

Celestial Marriage

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I stand before you tonight in the spirit of this musical number, “I Need Thee Every Hour,” and hope and pray and desire that I may be given utterance by the power of the Spirit so that I may say those things that will please the Lord, that will be the things he would say if he personally were addressing this great congregation at this hour. When I consulted with Brother Lorin Wheelwright, he told me that it would be most appropriate if I spoke on a Thanksgiving theme, since it would fit in well with the music. I decided to do that, and prepared my mind and an outline, and gathered some quotations, but since arriving here tonight I have had nothing but a stupor of thought, nothing but uncertainty in my mind as to that subject. Rather, I think, if I may be guided by the power of the Spirit and say what will please the Lord, I shall talk to you—somewhat informally, perhaps—about the obligation that rests upon Latter-day Saints to create for themselves eternal family units patterned after the family of God, our Heavenly Father.

So that we may all be united in our thinking and be in a position to build on the same foundation, having in mind the same eternal truths, I shall initially read three or four brief passages from the revelations. I hope and pray that I may be given utterance by the Spirit and that

your hearts may be opened by the power of the same Spirit so that we will be mutually edified. I pray that we will be one in feeling and in attitude, where these great doctrinal principles are concerned, and will have riveted in our souls the determination to do all the things that must be done in this mortal probation to inherit the fulness of the glory of our Father’s kingdom.

I take for one text these words from Section 42, the revelation entitled “The Law of the Church”: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22). And in the spirit of those words, I take from the Old Testament book of Ruth these expressions which though not originally uttered with reference to marriage, contain a principle that is wholly applicable.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou

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goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also [and now I will change it slightly] if [even] death part thee and me. [Ruth 1:16–17]

Now a passage from Section 49 in the Doctrine and Covenants summarizing the basic administrative announcement relative to marriage for our dispensation:

Verily I say unto you, [saith the Lord,] that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation;

And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made. [D&C 49:15–17]

When we as Latter-day Saints talk about marriage we are talking about a holy celestial order. We are talking about a system out of which can grow the greatest love, joy, peace, happiness, and serenity known to humankind. We are talking about creating a family unit that has the potential of being everlasting and eternal, a family unit where a man and a wife can go on in that relationship to all eternity, and where mother and daughter and father and son are bound by eternal ties that will never be severed. We are talking about creating a unit more important than the Church, more important than any organization that exists on earth or in heaven, a unit out of which exaltation and eternal life grow; and when we talk about eternal life, we are talking about the kind of life that God our Heavenly Father lives.

In this final glorious dispensation we have received the most basic truth of all eternity, and that truth concerns the nature and kind of being that God is. It is eternal life to know the Father and the Son (see John 17:3). There is no

possible way to go degree by degree, step by step to the high exaltation we seek unless and until we come to a knowledge of the nature and kind of being that God is. Thus, when we talk about eternal life we are talking about the kind of life that God our Father lives; and when we speak of him we are speaking of a holy, perfected, exalted, ennobled man—an individual, a personage, a being with “a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22). We are talking about someone who is a literal parent, who is the Father of the spirits of all men. You and I were born as members of his family. We have seen his face; we have heard his voice; we have received his counsel, personally as well as through representatives and agents; we knew him in the preexistence. Now a curtain has been dropped and we do not have the remembrance that we had then, but we are seeking to do the things that will enable us to be like him.

After he had begotten us as his spirit children, he gave us our agency, which is the power and ability to choose; he also gave us laws and allowed us to obey or disobey, in consequence of which we can and did develop talents, abilities, aptitudes, and characteristics of diverse sorts. He ordained and established a plan of salvation. It was named the gospel of God, meaning God our Heavenly Father, and it consisted of all of the laws, powers, and rights, all of the experiences, all of the gifts and graces needed to take us, his spirit sons and daughters, from our then-spirit state of low intelligence to the high, exalted state where we would be like him.

The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us that God himself, finding that he was in the midst of spirits and glory, ordained laws whereby they might advance and progress and become like him. Those laws included the creation of this earth; they included the receipt of a mortal body where we could be tried and tested in a probationary state and receive experiences impossible to gain in any other way; they

included the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, to do good or to do evil, the opportunity to grow and advance in the things of the spirit; and they included the opportunity to enter into a marriage relationship that has the potential of being eternal. We started out on this course in the premortal life. Now we are down here taking the final examination for all the life that we lived back then, which also is the entrance examination for the realms and kingdoms that are ahead.

The name of the kind of life that God our Father lives is eternal life, and eternal life consists of two things: the continuation of the family unit in eternity; and an inheritance of what the scriptures denominate the fulness of the father or the fulness of the glory of the Father (see D&C 76:56), meaning the might, power, dominion, and exaltation that he himself possesses. In our finite circumstances we have no ability or power to comprehend the might and omnipotence of the Father. We can look at the stars in the heavens, we can view the Milky Way, we can see all the worlds and orbs that have been created in their spheres, we can examine all the life on this planet with which we are familiar, and by doing this we can begin to get a concept of the glorious, infinite, unlimited intelligence by which all these things are—and all these things taken together and more dramatize the fulness of the glory of the Father.

We are seeking eternal life—that is to say, we have been offered the privilege to go forward in advancement, as the children of God, until we become like our eternal Parent; and if we so attain it is required, it is requisite, it is mandatory for us to build on the foundation of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It is required of us that we keep the commandments and sow the seeds of righteousness in order to reap the harvest of glory and honor. If we do all the things that the gospel requires of us we can make that kind of advancement. The gospel, which is the plan of salvation, is now named the gospel of Jesus Christ to honor

him who worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice and put into operation all the terms and conditions of the Father's plan.

God our Father is the Creator of all things, and we glorify his holy name and sing praises to him because he created us and, in the ultimate sense, the universe, the earth, and all things on all the orbs in all the sidereal heavens. God our Father is the ultimate and perfect Creator. Jesus Christ, his Son, is the Redeemer. He came to ransom us from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the fall of Adam. The ransom from temporal death gives each of us immortality: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). And every living soul will rise in the resurrection with immortality and, having so arisen, will be judged according to his works and will be assigned a place in the kingdoms which are prepared. Some will be raised in immortality and then unto eternal life, and eternal life is the name of the kind of life that God lives.

We cannot shout praises to the name of the Lord Jehovah, who is the Lord Jesus, to the extent that we should in order to honor him properly for all that he has done for us and for the possibilities that lie ahead because he took upon himself our sins on conditions of repentance. The work of God the Father was creation, and the work of Christ the Son was redemption. We are men, and our work—building on the foundation that God our Father laid and that Christ his Son has established—is to do the part assigned to us in order to inherit the glory and honor and dignity of which I speak. In general terms, that means that we are to accept and believe the law. We are to believe in Christ and live his law, be upright and clean, have our sins washed away in the waters of baptism, become new creatures by the power of the Holy Ghost, and walk in paths of truth and righteousness.

As long as we speak in this vein, all that we say is said in generalities; it is a foundation for

a specific and particular thing toward which we point: eternal marriage. Everything that we do in the Church is connected and associated with and tied into the eternal order of matrimony that God has ordained. Everything that we do from the time that we become accountable through all our experiences, and all the counsel and direction we receive up to the time of marriage, is designed and intended to prepare us to enter into a probationary marriage arrangement, one that does in fact become eternal if we abide in the covenant made in connection with that order of matrimony. Then everything that we do for the remainder of our lives, whatsoever it may be, ties back into the celestial order of matrimony into which we have entered, and is designed and intended to encourage us to keep the covenant made in holy places. That is the general concept, briefly stated, under which we are operating.

Let me now read from the revelation on marriage the general concept governing marriage and everything else. I read from the Doctrine and Covenants, section 132, verse 5: "All who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world." That is the basic, governing, overriding principle that rules all of the acts of men in all ages. No one ever gets anything for nothing. We have received as a free gift the fact of resurrection, but in a sense even that is not free in that we lived meritoriously and uprightly in the pre-existence and earned the right to undergo this mortal probation and the resurrection that follows it. In the broadest and most eternal perspective that there is, no one ever gets anything for nothing; and so we live the law and we get the blessing. And having said that, then the Lord says: "As pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory, and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law,

or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God" (D&C 132:6).

"The new and everlasting covenant" is the fulness of the gospel, and the gospel is the covenant of salvation that the Lord makes with men. It is new because it has been revealed anew in our day; it is everlasting because it has always been had by faithful people, not only on this earth but on all the earths inhabited by the children of our Father. This next verse, number seven, is a one-sentence summary of the whole law of the whole gospel. Of necessity, it is written in legal language because it outlines the terms and conditions that are involved; and of course it is the Lord speaking:

And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these [this recites the conditions of the law that govern in the whole field of revealed religion, but we will make specific application of it to our central responsibility, which is marriage]: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.

Now, what is involved? We have power, as mortals, to make between ourselves any arrangements that we choose to make and that are legal in the society where we live, and they will bind us as long as we agree to be bound, even until death takes us. But we do not have power, as mortals, to bind ourselves after

death. Neither you nor I can enter a contract to buy or sell or go to come or paint or perform or do any act in the sphere that is ahead. God has given us our agency here and now as pertaining to mortality.

We are mortal; this is a temporal sphere, a time-bound sphere. And if we are going to do anything here and now that bridges the gulf of death, anything that endures in the spirit world, anything that remains with us in the resurrection, we have to do it by a power that is beyond the power of man—it has to be the power of God. Man is mortal and his acts are limited to mortality; God is eternal and his acts have no end.

The Lord conferred upon Peter the keys of the kingdom of God so that he had power to bind on earth and seal everlastingly in the heavens, and then he spread that out to James and John and then to all of the Twelve anciently so that they all had the same power, and then in our day he has restored again what was had anciently. He has called apostles and prophets and given them the keys of the kingdom of God, and they have power once again to bind on earth and have it sealed everlastingly in the heavens. He sent Elijah to bring the sealing power; he sent Elias to confer upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the gospel of Abraham and to give the promise that in them and in their seed all generations after should be blessed.

Elijah came and Elias came, acting in the power and authority of the Almighty, and gave once again their keys, powers, prerogatives, and rights to mortal men on earth—praise God for this glorious thing! Once again on earth there are people who can bind on earth and have it sealed everlastingly in the heavens. We have the power to perform a marriage, and we can do it so that the man and the woman become husband and wife here and now and—if they keep the covenant there and then made—they will remain husband and wife in the spirit world and will come up in glory and

dominion with kingdoms and exaltation in the resurrection, being husband and wife and having eternal life. And it operates thus because in this church, and in this church only, the Lord Almighty has given the sealing power. That is our potential; that is within our possible realm of achievement.

In this one-sentence summary, as I express it, of the whole law of the gospel, we read three requisites. If, for instance, a person is going to have a baptism that lasts eternally he must first find the right baptism; second, find a legal administrator to perform the ordinance for him; and third, have that ordinance sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit, in which even the baptism will admit the repentant person to a celestial heaven in the realms ahead. This matter of being sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise applies to every ordinance and every covenant and all things that there are in the Church. Do not talk about marriage and the Holy Spirit of promise unless and until you understand first the concept and the principle and its universal application.

One of our revelations speaks of “the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true” (D&C 76:53), meaning that every person who walks uprightly, does the best that he can, overcomes the world, rises above carnality, and walks in paths of righteousness will have his acts and his deeds sealed and approved by the Holy Spirit. He will be, as Paul would have expressed it, “justified by the Spirit” (see 1 Corinthians 6:11). Therefore, if a man is going to be married and wants a marriage that lasts for a week, or three weeks, or three months, or as long as Hollywood prescribes, or even “until death us do part,” he can be married by the power of man within the parameters and the limits that are set; he has that prerogative by the agency that the Lord has given him. But if he wants a wife to be his in the realms ahead, he had better find someone who has power to bind on earth and seal in heaven.

In order to get a proper marriage one must do this: first, search for and seek out celestial marriage—find the right ordinance; second, look for a legal administrator, someone who holds the sealing power—and that power is exercised only in the temples that the Lord has had built by the tithing and sacrifice of his people in our day; and third, so live in righteousness, uprightness, integrity, virtue, and morality that he is entitled to have the Holy Spirit of God ratify and seal and justify and approve, and in that even his marriage is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise and is binding in time and in eternity.

So we Latter-day Saints struggle and labor and work to be worthy to get a recommend to go to the temple, for the spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. We struggle and labor to get our tabernacles clean, to be pure and refined and cultured, to have the Spirit as our companion; and when we get in that state our bishop and our stake president give us a “recommend” to go to the temple. We go there and make solemn and sober covenants, and having so done we then labor and struggle and work will all our power to continue in the light of the Spirit so that the agreement we have made will not be broken. If we do that, we have the assurance of eternal life. We do not need to tremble and fear; we do not need to have anxiety or worry if we are laboring and working and struggling to the best of our abilities. Though we do not become perfect, though we do not overcome all things, if our hearts are right and we are charting a course to eternal life in the manner I indicate, our marriages will continue in the realms that are ahead. We shall get into the paradise of God and we shall be husband and wife. We shall come up in the resurrection and we shall be husband and wife.

Anyone who comes up in the resurrection in the marriage state has the absolute guarantee of eternal life, but he will not then be a possessor and inheritor of all things—there is a great deal of progress and advancement to be

made after the grave and after the resurrection. But he will be in the course where he will go on in the schooling and preparing processes until eventually he knows all things and becomes like God our Heavenly Father, meaning that he becomes an inheritor of eternal life.

In a manner of speaking we have, here and now, probationary families even though we have been married in the temple, because our marriage in the temple is conditional. It is conditioned upon our subsequent compliance with the laws, the terms, the conditions of the covenant that we then make. And so when I get married in the temple, I am put in a position where I can strive and labor and learn to love my wife with the perfection that must exist if I am going to have a fulness of the glory that attends this covenant in eternity, and it puts her in a position to learn to love me in the same way. It puts both of us in a position to bring up our children in light and truth and to school and prepare them to be members of an eternal family unit, and it puts us as children of our parents in a position where we honor our parents and do what is necessary to have these eternal ties go from one generation to the next and the next. Eventually there will be a great patriarchal chain of exalted beings from Adam to the last man, with any links left out being individuals who are not qualified and worthy to inherit, possess, and receive along the indicated line.

I am talking now to people who have opportunity to live the law. Anyone who has the opportunity is required to do so; it is mandatory. I am perfectly well aware that there are people who did not have the opportunity but who would have lived the law had the opportunity been afforded; and those individuals will be judged in the providence and mercy of a gracious God according to the intents and desires of their hearts. That is the principle of salvation and exaltation for the dead.

I have talked only in general terms; I have deliberately not been specific. I have designed

to set forth true principles, as the Prophet indicated in his statement, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves" (quoted by John Taylor, "The Organization of the Church," *Millennial Star*, November 1851, p. 3). I have desired and designed to set forth the general concept that is involved with the hope that, having the concept before us, each of us will then determine for ourselves the courses that we have to pursue as individuals to obtain the indicated rewards.

I think that the noblest concept that can enter the heart of man is the fact that the family unit continues in eternity. I do not think that one can conceive of a more glorious concept than that—building, of course, on the foundation of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Celestial marriage is the thing that opens the door to eternal life in our Father's kingdom. If we can pass the probationary experiences that prevail and exist in the family unit, then the Lord will say to us at some future day, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

The things we are talking about here are true. That is the glory and the wonder and the beauty of everything connected with this system of revealed religion that we have—it is true. There is no more glorious fact connected with our whole system of revealed religion than the simple fact that it is true; and because it is true the doctrines that we teach are true; and because these doctrines are true they will give us peace and joy and happiness in this

life. They will enable us to cast off the drudgery, sludge, evil, and iniquities of the world; they will empower us to put on Christ and the glory and beauty of pure religion and to become new creatures of the Holy Ghost. It is a wondrous thing beyond belief to belong to a system that is true, that is founded on the rock foundation of eternal truth.

I hope, as I bear testimony to you of the truth and divinity of this work, that my words simply echo the thoughts that are in your hearts. I know just as well as I know anything in this world that God has spoken in our day, that Jesus is the Lord, that he has worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice, that the Lord has set up his kingdom for the last time among men, that Spencer W. Kimball at this moment is the prophet and revelator and mouthpiece of the Almighty on earth, and that this Church, weak and struggling and humble as it is now, is going to advance and grow and progress until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Our destiny is to fill the earth because we are founded on the rock foundation of eternal truth. There is nothing in all this world like the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I bear witness of it and hope that, as you say amen, you will thus make my witness your witness and that you will then be under covenant to do the things that must be done to gain peace and joy in this life and to be an inheritor of eternal life in the world to come. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.