

The responsibilities of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums are no less important than the responsibilities of elders quorums or high priests groups. Remember, they hold “the keys of the ministering of angels.” We need young men to stand up in their calling, knowing of their ordained right to act in the office to which they are appointed.

I testify that these Aaronic Priesthood quorums hold the holy priesthood of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69.
2. Jeremiah 1:4–7, 9.
3. 2 Timothy 1:6, 9.
4. 2 Timothy 3:15.
5. Mormon 1:1–2, 4.
6. Mormon 2:1–2.

Elder Merrill J. Bateman

Priesthood restored by divine messengers

One of the remarkable evidences of the Restoration is the testimony of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery regarding the manner in which the priesthood and its directing powers were returned to earth. In each case, priesthood and priesthood keys were restored by divine messengers who had held them in earlier times. John the Baptist brought back the Aaronic Priesthood with the keys of repentance and baptism.¹ Peter, James, and John restored not only the Melchizedek Priesthood but also “the keys of [the] kingdom.”² Moses and Elijah returned with the “gathering” and “sealing” keys.³

The events describing the return of the priesthood are remarkable in that they conform precisely with the biblical pattern of priesthood restoration in earlier dispensations. For example, consider the restoration and transfer of priesthood powers during the Savior’s time.

Jesus gives keys to His Apostles

Near the end of His ministry, Jesus promised Peter “the keys of the kingdom,”⁴ knowing that Jesus would soon leave and that priesthood keys were needed by the Apostles if they were to direct the work

after His ascension. In order for them to receive the keys, Matthew records that Jesus took “Peter, James, and John . . . up into an high mountain” where He “was transfigured before them” and Moses and Elias “appeared unto them.”⁵ Shortly after this event, the Savior declared that the Apostles now had the keys to direct the ministry.⁶ The Prophet Joseph Smith states that “the Savior, Moses, and Elias, gave the keys to Peter, James and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him.”⁷

The pattern of priesthood restoration described by Matthew is the same pattern followed in our dispensation. Apostles and prophets designated by the Lord to hold keys in earlier dispensations returned them to earth as this dispensation began.

In contrast, 19th-century ministers in the Palmyra environs, not understanding the great apostasy that had taken place, believed in an entirely different process for priesthood reception. They believed that the power to preach came through an inner calling to a priesthood of believers. They did not understand the necessity of receiving the priesthood from a person in authority by the laying on of hands.⁸ Also, they did not understand the purpose or necessity of priesthood keys.

Priesthood keys

The priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man. Priesthood keys are the right to direct the use of that power. The President of the Church holds the keys necessary for governing the entire Church. His counselors in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles also hold the keys of the kingdom and operate under the President's direction. Stake presidents, bishops, and temple, mission, and quorum presidents are given keys to guide the Church in their jurisdictions. Their counselors do not hold keys but "receive delegated authority by calling and assignment."⁹

Priesthood and priesthood keys open the door to the blessings of the Atonement. Through the power of the priesthood, people are baptized for the remission of sins, made possible by the Savior's great act of mercy. A man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood may confer the Holy Ghost. Through the bestowal of the Holy Ghost, members are cleansed with fire, guided into truth, comforted, sanctified, and blessed in many ways as partakers of the fruits of the Atonement. The sealing authority may bind a man, a woman, and their children together forever, making possible exaltations in the world to come—again, a blessing from the Savior.

Story of son and priesthood blessings

It is expected that worthy holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood will use the power delegated to them to bless others, starting with their own families. One of the great inheritances of the Restoration is that a father ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood has the right to bless his wife and children when prompted and when a blessing is desired by them.

Many years ago our family had an experience which left an indelible impres-

sion as to the importance and value and power of a father's blessing. The lessons learned may be of interest to you.

Son declines a blessing

When our oldest children were ready to begin formal schooling, Sister Bateman and I decided that a father's blessing would be given to each child at the beginning of the school year. The family home evening preceding the start of school would be the occasion. The year our oldest son, Michael, entered the third grade holds special memories for us. During the preceding summer he had participated in Little League baseball. He loved the sport. When we gathered for family home evening just before the start of school, Michael announced that he did not need a blessing. He had completed his first season in Little League, and blessings were for younger children.

Sister Bateman and I were stunned. We encouraged him, suggesting that a blessing would help him with his schoolwork. It would be a protection to him. It would help him in his relations with his brothers, sisters, and friends. Our encouragement, along with some coaxing, failed. He was too old. Believing in the principle of agency, we were not about to force a blessing on an eight-year-old. All of the children except Michael received a blessing that year.

Struck by a car

The school year proceeded normally. Michael and the other children did well in school, and the family enjoyed their associations together. Then the following May arrived, and it was time for Little League baseball to begin. Following the last day of school, Michael's coach called a team practice. Michael's anticipation could not have been greater. His dream was about to be realized. He was to be the starting catcher.

The baseball diamond was only a few blocks from our home. The boys and the coach walked to the baseball field, crossing a busy highway. Following the practice, the boys and coach started for home. Michael and a friend ran on ahead of the coach and the other boys. As the two boys approached the busy highway, Michael failed to look and darted in front of a car driven by a 16-year-old young man out for his first drive. Can you imagine the fear that must have struck the young man's heart? He slammed on the brakes and swerved in an attempt to miss the boy. Unfortunately, the side of the front fender and bumper hit Michael and threw him down the highway.

A short time later, Sister Bateman and I received a telephone call from the police. Michael, in critical condition, was in an ambulance on his way to the hospital. It was important that we hurry. Before leaving, I called a friend and asked him to meet us at the hospital and assist in giving a blessing. The 20-minute drive was the longest of our lives. We prayed fervently for the life of our son and to know the will of the Lord.

As we parked the car by the door of the emergency room, we saw a policeman exiting with a young man who was crying. The policeman recognized us and introduced the young man as the driver of the car. We knew enough of the story to put our arms around him and tell him that we knew it was not his fault.

A priesthood blessing

We then entered the hospital to find Michael. As we entered his room, the doctors and nurses were working feverishly, attending to his needs. My friend had arrived, and we asked if it would be possible to have two or three minutes alone with him. My priesthood brother anointed, and I sealed. As I laid my hands upon Michael's head, a feeling of comfort and peace came

over me, words flowed, and promises were made. He was then rushed to the operating room.

Recovery

For the next four weeks, Michael lay in a hospital bed with his head bandaged and his leg in traction. Each Wednesday his Little League teammates would visit him after the game and give him a report. Each Wednesday, tears would well up in Michael's eyes and run down his cheeks as the boys relived the game. After four weeks in traction, Michael was put in a body cast from his chest to his toes. On two or three occasions we took him to a game to watch his friends play. Another four weeks passed, and the body cast was replaced with a cast from his hip to his toes. Two days before school was to begin, the final cast was removed. As the family gathered the next night for school blessings, is there any wonder as to who wanted the first blessing? A nine-year-old boy, a little older and a lot wiser, was first in line.

A tradition of priesthood blessings

Over the years our children have come to understand that accidents are not always prevented by priesthood blessings, but they also know that more than one type of protection is available through the priesthood. Today our grandchildren are the recipients of priesthood blessings. The tradition is in the second and third generations. We believe that this practice, like the family, will prevail through the eternities.

I am so grateful that a 14-year-old boy, Joseph Smith, entered a grove of trees asking to know which church is right. I will be eternally grateful for the answer he received and the subsequent restoration of the priesthood and its keys through John the Baptist; Peter, James, and John; and other holy messengers. May we use this great power to bless all of God's children,

beginning with our own families, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 13; Joseph Smith—History 1:68–72.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16.
4. Matthew 16:19.
5. Matthew 17:1–3.
6. See Matthew 18:18; Doctrine and Covenants 7:7.
7. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 158.
8. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Christian Churches of America: Origins and Beliefs*, rev. ed. (1976, 1983), 54–55.

9. *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (1998), 161.

President Hinckley

Thank you, brethren.

We shall now hear from President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. The choir and congregation will then sing “Redeemer of Israel.” President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will then speak to us.

President James E. Faust

Young orphan girl crossing the plains

My dear brethren of the priesthood of God all over the world, we extend to each of you our love and greetings wherever you are.

Picture with me a little six-year-old orphan girl traveling across the plains of America. Her name is Elsie Ann. Her mother died when she was two. Her father remarried, and so for a time she had a stepmother. Then her father died at Winter Quarters when she was five. Her stepmother remarried and moved away, leaving this little orphan behind with Peter and Selina Robison, who were related to her stepmother. Elsie Ann left Winter Quarters with the Robisons in July of 1849 to come west. As she watched Selina care for her 10-month-old baby girl, she no doubt ached for the love of her own mother. Sometimes she would even ask, “Where is my mother?”

My heart goes out to this little girl when I think of her facing her uncertain future with no blood relatives to comfort

and help her. Elsie Ann was my great-grandmother, and only recently did we find out who her mother really was. For years we thought Elsie Ann was Jane Robison’s daughter. Careful research discovered her true parentage, and after all these years Elsie Ann now has been sealed to her father, John Akerley, and her mother, Mary Moore.

My grandparents have had a great influence on my life. Even though they have been dead for many years, I still feel their confirming love. One grandfather, James Akerley Faust, died before I was born. I knew him only through the stories my grandmother and my parents told about him. However, I feel a strong kinship with him because I am in part what he was. Among other things, he was a cowboy, a rancher, and a postmaster in a small town in central Utah. On one occasion, Grandfather took a trip in the winter to Idaho, where he met an acquaintance who had fallen on hard times. It was cold, and Grandfather’s friend had no coat. Grandfather took off his coat and gave it to him.