

# First Presidency Message

## A Temple-Motivated People

By President Howard W. Hunter

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The gospel proclaimed to the world by the Latter-day Saints is the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored to the earth in this dispensation and is for the redemption of all mankind. The Lord himself has revealed what is essential for the salvation and exaltation of his children. One of these essentials is that temples are to be erected for the performance of ordinances that cannot be performed in any other place.

When this is explained to people from all over the world who come and look at our temples, the question these people most frequently ask is, what are the ordinances that are performed in temples?

In response, we often first explain the ordinance known as baptism for the dead. We note that many Christians believe that at the time of death, our status before the Lord is determined for all eternity, for did not Christ say to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:5](#))? Yet we know that many people have died without the ordinance of baptism, and thus, according to Christ's statement to Nicodemus, they would be eliminated from entering into the kingdom of God. This raises the question, is God just?

The answer is, of course God is just. It is evident that the Savior's statement to Nicodemus presupposes that baptisms may be done for those who have died who have not been baptized. Latter-day prophets have told us that baptism is an earthly ordinance that can be performed only by the living. How then can those who are dead be baptized if only the living can perform the ordinance? That was the theme of the Apostle Paul's writing to the Corinthians when he asked this question:

"Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" ([1 Cor. 15:29](#).)

In fact, as we study ecclesiastical history, we find that baptism for the dead was practiced by the early Christians. There was vicarious work for the dead at that time, and there is today. Indeed, vicarious work is not something new or strange to us. We remember that the Savior himself in a vicarious manner atoned for the sins of all mankind. Today, baptisms are again performed by the living in behalf of individuals who have died, as is also the laying on of hands for the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost for these same deceased people. These ordinances for the deceased, however, are performed only in the house of the Lord.

The endowment is another ordinance performed in our temples. It consists of two parts: first, a series of instructions, and second, promises or covenants that the person receiving the endowment makes—promises to live righteously and comply with the requirements of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The endowment is an ordinance for the great blessing of the Saints—both living and dead. Thus it is also an ordinance performed by the living in behalf of deceased individuals; it is performed for those for whom baptismal work has already been performed.

Another temple ordinance is that of celestial marriage, where wife is sealed to husband and husband sealed to wife for eternity. We know, of course, that civil marriages end at death; but eternal marriages performed in the temple may exist forever. Children born to a husband and wife after an eternal marriage are automatically sealed to their parents for eternity. If children are born before the wife is sealed to her husband, there is a temple sealing ordinance that can seal these children to their parents for eternity, and so it is that children can be sealed vicariously to parents who have passed away.

In the ordinances of the temple, the foundations of the eternal family are sealed in place. The Church has the responsibility—and the authority—to preserve and protect the family as the foundation of society.

All of these priesthood temple ordinances are essential for the salvation and exaltation of our Father in Heaven's children. Therefore, it is of great interest that within the last two decades, three revelations relating to these matters have been added to the Doctrine and Covenants. We rejoiced when the revelation concerning the bestowal of the priesthood upon all worthy males was announced in 1978 by the First Presidency. That announcement is Official Declaration 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants. Also, two other sections were added in the 1970s to the Doctrine and Covenants: sections 137 and 138. It is most significant that both these revelations pertain specifically to the work for the redemption of the dead.

Section 137 records a vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple. In that vision, he saw his brother Alvin, who had departed this life, and his parents. The voice of the Lord came to him and said that "all who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God" ([D&C 137:7](#)).

Section 138 records a divine manifestation given to President Joseph F. Smith that also pertains to the work of redemption of the dead. President Smith had been pondering our Lord's visit to the spirit world as he read the First Epistle of Peter and reflected upon

the verse that states, "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 Pet. 4:6](#)).

A vision then unfolded to President Smith. That vision is recorded in section 138. President Smith saw that "the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them;

"But behold, from among the righteous, he 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, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead" ([D&C 138:2930](#)).

Surely we on this side of the veil have a great work to do. For in light of all the above-noted facts about temple ordinances, we can see that the building of temples has deep significance for ourselves and mankind, and our responsibilities become clear. We must accomplish the priesthood temple ordinance work necessary for our own exaltation; then we must do the necessary work for those who did not have the opportunity to accept the gospel in life. Doing work for others is accomplished in two steps: first, by family history research to ascertain our progenitors; and second, by performing the temple ordinances to give them the same opportunities afforded to the living.

Yet there are many members of the Church who have only limited access to the temples. They do the best they can. They pursue family history research and have the temple ordinance work done by others. Conversely, there are some members who engage in temple work but fail to do family history research on their own family lines. Although they perform a divine service in assisting others, they lose a blessing by not seeking their own kindred dead as divinely directed by latter-day prophets.

I recall an experience of a few years ago that is analogous to this condition. At the close of a fast and testimony meeting, the bishop remarked, "We have had a spiritual experience today listening to the testimonies borne by each other. This is because we have come fasting according to the law of the Lord. But let us never forget that the law consists of two parts: that we fast by abstaining from food and drink and that we contribute what we have thereby saved to the bishop's storehouse for the benefit of those who are less fortunate." Then he added: "I hope no one of us will leave today with only half a blessing."

I have learned that those who engage in family history research and then perform the temple ordinance work for those whose names they have found will know the additional joy of receiving both halves of the blessing.

Furthermore, the dead are anxiously waiting for the Latter-day Saints to search out their names and then go into the temples to officiate in their behalf, that they may be liberated from their prison house in the spirit world. All of us should find joy in this magnificent labor of love.

What a glorious thing it is for us to have the privilege of going to the temple for our own blessings. Then after going to the temple for our own blessings, what a glorious privilege to do the work for those who have gone on before us. This aspect of temple work is an unselfish work. Yet whenever we do temple work for other people, there is a blessing that comes back to us. Thus it should be no surprise to us that the Lord does desire that his people be a temple-motivated people. I repeat what I have said before: It would please the Lord for every adult member to be worthy of—and to carry—a current temple recommend, even if proximity to a temple does not allow immediate or frequent use of it. The things that we must do and not do to be worthy of a temple recommend are the very things that ensure we will be happy as individuals and as families.

Let us truly be a temple-attending and a temple-loving people. We should hasten to the temple as frequently, yet prudently, as our personal circumstances allow. We should go not only for our kindred dead but also for the personal blessing of temple worship, for the sanctity and safety that are within those hallowed and consecrated walls. As we attend the temple, we learn more richly and deeply the purpose of life and the significance of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us make the temple, with temple worship and temple covenants and temple marriage, our ultimate earthly goal and the supreme mortal experience.

Let us share with our children the spiritual feelings we have in the temple. And let us teach them more earnestly and more comfortably the things we can appropriately say about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Keep a picture of a temple in your home that your children may see it. Teach them about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Have them plan from their earliest years to go there and to remain worthy of that blessing. Let us prepare every missionary to go to the temple worthily and to make that experience an even greater highlight than receiving the mission call. Let us plan for and teach and plead with our children to marry in the house of the Lord. Let us reaffirm more vigorously than we ever have in the past that it does matter where you marry and by what authority you are pronounced man and wife.

All of our efforts in proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead lead to the holy temple. This is because the temple ordinances are absolutely crucial; we cannot return to God's presence without them. I encourage everyone to worthily attend the temple or to work toward the day when you can enter that holy house to receive your ordinances and covenants. As the prophets have said, the temple is a place of beauty; it is a place of revelation; it is a place of peace. It is the house of the Lord. It is holy unto the Lord. It must be holy and important to us.