

Speaking Today

Priesthood Restoration

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An edited version of a talk given 15 May 1988 at the Churchwide fire-side commemorating the 159th anniversary of the restoration of the priesthood.

This day of May 15 is a day of celebration in the Church. Further, this year is a very important anniversary season, inasmuch as we commemorate three great and significant events:

1. The restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, which occurred on May 15, 1829.
2. The restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which occurred a short time later.
3. The revelation under which the priesthood became available to all worthy men, regardless of lineage. This was announced to the Church ten years ago.

Can you imagine what a wonderful experience this restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood must have been for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery when John the Baptist spoke to them? Here was a man who had lived upon the earth more than 1,800 years earlier. Now he was speaking in English to two young men while he held his hands upon their heads. His was a resurrected body. Theirs were mortal bodies. They felt his hands, the materiality of them, and understood the words that he spoke. This tells us that resurrected beings are tangible, that they can move and act, that they can speak and be understood.

He told them, among other things, that, while the authority he gave them authorized them to baptize, it did not include the authority to bestow the Holy Ghost. He indicated that another order of the priesthood was necessary for this, and that it would subsequently be

given to them by Peter, James, and John.

That marvelous event followed. We do not know exactly where it took place, but, from the description given, it was not far away. Nor do we know the exact date. However, by piecing together various accounts and bits of history, we may assume that it occurred in the following month of June. Hence, we are justified in commemorating these two singular events together.

In a revelation given in 1831, which has become Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants and is known as the preface to that book of revelation, the Lord set forth one of the great purposes for the restoration of the gospel in this the dispensation of the fulness of times. He said that, among other reasons, the gospel was restored so that “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.” (D&C 1:20.)

It does not say that every man *shall* speak in the name of God the Lord. The meaning is that every man *may* speak, provided he is worthy and receives the priesthood.

But for many years during the history of the Church, the priesthood was withheld from many worthy men because of their lineage. Then, in June of 1978, a remarkable and wonderful thing occurred. The president of the Church, the prophet of the Lord at the time, Spencer W. Kimball, announced a revelation under which *every* worthy man could, under proper circumstances, receive the eternal priesthood with authority to act in the name of God.

I was not present when John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic Priesthood. I was not present when Peter, James, and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood. But I was present and was a participant and a witness to what occurred on Thursday, June 1, 1978. My memory is clear concerning the events of that day. Since we are commemorating the tenth anniversary of that historic event, I wish to give you my personal witness of what occurred.

Each first Thursday of the month is a day for fasting and the bearing of testimony by the General Authorities of the Church. So many of the Brethren are absent from home on the first Sunday of the month because of assignments to stake conferences that we hold our monthly testimony meeting in an upper room of the Salt Lake Temple the first Thursday of the month. The Thursday of which I speak was June 1, 1978. We heard testimonies from some of the brethren, and we partook of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

It was a wonderfully spiritual meeting, as are all such meetings in these holy precincts and under these circumstances. Then the members of the First Quorum of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric were excused, while there remained the president of the Church, his two Counselors, and ten members of the Council of the Twelve—two being absent, one in South America and the other in the hospital.

The question of extending the blessings of the priesthood to blacks had been on the minds of many of the Brethren over a period of years. It had repeatedly been brought up by Presidents of the Church. It had become a matter of particular concern to President Spencer W. Kimball.

Over a considerable period of time he had prayed concerning this serious and difficult question. He had spent many hours in that upper room in the temple by himself in prayer and meditation.

On this occasion he raised the question before his Brethren—his Counselors and the Apostles. Following this discussion we joined in prayer in the most sacred of circumstances. President Kimball himself was voice in that prayer. I do not recall the exact words that he spoke. But I do recall my own feelings and the nature of the expressions of my Brethren. There was a hallowed and sanctified atmosphere in the room. For me, it felt as if a conduit opened between the heavenly throne and the kneeling, pleading prophet of God who was joined by his Brethren. The Spirit of God was there. And by the power of the Holy Ghost there came to that prophet an assurance that the thing for which he prayed was right, that the time had come, and that now the wondrous blessings of the priesthood should be extended to worthy men everywhere regardless of lineage.

Every man in that circle, by the power of the Holy Ghost, knew the same thing.

It was a quiet and sublime occasion.

There was not the sound “as of a rushing mighty wind,” there were not “cloven tongues like as of fire” (Acts 2:2–3) as there had been on the Day of Pentecost. But there was a Pentacostal spirit, for the Holy Ghost was there.

No voice audible to our physical ears was heard. But the voice of the Spirit whispered with certainty into our minds and our very souls.

It was for us, at least for me personally, as I imagine it was with

Enos, who said concerning his remarkable experience, “And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind.” (Enos 1:10.)

So it was on that memorable June 1, 1978. We left that meeting subdued and reverent and joyful. Not one of us who was present on that occasion was ever quite the same after that. Nor has the Church been quite the same.

All of us knew that the time had come for a change and that the decision had come from the heavens. The answer was clear. There was perfect unity among us in our experience and in our understanding.

We met the following Thursday when the Presidency presented to the Twelve their letter of announcement. The following day we met with all of the General Authorities then in the city. Those absent were talked with by long-distance telephone. There was unity and there was rejoicing on the part of each. The letter was released to the Church and to the world.

I need not tell you of the electric effect that was felt both within the Church and without. There was much weeping, with tears of gratitude not only on the part of those who previously had been denied the priesthood and who became the immediate beneficiaries of this announcement, but also by men and women of the Church across the world who had felt as we had felt concerning this matter.

Tremendous, eternal consequences for millions over the earth are flowing from that manifestation. All within the sound of my voice tonight know something of what has happened as we have reached out with love, respect, and invitation to those in many areas of the earth who previously were restricted.

Let me tell you of such a man and a family with whom I spent a little time only a few days ago in the city of Fortaleza, Brazil. I know of none anywhere who are more faithful, more true, more dedicated to the work of the Lord. The husband serves as mission president, an honored high priest in Israel, and previously served as a bishop and then in a stake presidency. His wife serves at his side, and two beautiful little daughters are with them. A son has completed a mission and has married in the temple.

They came into the Church before 1978. When it was determined to build a temple in São Paulo, Brazil, they gave generously of their

means to help with the construction of that sacred house, with the expectation that they would never be able to enter it following its dedication.

Then came the glorious day ten years ago, the tremendous announcement, followed in due course by the bestowal of divine authority for which they had lived in faith and faithfulness.

Gone is every element of discrimination. Extended is every power of the priesthood of God.

Today, on this May 15 Sabbath, there was organized in the nation of Nigeria a stake of Zion whose officers and members are all native Africans. These people are able and faithful. They carry in their hearts a love for the Lord. They walk in obedience to the commandments. They honor and magnify the priesthood that they rightfully hold, having been called of God by prophecy, and the laying of hands by those in authority. This is but the beginning of greater things to come as the truth of the restored gospel covers the earth as the waters cover the mighty deep. (See Isa. 11:9.)

And so, we celebrate not only the restoration of the priesthood of Aaron and the higher priesthood called Melchizedek. We also celebrate the revelation of the Almighty to a prophet, joined in prayer by his fellow Apostles—his Counselors and those of the Council of the Twelve. This has opened great areas of the world to the teaching of the everlasting gospel. This has made it possible that “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.”

We have cause to rejoice and to praise the God of our salvation that we have seen this glorious day, that we have now lived a full decade under this tremendous enlargement of opportunity and authority, and that the Lord has blessed with a great and sweet harvest the efforts of those who have labored among those upon whom there was once a restriction.

What is this remarkable gift and power that has come to us with no price other than our personal worthiness? The Prophet Joseph Smith described it on one occasion in these words: “The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will [exist] to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years.” (*History of the Church*, 3:386.)

It is veritably the power of the Almighty given to man to act in His

name and in His stead. It is a delegation of divine authority, different from all other powers and authorities on the face of the earth. Small wonder that it was restored to man by resurrected beings who held it anciently, that there might be no question concerning its authority and validity. Without it there could be a church in name only, lacking authority to administer in the things of God. With it, nothing is impossible in carrying forward the work of the kingdom of God. It is divine in its nature. It is both temporal and eternal in its authority. It is the only power on the earth that reaches beyond the veil of death. Said the Lord to His chosen Apostles: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 16:19.)

It includes the right to receive of the things of God. It carries the responsibility to instruct. It holds the authority to govern. It grants the power to bless.

Permit me to comment briefly on these four aspects of divine authority.

With the bestowal of the priesthood comes the right to receive marvelous and wonderful blessings. John declared that the Aaronic Priesthood “holds the keys of the ministering of angels.” (D&C 13:1.) How marvelous a gift, that if we live worthily, we shall have the right to the company of angels. Here is protection, here is guidance, here is direction—all of these from powers beyond our own natural gifts.

Marvelous and unequalled are the promises set forth in Section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining [of] these two priesthoods ... and the magnifying [of] their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

“They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

“And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

“For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;

“And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;

“And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.” (D&C 84:33–38.)

No greater promise is found in all of scripture than is found in this revealed word concerning those who magnify and live worthy of the holy priesthood.

It carries with it the responsibility to instruct. Declared the Lord to His disciples prior to his ascension: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15.)

This is not the responsibility of just anyone. It is the responsibility of those who have received divine authority: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” (Heb. 5:4.)

Even young men of the Aaronic Priesthood have a direct assignment to instruct and teach. Said the Lord:

“The teacher’s duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them;

“And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking;

“And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty.” (D&C 20:53–55.)

The holy priesthood carries with it the authority to govern in the affairs of the kingdom of God on the earth. Under the revelations of the Lord, the Church is to be presided over by three presiding high priests. They are to be assisted by a council of Twelve Apostles, who in turn are to be assisted by those of the First Quorum of the Seventy. A Presiding Bishopric of three are responsible for temporal affairs under the direction of the Presidency. All of these are priesthood officers. That power divinely given is the authority by which they govern. It is so in the stakes and the wards with presidencies and bishoprics. It is so in the quorums. The auxiliary officers carry forth their work under direction and delegation from the priesthood. Without the priesthood there might be the form of a church, but not the true substance. This is the church of Jesus Christ, and it is governed by that authority which is “after the Order of the Son of God.” (D&C 107:3.)

The holy priesthood includes the power to bless. For those of the

Aaronic Priesthood, it carries with it the authority to administer to the congregation the emblems of the flesh and blood of the Lord who gave His life as a sacrifice for all. The sacrament and the partaking of these emblems is the very heart of our sabbath worship. It includes a renewal of covenants with God. It carries with it a promise of His Holy Spirit to be with us. It is a blessing without peer to be enjoyed by all and made possible by the authority given to worthy young men. Boys, treasure it. Be worthy of it. Exercise it in righteousness “without hypocrisy, and without guile.” (D&C 121:42.)

The Melchizedek Priesthood carries with it the authority to bestow the Holy Ghost. How great a blessing it is to have the ministering influence of a member of the Godhead, having received that gift under the hands of those who acted with divine authority. If we continue to walk in virtue, we may enjoy the fulfillment of the promise made by the Lord when He said: “The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.” (D&C 121:46.)

The priesthood includes the power to bless the sick. Is there anyone within my hearing who has not exercised or felt that divine power? Can any of us have any doubt concerning its efficacy? We could tell of miracles, sacred and wonderful, that we have witnessed within our own experience. Declared James of old:

“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” (James 5:14–15.)

This holy Melchizedek Priesthood carries with it the power to bless with prophecy, to comfort, to sustain, to direct. We have patriarchs in our midst who, under the authority that they hold, declare lineage and pronounce blessings for our guidance. These blessings may become as an anchor to which we may hold to keep us steady through the storms of life.

In its ultimate expression the holy priesthood carries with it the authority to seal on the earth and have that sealing effective in the heavens. It is unique and wonderful. It is the authority exercised in

the temples of God. It concerns both the living and the dead. It is of the very essence of eternity. It is divine power bestowed by the Almighty as a part of His great plan for the immortality and eternal life of man.

How precious is the gift of God that has come to us. Properly we celebrate the bestowal of divine authority and the extension of that authority to good men throughout the world, conditioned only upon worthiness and obedience, that “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.” (D&C 1:20.)

May we reflect on the wonder of that which we have. May we exercise it in righteousness and faithfulness. May we never sully it through behavior unbecoming those who hold this divine power. May we fit the description given by Peter when he said: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Pet. 2:9.)

God bless us to this end.