

## President James E. Faust

### The key of the knowledge of God

Brethren of the priesthood of God, I am again seated as I deliver my message this evening. As you are aware, I am working through a temporary back problem. Those of you who have had back trouble will understand. Those of you who haven't—just wait a while! Any other explanation of what ails me is not true!

I humbly speak to you tonight with a prayer in my heart that you may understand me by the power of the Spirit. It is hard to imagine anything more important for us as priesthood holders to learn than the key of the knowledge of God. This evening I would like to speak concerning that key.

The greater priesthood administers the gospel and holds “the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.”<sup>1</sup> What is the key of the knowledge of God, and can anyone obtain it? Without the priesthood there can be no fulness of the knowledge of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith said the “Melchizedek Priesthood . . . is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”<sup>2</sup> President Joseph F. Smith stated:

“One who can truly affirm that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and Jesus is the Savior, has in his possession a prize beyond computation. When we know this we know God, and we have a key to all knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>

Father Abraham recognized the value of this grand key as he recounted his experience:

“I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a

greater knowledge, . . . and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.”<sup>4</sup>

### How to obtain greater knowledge of God

Anyone who is righteous and desires to possess greater knowledge and to become “a greater follower of righteousness” can, under the authority of the priesthood, obtain a greater knowledge of God. The Lord tells us one clear way to do so, as given in the Doctrine and Covenants: “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, . . . that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”<sup>5</sup>

One might ask, “How do I become a greater follower of righteousness?” A righteous person is one who makes and keeps gospel covenants. These are holy contracts, usually between individuals and the Lord.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes they include other persons, such as spouses. They involve most sacred promises and commitments, such as baptism, the conferral of the priesthood, temple blessings, marriage, and parenthood. Many of the blessings of Father Abraham come as the Holy Ghost is poured out upon all people.<sup>7</sup> Any worthy man or woman who receives the Holy Ghost can actually become “a new creation.”<sup>8</sup>

### The oath and covenant of the priesthood

To obtain the full portion of these supernatural blessings and come to a full knowledge of God, a man must enter into and keep the oath and covenant of the priesthood.<sup>9</sup> President Marion G. Romney insightfully pointed out:

“The only way a man can make the maximum progress towards eternal life, for which mortality is designed, is to obtain and magnify the Melchizedek Priest-

hood. . . . It is of utmost importance that we keep clearly in mind what the magnifying of our callings in the priesthood requires of us. . . . It requires at least the following three things:

“1. That we obtain a knowledge of the gospel.

“2. That we comply in our personal living with the standards of the gospel.

“3. That we give dedicated service.”<sup>10</sup>

Two covenants are to be made by each priesthood holder. The first is to be faithful unto the obtaining of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.<sup>11</sup> The Aaronic Priesthood trains and prepares the priesthood holder for the greater duties of the Melchizedek Priesthood and prepares him to receive the blessings of the oath and covenant of the priesthood. Holding both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods is essential to receive the full blessings that the Lord has for His faithful sons. The second covenant as His agent in this holy authority is to be faithful in magnifying one’s calling with total faith in God.<sup>12</sup>

As part of the oath and covenant of the priesthood, the Lord makes several promises to His faithful sons “which he cannot break.”<sup>13</sup> First, the priesthood holders “are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.”<sup>14</sup> I think President Hinckley is a great example of this. He has been renewed in body, mind, and spirit in a most remarkable manner. Second, “they become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham.”<sup>15</sup> Third, they become “the elect of God.”<sup>16</sup> As His agents, they carry forth this holy work in our time on the earth. Fourth, “all they who receive this priesthood receive [the Lord].”<sup>17</sup> Fifth, those who receive the Lord’s servants receive Him.<sup>18</sup> Sixth, those who receive the Savior receive God the Father.<sup>19</sup> Seventh, they also receive the Father’s kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Eighth, they also shall be given all that the Father hath.<sup>21</sup> Those who receive all that the Father hath can receive nothing more.

### **Aaronic Priesthood is a very real power**

You young men of the Aaronic Priesthood have been given great authority and responsibilities. Under the direction of the bishop, the Aaronic Priesthood functions in at least two ordinances that are directly related to the Atonement. One is the sacrament, which is in remembrance of the Savior’s blood shed for our sins and His body which He gave as a ransom for us.<sup>22</sup> The second is baptism. Priests have authority to perform baptisms for the remission of sins. The Aaronic Priesthood is a very real power. One young man wrote this of his experience in exercising this power:

“At one time I attended a ward which had almost no Melchizedek Priesthood holders in it. But it was not in any way dulled in spirituality. On the contrary, many of its members witnessed the greatest display of priesthood power they had ever known.

“The power was centered in the priests. For the first time in their lives they were called upon to perform all the duties of the priests and administer to the needs of their fellow ward members. They were seriously called to home teach—not just to be a yawning appendage to an elder making a social call but to bless their brothers and sisters.

“Previous to this time I had been with four of these priests in a different situation. . . . They drove away every seminary teacher after two or three months. They spread havoc over the countryside on Scouting trips. *But when they were needed—when they were trusted with a vital mission—they were among those who shone the most brilliantly in priesthood service.*

“The secret was that the bishop called upon his Aaronic Priesthood to rise to the stature of men to whom angels might well appear; and they rose to that stature, administering relief to those who might be in want and strengthening those who needed

strengthening. Not only were the other ward members built up but so were the members of the quorum themselves. A great unity spread throughout the ward and every member began to have a taste of what it is for a people to be of one mind and one heart. There was nothing inexplicable in all of this; it was just the proper exercise of the Aaronic Priesthood.”<sup>23</sup>

President Gordon B. Hinckley recently told the Aaronic Priesthood that those of you who live worthy lives can be blessed by the “protection of ministering angels” and that you “have something magnificent to live up to.”<sup>24</sup>

### Significance of being the seed of Abraham

What does it mean to be the seed of Abraham? Scripturally it has a deeper meaning than being his literal descendants. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, the great patriarch, that all nations would be blessed through him.<sup>25</sup> Any man or woman can claim the blessings of Abraham. They become his seed and heirs to the promised blessings by accepting the gospel, being baptized, entering into temple marriage, being faithful in keeping their covenants, and helping to carry the gospel to all the nations of the earth.

To be empowered to “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations,”<sup>26</sup> a man must receive the Melchizedek Priesthood with its blessings. Then through faithfulness he becomes an heir to the fulness of eternal life. For as Paul said, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”<sup>27</sup>

As the seed of Abraham, we have some obligations. We are commanded to come to Christ by doing “the works of Abraham.”<sup>28</sup> These works include obeying God, receiving and keeping priesthood and temple ordinances and covenants, preaching the gospel, building a family unit and teaching our children, and being faithful to the end.

It is interesting that the Lord used the word *seed* in His promise to Abraham. It has a fuller meaning than *posterity* because it means to multiply the blessings of the covenant of Abraham “unto all nations.”<sup>29</sup> The Lord promised Abraham a posterity “as innumerable as the stars” or “the sand upon the seashore.”<sup>30</sup>

Abraham’s righteous posterity is also privileged to be adopted into the eternal family of Jesus Christ. This includes the right to receive eternal covenants in the temple by which, if they are worthy, they will be organized and exalted in the eternal family of Christ.<sup>31</sup> It also includes “the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.”<sup>32</sup>

### Losing an arm becomes a blessing

The patriarchal order runs from Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob. Through the line of the priesthood, it continues in our own day and time. Through the ages, blessings and promises were given from the fathers to their faithful sons. A modern example of this is taken from the life of Elder John B. Dickson of the Seventy. He recalls:

“When it was time for me to go on a mission, I was very excited to serve the Lord. Just before I was to leave, however, I found out that I had bone cancer. The chance of living long enough to serve a mission wasn’t very high. I had faith that the Lord would provide a way if He wanted me to go. My father gave me a blessing in which I was told that I would serve my mission in Mexico, serve in the Church all my life, and have a family. My right arm had to be amputated above the elbow, but my life was spared, and the promises I was given have all been fulfilled.

“Some would think that losing an arm would be a terrible burden, but it has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I learned that it is very important to have challenges and to face up to them.”

Elder Dickson had always been right-handed, and now he had to learn to do everything left-handed. One struggle was learning how to tie his ties. He said:

“One Sunday morning when I was in my bedroom with my tie in my hand, I thought, *How am I going to tie this?* I thought about getting a clip-on tie. I thought about asking Mom to help me. But I couldn’t take her with me on my mission just to tie my ties. So I decided I had to learn how to do it myself. I finally figured it out by using my teeth. I still do it that way, even after having tied it thousands of times.”<sup>33</sup>

### Great promises to those who are faithful

We don’t know in detail all that is going to be required of humanity, of the Saints of God in the uncertain days ahead. Everyday righteous living will be increasingly difficult. In addition, holders of the priesthood may well have to meet some extra challenges in safeguarding and providing for their families. As one world leader recently pointed out, there will be “dangers common to us all. Today’s deadly threats come from rogue powers and stateless networks of extremists who have nothing but contempt for the sanctity of human life and for the principles civilized nations hold dear.”<sup>34</sup>

We can all expect to face trials. But great eternal promises are extended to those who persist in righteousness. The Lord has given His word that “any man that shall . . . fail not to continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint. . . . And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst.”<sup>35</sup> I am optimistic about what the future holds for the Lord’s Church and its members, but we will have to persist in righteousness and be “faithful in all things.”<sup>36</sup> The key of the knowledge of God, administered by those who keep

the oath and covenant of the Melchizedek Priesthood, will enable us to come off as the sons of God. That we will do so, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 166–67.
3. “The M. I. Course: Remarks at the B. Y. Academy,” *The Daily Enquirer* (Provo, UT), Jan. 30, 1892.
4. Abraham 1:2.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 42:61.
6. See Carlos E. Asay, in Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 56–60; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 43–45.
7. See 3 Nephi 20:25–29.
8. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 149–50.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–42.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1962, 18; or *Improvement Era*, June 1962, 416.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 84:40.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 84:34.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 84:34.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 84:35.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:36.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:37.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
22. See Matthew 26:26–28; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 26:22–24.
23. Quoted in Victor L. Brown, in Conference Report, Oct. 1975, 101–2; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 68.
24. Quoted in Jason Swensen, “Priesthood Restored Directly from Heaven,” *Church News*, May 22, 2004, 3.
25. See Genesis 18:18; Galatians 3:8; 3 Nephi 20:25, 29.
26. Abraham 2:9.
27. Galatians 3:29.
28. John 8:39; see also John 8:32–50.
29. Abraham 2:9.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 132:30.

31. See Galatians 3:29.  
 32. Abraham 2:11.  
 33. "Friend to Friend," *Friend*, Sept. 1995, 7.  
 34. Colin Powell, "Of Memory and Our Democracy," *USA Weekend*, May 2, 2004, Internet, <http://www.usaweekend.com>.

35. Doctrine and Covenants 84:80.  
 36. Doctrine and Covenants 84:80.

---

The choir and congregation sang  
 "Praise to the Man."

---

## President Thomas S. Monson

### Be anxiously engaged

My dear brethren, it is a solemn and somewhat humbling experience to stand before you this evening and respond to the invitation to teach and to testify concerning the sacred privilege which is ours to bear the priesthood of God. I pray for your faith and your prayers in my behalf.

Beyond those who hold the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood who are in attendance this evening here in this beautiful Conference Center or seated in locations worldwide, there are vast numbers of priesthood bearers who, for whatever reason, have drifted from their duties and have chosen to pursue other pathways.

The Lord speaks rather plainly to us to reach out and rescue such individuals and bring them and theirs to the table of the Lord. We well could pay heed to the Lord's divine instructions when He declared, "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."<sup>1</sup> He added:

"For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And in-

asmuch as men do good they shall in no-wise lose their reward."<sup>2</sup>

### Jesus's example of doing good

The sacred scriptures provide for you and me a model to follow when they declare, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."<sup>3</sup> And He "went about doing good, . . . for God was with him."<sup>4</sup>

I have observed in studying the life of the Master that His lasting lessons and His marvelous miracles usually occurred when He was doing His Father's work. On the way to Emmaus He appeared with a body of flesh and bones. He partook of food and testified of His divinity. All of this took place after He had exited the tomb.

At an earlier time, it was while He was on the road to Jericho that He restored sight to one who was blind.

The Savior was ever up and about—teaching, testifying, and saving others. Such is our individual duty as members of priesthood quorums today.

### A plea to priesthood holders

In a proclamation of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued on April 6, 1980, this declaration of testimony and truth was set forth:

"We solemnly affirm that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in fact a restoration of the Church established by the Son of God, when in mortal-