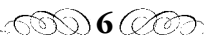


**Family history work and temple work
for the dead are labors of love.**

There are many good, humble souls who have deprived themselves of the comforts, and at times the necessities, of life, in order that they might prepare the records and perform the labor for their dead that the gift of salvation might be taken unto them. These labors of love shall not go for naught, for all those who have worked in this goodly cause shall find their treasure and riches in the celestial kingdom of God. Great shall be their reward, yea, even beyond the power of mortals to understand.²⁰

There is no work connected with the gospel that is of a more unselfish nature than the work in the House of the Lord, for our dead. Those who work for the dead do not expect to receive any earthly remuneration or reward. It is, above all, a work of love, which is begotten in the heart of man through faithful and constant labor in these saving ordinances. There are no financial returns, but there shall be great joy in heaven with those souls whom we have helped

to their salvation. It is a work that enlarges the soul of man, broadens his views regarding the welfare of his fellowman, and plants in his heart a love for all the children of our Heavenly Father. There is no work equal to that in the temple for the dead in teaching a man to love his neighbor as himself. Jesus so loved the world that he was willing to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin that the world might be saved. We also have the privilege, in a small degree, of showing our great love for Him and our fellow beings by helping them to the blessings of the gospel which now they cannot receive without our assistance.²¹



Through family history work and temple work, we complete the family organization from generation to generation.

The doctrine of salvation for the dead and temple work holds out to us the glorious prospect of the continuance of the family relation. Through it we learn that family ties are not to be broken, that husbands and wives will eternally have a claim upon each other and upon their children to the latest generation. However, in order to receive these privileges the sealing ordinances in the temple of our God must be obtained. All contracts, bonds, obligations and agreements made by men shall come to an end, but the obligations and agreements entered into in the house of the Lord, if faithfully kept, will last forever [see D&C 132:7]. This doctrine gives us a clearer concept of the purposes of the Lord toward his children. It shows his abundant and unlimited mercy and love to all who obey him, aye, even to those who are rebellious, for in his goodness he will grant great blessings even unto them.²²

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.²³

There must be a welding, a joining together of the generations from the days of Adam to the end of time. Families will be joined



As we turn our hearts to ancestors who have died, we can also turn our hearts to living family members.

and linked together, parents to children, children to parents, one generation to another, until we shall be joined together in one great grand family with our father Adam at the head, where the Lord placed him. So we cannot be saved and exalted in the kingdom of God unless we have within our hearts the desire to do this work and perform it so far as it is within our power on behalf of our dead. This is a glorious doctrine, one of the grand principles of truth revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We should take advantage of our opportunities and prove ourselves worthy and acceptable in the sight of the Lord, that we might receive this exaltation for ourselves, and there rejoice in the kingdom of God with our relatives and friends in this grand reunion and assemblage of the Saints of the Church of the First Born, who have kept themselves free and unspotted from the sins of the world.

The Lord bless us and grant that we may have the desire in our hearts to magnify our calling and to serve Him in faithfulness in all these things, is my prayer.²⁴

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- In “From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith,” read President Smith’s counsel about “what we really do” at a temple dedication. What can we do to follow this counsel?
- How do the teachings in section 1 relate to our efforts to help our ancestors who have died? How can these teachings relate to our relationships with living family members?
- As you read section 2, look for President Smith’s explanation of why the sealing power “saves the earth from being utterly wasted at the coming of Jesus Christ.” What does this teach about the place of families in the plan of salvation?
- In what ways is temple work “interwoven with the plan of salvation”? (See section 3.) How can this principle influence our feelings about temple work?
- President Smith counseled that when we do temple work for the dead, we should think of the people as living (see section 4). What does this mean to you? How might this idea influence the way you serve in the temple?
- As you review section 5, look for blessings that President Smith said would come to those who do family history work. How have you found these things to be true?
- Study section 6, and imagine the experience of rejoicing with your ancestors in a “grand reunion.” Think about what you can do to prepare yourself and your family for that privilege.

Related Scriptures

1 Corinthians 15:29; D&C 95:8; 97:15–16; 128:16–19

Teaching Help

“When an individual asks a question, consider inviting others to answer it instead of answering it yourself. For example, you could say, ‘That’s an interesting question. What do the rest of you think?’

or ‘Can anyone help with this question?’” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 64).

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1948, 134.
2. “Salvation for the Dead,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1917, 361; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:147.
3. “Ogden Temple Dedicatory Prayer,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1972, 6.
4. “The Coming of Elijah,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1972, 2, 5.
5. “The Keys of the Priesthood Restored,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1936, 100.
6. “A Peculiar People: The Authority Elijah Restored,” *Deseret News*, Jan. 16, 1932, Church section, 8; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:117.
7. “Salvation for the Living and the Dead,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1918, 677–78; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:121.
8. *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:122.
9. “The Coming of Elijah,” 5.
10. In “Relief Society Conference Minutes,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Aug. 1919, 466; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:40.
11. “One Hundred Years of Progress,” *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal*, Apr. 15, 1930, 520.
12. “The Duties of the Priesthood in Temple Work,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Jan. 1939, 4.
13. “Elijah the Prophet and His Mission—IV,” *Instructor*, Mar. 1952, 67.
14. “Salvation for the Dead,” *Millennial Star*, Dec. 8, 1927, 775; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:127.
15. “The Keys of the Priesthood Restored,” 101.
16. *Sealing Power and Salvation*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Jan. 12, 1971), 2–3; italics removed.
17. *The Restoration of All Things* (1945), 174–75.
18. “The Keys of the Priesthood Restored,” 100–101.
19. *Sealing Power and Salvation*, 3.
20. “A Greeting,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Jan. 1935, 5; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:180.
21. “Salvation for the Dead,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1917, 362; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:144.
22. “Salvation for the Dead,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1917, 362–63; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:173.
23. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 26; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:175.
24. In Conference Report, Oct. 1911, 122.