

GD30 - "The Prisoners Shall Go Free"  
Goose Creek Ward, Ashburn, VA Stake  
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August 19, 2001

The chastening experiences of Kirtland and Missouri purged the Church, resulting in a considerable number of apostasies. But, this left the remaining members better prepared for what the Lord would reveal. During the Nauvoo years Temple worship as we know it today had its origin. Vicarious ordinance work, endowments, and eternal marriages were revealed and put in order at Nauvoo.

Next week's lesson will discuss eternal marriage. This week's lesson discusses vicarious ordinance work.

### **Context of the Quotation**

D&C 128:22 Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! 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.**

In D&C 128:20-23 Joseph exults in the blessings of the gospel that has been revealed to them as well as the restoration of the Priesthood. The restoration of the Priesthood is what has enabled vicarious ordinance work to commence, and Joseph wants the Saints to employ that Priesthood in the manner in which it was intended.

### **History**

It is not entirely clear when Joseph became aware of the doctrine of vicarious ordinance work. It is plain from the history that Joseph first introduced it to the Saints in August 1840. However, it is likely Joseph had at least some intimation of the work before this time.

In his threefold interview with Moroni the night of September 21, 1823 passages from Malachi were discussed (cf. JS-H 1:37-39) although no specific details were reiterated by Smith. Regardless of Smith's omission of details, the passages which he informs us were discussed are those which are subsequently explicitly linked with vicarious ordinance work (cf. D&C 110:13-16). This strongly suggests the topic of conversation between Joseph and Moroni on that September 1823 evening was vicarious ordinance work.

With respect to the advent of the work at Nauvoo, the following historical overview gives the details:

Baptisms for the dead began shortly after Joseph Smith preached about them on 16 August 1840, at the funeral of Seymour Brunson. From that time, although careful records were not always kept, the Saints commenced to think about the necessity for this ordinance and began to attend to it. Jane Nyman appears to have been among the first. After consultation with her husband, she entered the waters of the Mississippi River on 13 September 1840 and was baptized in behalf of her deceased son. One month later, on 15 October, residents on the Iowa side of the Mississippi commenced to do the same. One year later, at the October conference, the Prophet brought the baptisms for the dead outside the temple to a halt: "There shall be no more baptisms for the dead, until the ordinance can be attended to in the Lord's House." The first baptisms for the dead performed in the temple took place on 21 November 1841. (Doctrines For Exaltation: 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants, Redemption for the Dead, by Leland Gentry, page 84)

Subsequent to Smith's first public lectures on the subject Smith wrote a letter to the Quorum of the Twelve, who at that time were largely engaged in missionary work in England. Below is an excerpt from the letter dated October 19, 1840.

I presume the doctrine of "baptism for the dead" has ere this reached your ears, and may have raised some inquiries in your minds respecting the same. I cannot in this letter give you all the information you may desire on the subject; but aside from knowledge independent of the Bible, I would say that it was certainly practiced by the ancient churches; and St. Paul endeavors to prove the doctrine of the resurrection from the same, and says, "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?"

I first mentioned the doctrine in public when preaching the funeral sermon of Brother Seymour Brunson; and have since then given general instructions in the Church on the subject. The Saints have the privilege of being baptized for those of their relatives who are dead, whom they believe would have embraced the Gospel, if they had been privileged with hearing it, and who have received the Gospel in the spirit, through the instrumentality of those who have

been commissioned to preach to them while in prison.

Without enlarging on the subject, you will undoubtedly see its consistency and reasonableness; and it presents the Gospel of Christ in probably a more enlarged scale than some have imagined it. But as the performance of this rite is more particularly confined to this place, it will not be necessary to enter into particulars; at the same time I always feel glad to give all the information in my power, but my space will not allow me to do it. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 4, page 231)

Subsequent to these events, on September 7, 1842, Smith wrote the letter which ultimately became the text of D&C 128. In this letter Joseph exults in the doctrine of the redemption of the dead and passionately encourages the Saints to embrace it and act accordingly. Smith then comments on the text of the letter:

The important instructions contained in the foregoing letter made a deep and solemn impression on the minds of the Saints; and they manifested their intentions to obey the instructions to the letter. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 5, page 153)

Clearly, Joseph's intention was to get the Saints "to obey the instructions of the letter", plainly indicating they generally weren't. The next significant public lecture we are aware of occurred Sunday, January 21, 1844 at Nauvoo, and Smith comments:

Preached at the southeast corner of the temple to several thousand people, although the weather was somewhat unpleasant. My subject was the sealing of the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 6, pages 183)

While Joseph's account is quite terse, Elder Woodford Woodruff gives a much more detailed account of what Joseph said at that meeting, as follows:

Discourse: The Sealing Power in the Priesthood.

When I consider the surrounding circumstances in which I am placed this day, standing in the open air with weak lungs, and somewhat out of health, I feel that I must have the prayers and faith of my brethren that God may strengthen me and pour out His special blessing upon me, if you get very much from me this day.

There are many people assembled here to-day, and

throughout the city, and from various parts of the world, who say that they have received to a certainty a portion of the knowledge from God, by revelation, in the way that He has ordained and pointed out.

I shall take the broad ground, then, that we have received a portion of knowledge from God by immediate revelation, and from the same source we can receive all knowledge.

What shall I talk about to-day? I know what Brother Cahoon wants me to speak about. He wants me to speak about the coming of Elijah in the last days. I can see it in his eye. I will speak upon that subject then.

The Bible says, "I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Now, the word turn here should be translated bind, or seal. But what is the object of this important mission? or how is it to be fulfilled? The keys are to be delivered, the spirit of Elijah is to come, the Gospel to be established, the Saints of God gathered, Zion built up, and the Saints to come up as saviors on Mount Zion.

But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah. And I would to God that this temple was now done, that we might go into it, and go to work and improve our time, and make use of the seals while they are on earth.

The Saints have not too much time to save and redeem their dead, and gather together their living relatives, that they may be saved also, before the earth will be smitten, and the consumption decreed falls upon the world.

I would advise all the Saints to go to with their might and gather together all their living relatives to this place, that they may be sealed and saved, that they may be prepared against the day that the destroying angel goes forth; and if the whole Church should go to with all their might to save their dead, seal their posterity, and gather their living friends, and spend none of their time in behalf of the world, they would hardly get through before night would come, when no man can work; and my only trouble at the present time is concerning ourselves, that the Saints will be divided, broken up, and scattered, before we get our salvation secure; for there are so many fools in the world for the devil to operate upon, it gives him the advantage oftentimes.

The question is frequently asked "Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances, &c.?" I would answer, No, not the fullness of salvation. Jesus said, "There are many mansions in my Father's house, and I will go and prepare a place for you." House here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too.

But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 6, pages 183-185)

It is plain from his comments in the last 3 or 4 paragraphs that Smith is somewhat frustrated over the lack of zeal the Saints show for the work and their general lack of willingness to wholeheartedly embrace the doctrine and act on it.

But, that is typical and should be no surprise. Whenever some new doctrine is revealed there is always lag time between revelation and assimilation. At that time the people were more concerned

about their own baptisms and constructing the Temple so they could take out their own endowments. Many people only had the opportunity to take out their own endowments mere days before they had to flee Nauvoo. It isn't until the Church is established and well-settled in Utah the efforts at vicarious ordinance work are attended to in earnest. And, even today, the Church is consistently admonished to spend more time in the Temple, and given the consistent admonitions it certainly appears we're not really paying attention.

### **Doctrinal Importance of Vicarious Ordinance Work**

Given the eminent position Malachi 4 is placed in throughout the history of the restoration it should be plain how important this doctrine is. Very early on Joseph was apparently lectured on the subject at length by Moroni (cf. JS-H 1:37-39). The Kirtland Temple was built expressly for the purpose of disbursing the keys of the gathering of Israel and of vicarious ordinance work (cf. D&C 105:33, D&C 110). And the Lord tells the Saints to build a Temple in Nauvoo so there will be an appropriate place to perform baptisms for the dead (cf. D&C 124:25-41).

As we believe in the continuity of the spirit, the resurrection of the body, and of being eternally sealed in families, it logically follows that ordinance work must be performed posthumously in order to seal families together. Hence its position as one of the three great missions of the Church.

### **Antiquity of Temple Ordinances**

While there is considerable evidence of the ancient and pre-Christian origin of Temple ordinances such as baptism and the endowment ceremony, all available evidence suggests vicarious ordinance work did not start until the Christian era, cf. 1 Cor. 15:29. Note the Lord states there are lost Temple ordinances to be revealed, and if they are lost then they must have been available at some point in the past (cf. D&C 124:28, D&C 124:40-41, D&C 127:8).

That vicarious Temple work is strictly a Christian era activity would follow the general premise of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6. If post-mortal proselyting did not start until after Jesus' resurrection, then vicarious ordinance work would have been putting the cart before the horse. It may have been done before the Christian era, but it would have had no immediate effect. And if it was done in a pre-Christian setting there is nothing in the texts presently available to us to suggest it.

## History of Nauvoo Temple Construction

To cast some light on the physical and mechanical aspects of the construction of the Temple at Nauvoo, the following excerpt is provided:

Just as most of the large religious gatherings in Nauvoo centered on the temple site, so most of the life in the city centered on the temple. The temple was the main topic of conversation when friends met in the streets and in letters sent back home. It was the showpiece to visitors, and its commanding position made it the first thing to catch the eye of boat passengers on the river. A traveling lecturer of the late 1840s, J. R. Smith, called the temple in Nauvoo the finest building in the west. Erected in only five years, it was, he told his audiences, the largest building west of Cincinnati and north of St. Louis. John Greenleaf Whittier noted that when completed, the Nauvoo Temple would be "the most splendid and imposing architectural monument in the New World...a temple unique and wonderful as the faith of its builders." It absorbed the interest of Mormons and non-Mormons alike.

As a public works project, building the temple provided a livelihood for numerous immigrants who might otherwise have remained unemployed for some time. Because it was a tithe-labor system that built the temple, the project should have provided one-tenth of all employment. When we consider the number engaged in the various aspects of construction, it probably did provide at least that much employment. Exactly how many people were actually engaged in the construction varied with the season. We get some idea, however, from another of Ann Pitchforth's letters to her relatives in England: "The Temple has 200 men employed continually upon it and is truly a very fine building. Six hundred men are cutting wood and stone for the 200 builders." The woodcutters were the men at the Black River pineries, whose lumber rafts furnished much of the lumber for the whole town. The entire interior and roof of the temple were of Wisconsin white pine and hardwoods. The stone cutters, of course, were the men at the limestone quarry.

The work of quarrying and preparing the stone was, without doubt, the most hazardous and grueling work in Nauvoo, but it was also perhaps the most exciting and interesting to visitors. By 1842 at least one hundred men were at work just in the quarries, drilling and blasting the rough limestone blocks. Other workers with hammer and chisel trimmed the blocks to a nearly

uniform size right at the quarry. Then the blocks were hauled by wagons and carts to the temple stone shop. There they were chiseled and polished into final shape before being lifted by huge wooden cranes into position on the walls. We can get an idea of what was involved in putting these blocks in place from a brief notation in the Prophet's journal on 23 September 1844: "The first capital weighing about two tons was raised on to the walls of the Temple." The texture of the limestone blocks permitted them to be easily tooled, making them ideal for the exterior ornamentation that attracted so much attention.

The temple required a great variety of tools and vast quantities of materials—brick, mortar, wood, stone, and metal of various kinds. Woodworkers and whitesmiths and blacksmiths were kept busy. In just three and one half years more than one hundred casks of blasting powder were used at the quarry. Crews had to be fed and clothed, teams provided and fed, and wagons, sleds, carts, and their hardware supplied. Many of these items were furnished under the tithing system, but many had to be purchased, making the temple the best customer of commercial Nauvoo.

It must be noted, however, that even the money for purchasing necessary goods was itself donated. The sacrifice of time, labor, goods, and scarce money was the most revealing feature of the entire project. When we consider the impoverished condition of these temple builders, driven destitute from their Missouri homes, the magnitude of their sacrifice takes on greater meaning. There was the inevitable criticism of such an expensive project, especially by outsiders, but Joseph Smith answered them in a public address in October 1843: "Some say it is better to give to the poor than build the Temple. The building of the Temple has sustained the poor who were driven from Missouri, and kept them from starving; and it has been the best means of this object which could be devised."

Contemporary observers might have noted not only the uniqueness of the doctrine that required such a building but also, perhaps, the uniqueness of the sacrifice that built it. In speaking of Americans in general, a British visitor, Frances Trollope, observed: "It is not in the temper of the people either to give or receive. . . . the destitute in America are not liberally relieved by individual charity." Nevertheless, the Prophet wrote in October 1841: "Scores of brethren in this city have offered to board one or two laborers each, till the temple is completed, many have volunteered to labor continually."



The Saints never considered their religious activity as a form of benevolence. When the Neighbor reported that two hundred brethren with forty to fifty teams turned out in a cold drizzling rain to cut wood for the Prophet and then, two weeks later, met again to cut wood for the poor, the newspaper was simply reporting the normal religious activities of a people doing what was expected of a chosen people.

One day in August of the Saints' last full year in their city, the editors did something that was not normal. They delayed for a few hours the publication of their weekly newspaper so that they could report an out of the ordinary event: the laying of the last shingle on the temple. Now, the editors reported, the temple was considered enclosed, and the following day would be a fast day. This response may seem a rather brief recognition for such a momentous event, but the Saints did not have time for much more. In only a few months, the stillness and serenity that marked each Sabbath day would characterize all the days of their abandoned city. (George W. Givens, *In Old Nauvoo*, pages 150-152)