

1r-D&C-30
“The Prisoners Shall Go Free”
(D&C 2, 124, 127, 128, JS-H 36-39)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background and evidences supporting the Restoration)

- I. A major purpose of the Restoration **was to redeem the dead**.
- A. Thus, on Moroni’s first visit, he re-issued the Lord’s promise of such.
- B. “Behold I will send you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet...”
“And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers....”
“If it were not so **the whole earth would be utterly wasted...**” (JS-H 38-9). (Emphasis added).
1. What a powerful reminder to the vital necessity of redeeming the dead.
- II. When time came to accomplish that great work, Satan would exert great efforts to stop it.
- A. “the Lord has revealed to me that my enemies, both in Missouri and this State, [are] again in the pursuit of me...” (See D&C 127:1-3).
- B. Satan has always exerted his greatest force to thwart God’s works at their inception, so at the institution of Baptism for the Dead, attempts were made to capture and re-imprison Joseph.
- C. Satan had reason to act, for **this great work threatened his domain**.
1. Prior to giving Peter the Priesthood Keys, Jesus promised “the gates of hell shall not prevail” due to those keys.
2. **Those keys held the power to wrest from Satan those whom he held captive.**
- D. Now, Joseph realized that “the enemy is on alert, and as the Savior said, the prince of this world cometh...” (D&C 127:11.)
- E. Joseph knew, “he hath nothing in me,” (v.11) and in spite of the efforts, Satan would fail.
- F. So in the midst of being continually hunted down by the law, Joseph did not despair, but actually exulted with confidence, “**the prisoners shall go free**” (D&C 128:22 Emphasis added).
- G. He knew he had the Priesthood power, the knowledge to accomplish it, and God’s help.
- III. Even in fleeing for his life, Joseph realized this work was so vital, he remained completely immersed in issuing forth details regarding how to carry it forth.
- A. There had been so much excitement among the people, that they had immediately begun doing the work, without order, guidance or proper authority.
- B. Joseph had come to understand the need to make records of what saving work had been done for the dead.
- C. Joseph understood as that which is bound on earth will be bound in Heaven, so records of those being bound on earth must be recorded on earth to be recorded in Heaven (D&C 128:8-9).
- D. Other important details concerning the work of bringing salvation to the dead were also received by revelation through Joseph.
- IV. Because the work coming forth was indeed for the dead, Joseph revealed that **the baptismal fonts themselves should be built below the level of the earth**.
- A. The font was thus to be “in similitude of the grave” (See D&C 128:12-13).

1. “Herein is glory and honor, and immortality and eternal life --- The ordinance of baptism by water. **To be immersed therein in order to answer to the likeness of the dead, that one principle might accord with the other; to be immersed in the water and come forth out of the water in the likeness of the resurrection of the dead in coming forth out of the graves...**” (D&C 128:12).

B. As **further proof that the earliest Christians were taught and did practice baptism for the dead**, a large number of ancient baptismal fonts still exist which were also built “in the similitude of the grave,” or below the ground. (For pictures and an account of actually seeing such sites, see Grace Vlan, “The Mormon Doctrine of Baptism as Reflected in Early Christian Baptistries,” *Dialogue*, Vol. III, Number One, Spring, 1968, pp. 151-152).

V. Joseph made clear that this work for the dead was not an afterthought, but wondrously, was **anticipated and prepared for by God Himself from before the foundations of the earth**.

A. For the Father foreknew that Man would fall and that many would die without having opportunity to hear of His work of salvation through Jesus Christ, and be therefore baptized.

B. “[Our doing this work in such a way] is only to answer the will of God, by conforming to the ordinance and preparation before the foundation of the world, for the salvation of the dead who should die without a knowledge of the gospel” (D&C 128:5).

C. Many churches through the centuries had struggled with the great dilemma of why Christ would command men to be baptized, when so many died without having that opportunity.

D. Most had come up with false ideas to answer the dilemma:

1. I.E.: “It isn’t really necessary to be baptized after all, just to believe” [Of course the same dead did not have the opportunity to believe either, and thus are still damned];

2. Or: “God predestined only a few to be saved.” (No wonder God called their doctrines “an abomination” to Him.)

3. Or: “Everyone will be saved; baptism is not necessary” (regardless of what Jesus Himself taught) etc.

E. But the Lord revealed how *He* had solved the dilemma.

1. **Christ did speak truly when He said “except a man be born of the water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:3-5).**

2. **But He had provided the way, through love, to make belief and baptism possible for every single individual.**

VI. This work was not a new thing, for the Lord’s prophets of many dispensations knew of the work for the salvation of the dead.

A. The pre-mortal Lord to Malachi: “I will send you Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 4:5-6) that “the whole earth would [not] be utterly wasted at [Christ’s] coming” (D&C 2:3).

B. Jesus to Peter: “the gates of hell shall not prevail against [those who believe in me and do good works]” (Matthew 16:18-19; D&C 128:10).

C. Paul: “Why are they then baptized for the dead” “if the dead rise not at all” (1 Corinthians 15:19; D&C 128:16).

D. John: (Seeing into the future) “and [all] the dead [will be] judged... according to their works” (Revelation 20:12; D&C 128:6).

E. **The work for the dead was so vital there was a reason it was the last work prophesied of by Malachi in closing the Old Testament, and the first principle revealed to Joseph at the beginning of the Restored Covenant (Malachi 4:5-6; Joseph Smith History 36-39).**

VII. Joseph Smith's revelation appropriately reflects the joy mankind should feel at this work.

A. **The Lord did not command baptism from arbitrariness, but out of love and wisdom.**

B. Paul explained: We are to be "buried with him [Christ] by baptism unto death; **that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness in life**" (Romans 6:4).

1. In other words, when we are baptized in the proper manner, by full immersion, we undergo, (if truly repentant), a "death" to the old persons we were, and we are reborn when we come up out of the water into a new person: cleansed and renewed.

2. When we are also baptized "by the spirit" --- that is by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost through true priesthood authority, **the spirit enters and purifies our souls and our bodies, and we truly do walk in newness of spiritual life.**

C. Thus, baptism itself *is* for Joy! So why should there be arguments against it?

VIII. **As Baptism is a beautiful ordinance, the Lord desires all to experience its hope and joy!**

A. Therefore, in the Lord's great wisdom and love, He extended the opportunity to all.

B. He did not forget those who lived before Christ came. He did not forget those billions who lived or are now living where the preaching of Christ and true baptism are not allowed.

1. Would not a wise and loving God provide a means for *all His children* to have opportunity for salvation and experience these precious ordinances and know baptism's joy?

C. To show His love *does* extend to all, He Himself went to preach to the spirits of the dead. 1 Peter 3:18-20 tells us Christ preached to the spirits in prison. 1 Peter 4:6 tells us why?

1. "For 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.**"

2. **So Christ did not go there to mock the hopeless, but to give them hope of deliverance!**

IX. So enormous was the joy Joseph felt at understanding the awesome significance of this work, it could not be contained.

A. Amidst a whole hymn of praise, He exults, "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!" (Doctrine and Covenants 12: 22).

X. Baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost are the true essence of being "Born Again."

A. Jesus made it clear that baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost [by laying on of hands through the priesthood, 2 Timothy 1:6] are the very first steps of being "born again" (John 3:3).

1. Unfortunately, many have adopted the slogan of being "Born again," yet deny the very processes by which the Savior said "being born again" occurs.

B. Our Loving Lord has provided the way by which every individual who has ever lived upon the earth can come to know Him and to experience the ordinances, either in person or vicariously, which will allow them to be Born Again."

C. Thus through personal experience or vicarious experience, **all may come to know the Joy of being born again through Christ.**