

RICK B. JORGENSEN

TEACHING THE DOCTRINE  
OF THE RESURRECTION WHEN  
SHARING THE GOSPEL



**D**uring the Easter season, Christians around the world turn their thoughts and their hearts to Jesus Christ as they commemorate the last week of His life. Some Latter-day Saints wonder how best to celebrate this important religious holiday, unable to make the distinction between the traditions of other Christian faiths and scriptural truths associated with Easter. As a result, they may focus much of their attention on Christ's Resurrection but keep their thoughts and praise during the Easter season confined to subdued expressions in private environments. Easter is a celebration of the risen Lord, and Latter-day Saints should lead out in their celebration of this important

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holiday, declaring the light and truth of the Restoration that promises the resurrection of all mankind.

As a seminary teacher in a small agricultural community, I wore a suit and tie, which sometimes led to questions about the nature of my work. On one occasion a Hispanic man who was interested in purchasing my van flagged me down on the road. He asked what I did for work. He was surprised that Latter-day Saints taught scriptures to high school students during the school day. He excitedly told me he was the new co-pastor for a local Christian church with a contingent Spanish congregation. This polite exchange led to a conversation about the basic doctrines of each other's faith. I asked about his belief in the Resurrection. Mistakenly thinking I was referring to the Second Coming, he slapped his chest, saying, "Él viene, mi amigo!" or "He is coming, my friend!" I asked him again his beliefs about the Resurrection, and he did not seem to understand what I meant. I asked if he believed that after Jesus was crucified He arose from the tomb with His physical body. He looked at me carefully and asked what I believed. After explaining the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, I testified of our eventual resurrection. He said simply and humbly, "That is what I believe."

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, "When you declare the truth, it will bring an echo, a memory, even if it is an unconscious memory to the investigator, that they have heard this truth before—and of course they have."<sup>1</sup> Since missionary work is the business of spreading the good news of truth, my experience with that man impressed upon me the importance of teaching the doctrine of the Resurrection when sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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### A LACK OF UNITY IN DOCTRINE AND UNDERSTANDING

During the Savior’s mortal life, the Jewish religious community was divided on the issue of resurrection. The New Testament states clearly that the Sadducees said there would be no resurrection (see Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:6–8). After the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ, there continued to be division among Christians concerning a physical resurrection. St. Augustine (circa AD 430), the first archbishop of Canterbury, wrote about this doctrine that has long split Christianity, “In nothing is there so much conflict and controversy among Christians themselves as on the subject of the resurrection of the flesh.”<sup>2</sup> The controversy of which St. Augustine spoke appears to be centered on the idea of a literal, corporeal resurrection.

Kenneth Woodward wrote in his featured *Newsweek* article entitled “Rethinking the Resurrection” that even though “most Christians still believe in the Risen Jesus . . . very few Christians are literalists on this point, and . . . there is a range of opinion on what the Resurrection means.”<sup>3</sup> Divergent doctrinal opinions have historically fueled Protestant offshoots and continue to be a catalyst for change. The result is the present diversity in Christian doctrines, including that of a physical resurrection.

A poll by the National Opinion Research Center asked Americans, “Will life after death be a spiritual life, involving our mind but not our body?” Seventy-five percent of respondents believed that would be the case.<sup>4</sup> Later the Gallup Organization polled 750 adults about resurrection,

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asking whether or not people will have “human form” in the life after death: 43 percent said yes, and the remaining 57 percent disagreed or did not know.<sup>5</sup> According to this poll, the majority questioned did not know or did not believe in a resurrection that includes human form. If resurrection is indeed a significant Christian doctrine, then these results demonstrate a need for clarification of this truth. Although the poll data is now around twenty years old, the responses indicate that the reality of a physical resurrection confuses many Americans, though many do still believe in a corporeal resurrection.

These poll questions hint at the disparity between what resurrection is and what the general population understands it to be. The division in doctrinal understanding concerning resurrection raises the question, “What effect does an understanding of the doctrine of the Resurrection have upon religious observance in general as well as on human behavior?” The idea that true doctrine correctly understood affects behavior could be significant in relationship to the doctrine of the Resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Christians and non-Christians might have a changed outlook if they were truly converted to the reality of the doctrine of the Resurrection. A true understanding of the Resurrection gives an eternal perspective for the physical body. The knowledge that not only the mind and spirit continue but that the physical body does as well changes the way humans treat their bodies and the way they think about the opportunity to progress in the eternities. Acceptance of Christ’s physical Resurrection strengthens belief in the eternal nature of humankind.

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### RESURRECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word *resurrection* appears 124 times in the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in sixty-two different passages. Comparing this to the word *baptism*, which is referenced in forty-two passages, illustrates the prevalence of *resurrection* in the scriptures. Like the word *baptism*, the word *resurrection* is not specifically used in the Old Testament, though latter-day scripture confirms that ancient prophets spoke of resurrection during the Old Testament era. Moses 7:62 reads, “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men.”

Old Testament references to resurrection—without using the actual word—add great insight to our understanding of this doctrine and confirm that the prophets of old indeed looked forward to a glorious resurrection. The seemingly forsaken Job spoke on two separate occasions of his eventual resurrection. He specified a corporeal resurrection, claiming, “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26; see also Job 14:14). Snapshots of other references reveal the hope others had in their resurrection. In 1 Samuel 2:6 Hannah sings praises to the Lord, testifying of her conviction that the Lord brings about resurrection, saying, “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” Isaiah prophesied that Christ would overcome death and be resurrected, thus opening the way for all men to be resurrected (see

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Isaiah 25:8). The ancient prophet Ezekiel was carried away in vision by the Lord to a valley of dry bones, where he was shown the restoration of the house of Israel. In graphic detail, Ezekiel saw physical bodies arise when sinew, flesh, and skin were put back on the bones and breath returned to those slain (see Ezekiel 37). The book of Daniel prophesies of two resurrections, one unto eternal life and the other to shame and contempt (see Daniel 12:2). Hosea speaks for the Lord when he proclaims that He will ransom His people “from the power of the grave” (Hosea 13:14).

### RESURRECTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christ’s victory over death and His compassion for those left to mourn are powerful elements in scripture. The New Testament describes three incidents where Christ raised someone from the dead. These were not permanent physical resurrections but restorations to mortal life. All three were raised as Christ demonstrated His compassion for those who suffered from the untimely deaths of loved ones. These events strengthened faith in His power over death and must have prepared the hearts of the people for His Resurrection. When Christ rose from the tomb, however, it was permanent. He was not merely raised from the dead but was resurrected, becoming “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Before raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, Christ comforted Martha, explaining that He is the Resurrection and the Life and that those who believe this shall live eternally both spiritually and physically (see John 11:17–27).

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The Resurrection of Christ is a pinnacle doctrine in the New Testament. In fact, it is central to the concluding chapters of all four Gospels. Luke offers a vivid account of the Lord’s first appearance as a resurrected being to His Apostles. Although the doors had been shut, He appeared in the room, and those present had the privilege to touch and be touched by Him, as well as to see Him eat:

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. (Luke 24:36–44)

The experience must have been life altering for those present and so incredible that Thomas doubted it until he personally witnessed the risen Lord. The effect of Christ’s first appearance to His Apostles cannot be measured directly, but subsequent scriptural accounts describe converted Apostles who testified of the resurrected Christ even though they faced persecution. Christ had demonstrated His power over death by raising those aforementioned, but a resurrected, immortal being was almost unbelievable

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for even those closest to the Savior during His mortal ministry.

Special among the accounts of the resurrected Lord is His appearance to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb as recorded in John 20:

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping:  
and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the  
sepulchre,

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the  
head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus  
had lain.

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?  
She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my  
Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

And when she had thus said, she turned herself  
back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was  
Jesus.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?  
whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the  
gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him  
hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take  
him away.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and  
saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. (John  
20:11–16)

In the following verse, Christ commands Mary, saying, “Touch me not” (John 20:17). However, a more literal translation of this passage from Greek would read, “Stop holding on to me.” The Joseph Smith Translation supports this interpretation, saying, “Hold me not,”



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thereby strengthening the proof that she witnessed a bodily resurrection as Mary could touch Christ’s body. This very personal account of the resurrected Lord’s appearance to Mary brings peace to those whose faith has been tested by the loss of a loved one. A witness of the resurrected Christ can bring comfort to friends, neighbors, and loved ones; it can also strengthen our faith in our own eventual resurrection.

Besides testifying of the Resurrection of Christ, the New Testament records that others were resurrected after He arose. Matthew 27:52 declares, “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose.” This is an important passage, since it contradicts those who believe that the privilege of a physical resurrection was reserved for Christ only. According to John, Christ taught the Jews that sought His life that the Father was involved in the resurrection of all men and that Christ Himself was there to do the work of the Father (see John 5:17–21).

In the Acts of the Apostles, the role of the Apostles as testifiers of the Resurrection is paramount. As the Apostles sought the conversion of not only all Jews but of all men, their testimonies were centered on the risen Lord (see Acts 4:33). Their proclamations put their very lives in jeopardy. As the Apostles repeatedly testified that Jesus Christ the Son of God had been crucified but rose triumphantly from the grave, the Resurrection became the central message of nascent Christianity.

Jewish rejection of Christ’s Resurrection led the Apostle Paul to turn his efforts toward the conversion of Gentiles (see Acts 13:45–48). Resurrection, which was so controversial for some, appears to have been central to Paul’s message.

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When Paul spoke in defense of his life before Felix, he took occasion to testify of the physical resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust (see Acts 24:15). Later, standing before King Agrippa, Paul asked why it was so incredible or unbelievable that God would raise the dead (see Acts 26:8). The Resurrection was foundational to Paul, and he testified of the resurrection of all humankind as he appeared before kings and magistrates.

Paul's epistles also contain powerful testimonies of resurrection. To the Romans, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians, Paul testified that our mortal bodies would be quickened, or resurrected, to an immortal physical state (see Romans 8:11; Ephesians 2:5; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 2:13). Paul likewise understood and testified that there was an order to resurrection associated with righteousness and a belief in Christ. Paul continued to teach the reality of resurrection during his many years of missionary work as he encouraged all men and women to come unto Christ. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

Paul taught that personal righteousness affects not only being resurrected but also the order in which people would be resurrected. To the Thessalonians he wrote that those who die while following Christ will be resurrected first (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). And his epistles do not stand alone among the New Testament texts in declaring this truth. In

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Revelation, John added his testimony of the importance of personal righteousness as it relates to physical resurrection. The faithful were promised the privilege of the First Resurrection. Peter’s faith in Christ was strengthened by his hope in resurrection (see 1 Peter 1:3), and he recognized that the gift of resurrection saved him from physical death (see 1 Peter 3:21). Clearly the witness of the Resurrection was foundational to the testimony of Christ’s Apostles and the early Christian Church as described in the New Testament.

### RESURRECTION IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

President Ezra Taft Benson explained the powerful role the Book of Mormon has in proving resurrection: “The Book of Mormon is also the keystone of the doctrine of the Resurrection. As mentioned before, the Lord himself has stated that the Book of Mormon contains the ‘fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (D&C 20:9). . . . The Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious.”<sup>7</sup> The Book of Mormon records Jesus Christ’s appearance in the Americas as the resurrected and immortal Son of God. The Book of Mormon clearly prophesies of the resurrection of all humankind, even detailing the actual restoration of flesh and bone with spirit.

Many ancient prophets in the Book of Mormon testified of a physical resurrection. Nearly six hundred years before the birth of Christ, Nephi saw in vision that after Christ was slain He would rise from the dead (see 1 Nephi 10:11).

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Nephi explained that resurrection included both the body and the spirit and that every human being would become incorruptible and immortal, clothed with purity and the robe of righteousness (see 2 Nephi 9:12–14). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland clarified this passage of scripture, promising, “As a universal gift flowing from the atonement of Christ, the Resurrection will clothe with a permanent, perfected, restored body every spirit ever born into mortality.”<sup>8</sup> The Book of Mormon prophets understood that bringing to pass the resurrection of the dead was a significant part of Christ’s role (see 2 Nephi 2:8; Alma 33:22; Alma 40:3; Helaman 14:15; Mormon 7:6). The Book of Mormon clearly teaches the corporeal resurrection of all people (see Alma 11).

The “crowning event” in the Book of Mormon is the appearance of the resurrected Christ in the Americas to the righteous who awaited His coming (introduction to the Book of Mormon; see also 3 Nephi 11–27). Christ taught and testified to the people of the certainty of their own resurrection. So paramount is the witness for physical resurrection in the Book of Mormon that Moroni, the concluding author, devotes his last passage to his conviction that his own spirit and body would again reunite in the resurrection (see Moroni 10:34). The testimonies of these ancient prophets in the Americas is another testament of Jesus Christ, giving credibility to an actual physical resurrection.

The Book of Mormon outlines the advantages of a glorified, resurrected body over just a spirit body. It testifies of a complete corporeal resurrection in which not even a

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hair of the head will be lost (see Alma 11:42–46). President John Taylor explained, “It requires both body and spirit to make a perfect man, whether in time or eternity.”<sup>9</sup> Not just any physical body but a perfected body reunited with its spirit in its perfect form (see Alma 11:43). President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “Deformities will be erased and in the resurrection will be made whole.”<sup>10</sup> President Brigham Young promised, “Those who attain to the blessings of the first or celestial resurrection will be pure and holy, and perfect in body.”<sup>11</sup> The idea of a perfect body restored to its whole and complete form is miraculous, particularly for those deprived of health or wholeness in mortality. President Spencer W. Kimball testified, “When the body is resurrected, . . . we will have our limbs and all our faculties.”<sup>12</sup> These promised blessings give hope to those in a fallen world. As Latter-day Saints we have the obligation to lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees (see D&C 81:5). We can do this when teaching and testifying of a glorious resurrection as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### A LATTER-DAY SAINT PERSPECTIVE

The Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version describes resurrection as “the uniting of a spirit body with a body of flesh and bones, never again to be divided.” In answer to the question “Is Christ to be the only resurrected being?” the Bible Dictionary further explains that all who have lived upon this earth will be resurrected because of Christ’s victory

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over death. Its definition of resurrection culminates with the proclamation that to be resurrected with “a celestial, exalted body is the center point of hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection of Jesus is the most glorious of all messages to mankind.”<sup>13</sup>

President Howard W. Hunter powerfully addressed the doctrinal significance of Christ’s Resurrection to Latter-day Saints: “The doctrine of the Resurrection is the single most fundamental and crucial doctrine in the Christian religion. It cannot be overemphasized, nor can it be disregarded. Without the Resurrection, the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a litany of wise sayings and seemingly unexplainable miracles.”<sup>14</sup>

President Hunter’s remarks assign great importance to this crucial doctrine, especially in missionary situations. When sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, citing this crucial doctrine as the centerpiece of our testimony may significantly change behavior and speed the conversion process.

Speaking of Christ’s Resurrection, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “This was not an ordinary thing. It was the greatest event in human history. I do not hesitate to say that.”<sup>15</sup> As the greatest miracle in human history, the Resurrection deserves a prominent place among the doctrines that Latter-day Saints include when sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with friends or neighbors. Broaching the subject of the “greatest event in human history” should not be unduly difficult and is absolutely necessary because it is indeed a “crucial doctrine.”

In a recent general conference, President James E. Faust testified of the significance of resurrection in relation

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to the fulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ: “With [the Apostasy], priesthood keys were lost, and some precious doctrines of the Church organized by the Savior were changed. Among these . . . [that] all mankind will be resurrected through the Atonement of Christ, ‘both the just and the unjust.’”<sup>16</sup> Understanding the Apostasy and its continued effect on Christian doctrines helps explain the general lack of understanding and minimizing of resurrection’s importance. When Latter-day Saints recognize this loss of truth concerning resurrection and their ability to bless the lives of others with this knowledge, they can declare this doctrine of salvation with confidence.

A conviction of resurrection will strengthen an individual’s understanding of the purpose of this life and help them face challenges common to mortality. Truly believing in resurrection could heal the hearts of a couple who has lost a young child in death. Knowledge of the restoration of the physical body in resurrection could change the perspective of someone physically challenged, permanently injured, or undeveloped. Possibly the most significant change a testimony of resurrection can bring is eternal perspective and purpose. This belief can change the way one views life and death and the way one treats the body. It gives meaning to this life and helps explain the potential humankind has in the afterlife. Believing in the Resurrection is more than a spiritual crutch for the mentally weak; it strengthens the reality of our eternal nature.

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### RESURRECTION AND THE RESTORATION

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that our testimony of the Restoration should emphasize the reality of the Resurrection: “Without the Restoration we would not have the blessings of priesthood ordinances that are valid in time and eternity. We would not know the conditions of repentance, nor would we understand the reality of the resurrection. . . . Our love for the Lord and appreciation for the Restoration of the gospel are all the motivation we need to share what gives us much joy and happiness. It is the most natural thing in the world for us to do, and yet far too many of us are hesitant to share our testimonies with others.”<sup>17</sup> Since the bar for missionary work has been raised and the Church’s efforts to share the gospel have been centered on the Restoration, the question of how significant teaching the Resurrection should be in our missionary efforts is an important one.

President Joseph F. Smith, sixth President of the Church, wrote: “The greatest event that has ever occurred in the world, since the resurrection of the Son of God from the tomb and his ascension on high, was the coming of the Father and of the Son to that boy Joseph Smith, to prepare the way for the laying of the foundation of his kingdom—not the kingdom of man—never more to cease nor to be overturned.”<sup>18</sup> Restored to the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith is the message that the resurrected Christ stands at the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With the Book of Mormon as another witness of the resurrected Christ, the kingdom of God is established on earth to prepare the earth for the



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Second Coming of the Messiah. Above all, the doctrine of resurrection with the light of the Restoration gives hope to all mankind that resurrection is a reality and that God’s whole work and glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (see Moses 1:39).

I do not know what became of the man with whom I spoke of Resurrection, but I hope that he maintained a belief and a hope in that doctrine. President James E. Faust explained what a testimony of a literal Resurrection of the Savior can do, saying, “The depth of our belief in the Resurrection and the Atonement of the Savior will . . . determine the measure of courage and purpose with which we meet life’s challenges.”<sup>19</sup> If indeed that man embraced the doctrine of the Resurrection and it became part of his testimony of the Savior, then it must have helped him in his pursuit of truth.

Considering all the things that have been written and spoken concerning the Resurrection, it seems important to end with the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the resurrected Christ. “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!” (D&C 76:22). Let us follow the example of great missionaries in scripture and counsel from living prophets to reach out and share the doctrine of resurrection and the great truth of the Restoration with all who will listen.

## NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Missionary Work and the Atonement,” *Ensign*, March 2001, 11.

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2. Augustine, quoted in Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 159.
3. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Rethinking the Resurrection," in *Newsweek*, April 8, 1996, 62.
4. National Opinion Research Center Survey, July 1984, in LexisNexis Academic Database; <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/> (accessed November 7, 2006). Forty-six percent of respondents said a "spiritual life, involving our mind but not our body" was "very likely." Twenty-nine percent called it "somewhat likely."
5. Gallup Organization Survey, December 1988, in LexisNexis Academic Database (accessed November 7, 2006).
6. See Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign*, November 1986, 16–18.
7. Ezra T. Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 5–6.
8. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 244.
9. John Taylor, quoted in Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, eds., *Understanding Death and the Resurrection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 219.
10. Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted in Parry and Parry, *Understanding Death and the Resurrection*, 222.
11. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 10:24.
12. Spencer W. Kimball, quoted in Parry and Parry, *Understanding Death and the Resurrection*, 221.
13. Bible Dictionary, "Resurrection," 761.

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14. Howard W. Hunter, “An Apostle’s Witness of the Resurrection,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 15.
15. Gordon B. Hinckley, “He Is Not Here, but Is Risen,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 70; see also an address delivered by President Hinckley on Easter Sunday, 1994, wherein he said, “Today is observed as the anniversary of the greatest miracle in human history” (“The Greatest Miracle in Human History,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 72).
16. James E. Faust, “The Restoration of All Things,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 61.
17. M. Russell Ballard, “Creating a Gospel-Sharing Home,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 84.
18. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 495.
19. James E. Faust, “Woman, Why Weepest Thou?” *Ensign*, November 1996, 52.

