



A KING AND HIS CROWN

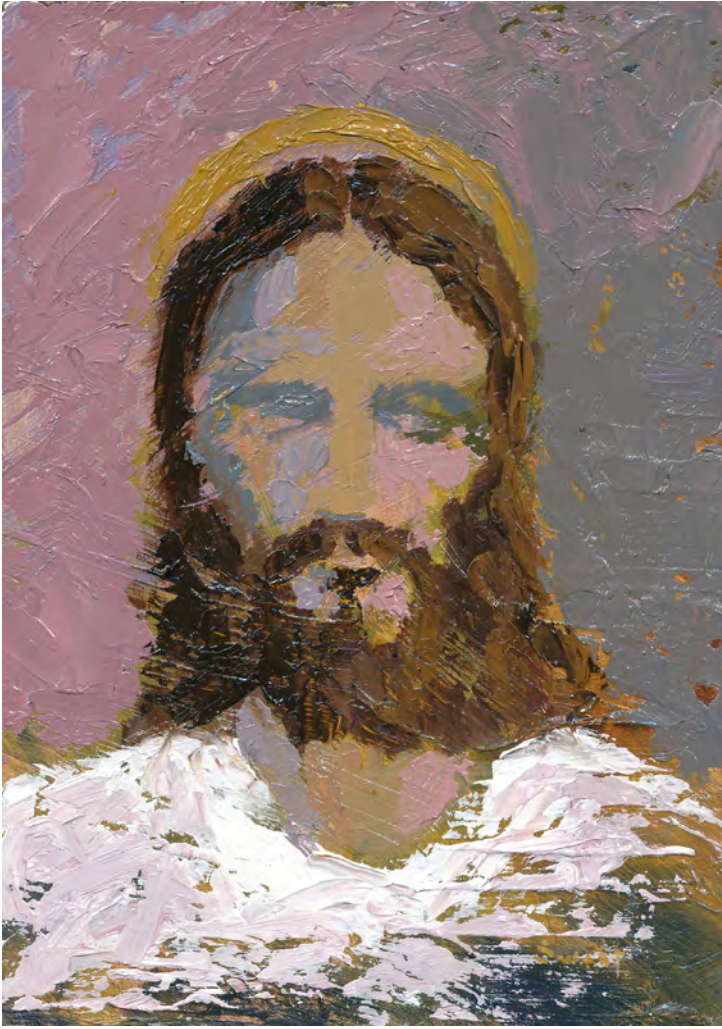
WHAT, HOW, AND WHY WE WORSHIP

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I have adapted my title, “A King and His Crown: What, How, and Why We Worship,” from a monumental revelation that Joseph Smith received in the spring of 1833. It is recorded today in Doctrine and Covenants 93. It is a radical revelation, in every sense of the word. It deals with the divine nature of Christ and the divine nature of humankind, challenging several prevailing Christian beliefs. The revelation of Doctrine and Covenants 93 tells us why God felt it was important to clarify these truths, giving us a “thesis” statement found in verse 19: “I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.”

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ANTHONY R. SWEAT, *MAN OF COMFORT*, © ANTHONY SWEAT.

Section 93 can be classified as a central section of Latter-day Saint worship, teaching us *what* we worship, *how* we are

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to worship, and *why* we worship. Let us look closer at each of these three central ideas, beginning with what we worship.

WHAT WE WORSHIP

What we worship is the Son of God, who grew into a fullness of Godhood. In case we miss this radical idea, the revelation states *three* times in a row for emphasis that mortal Jesus “received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace,” first in verse 12, then in verse 13, and again in 14. The revelation concluded, however, that Jesus *did* receive “a fulness of the glory of the Father” in verse 16. When did Christ receive this fulness of glory? Verse 17 gives us a hint: “And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him.” That phrase, “all power, both in heaven and earth,” aligns with Matthew 28:18, when after his resurrection Jesus told his disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” It seems that Christ grew, line upon line, and grace for grace, until after showing his perfect obedience and submission to the Father in all things—all the way up to the end of his life in his atoning suffering and triumph—then he was given a “fulness” of glory and power after his resurrection. Thus, in the New Testament Jesus taught his followers to be perfect or complete, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect. After his resurrection, however, he visited the peoples of the Book of Mormon and added himself in the phrase, “be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

Why does understanding that Jesus grew grace by grace matter? Because it helps us understand what, or whom, we

worship. We worship a being who understands growth and progression, line upon line. We worship a Savior who left his premortal station in the Godhead and condescended—which means “to waive the privileges of rank”¹—to come to earth and live a mortal life. His mortal life began in the lowliest of situations—being born as a helpless baby, in a dirty cave, in a small town, to an impoverished and obscure family in a politically oppressed nation. The being who formerly formed worlds without number and had the very elements obey his voice became a helpless infant who couldn’t speak; he was cared for by first-time parents with pure hearts but very inexperienced hands. *Jesus became a mortal, like you and me, in every sense of the word.* Despite the claim in the sentimental Christmas hymn “Away in a Manger,” as a baby little Lord Jesus probably cried a lot. Most babies do. Presumably he fussed and didn’t sleep through the night. He probably tried to put everything in his mouth. He rolled over, and then crawled, and then stumbled to an unsteady walk. He possibly threw temper tantrums and cried until he fell asleep on the floor, cheeks flushed and hair tousled with sweat. He babbled and had to learn how to make word associations. Ironically, He who made the trees had to learn how to say “tree.” I once held my two-year-old son in my arms and pointed to a tree and asked him what it was. He said, “Dog.” “No, little buddy,” I said. “That’s a tree. Can you say tree?” “Tuh-ree,” he said proudly. I can imagine Joseph or Mary holding two-year-old Jesus and having the same type of conversation: “Can you say tree, Jesus?” “Tree.” “Good!” “And guess what, *you* made that tree! Nice work. Careful what you say to that tree, by the way, because it will obey you” (see Matthew 21:19–20).

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Like all of us, our Lord experienced the veil of forgetfulness.² Jesus had to learn he was Jehovah. When did he realize he was special, the Messiah? We don't really know. It is evident



WALTER RANE, *AND THE CHILD GREW.*

that by the time he was twelve years old in the temple he already understood who his real Father was and that his life's purpose was to do God's will (see Luke 2:49). Despite this knowledge, however, Jesus continued to develop as a regular boy. He probably preferred to play and run with his friends instead of doing

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chores around the house, like many teens. He likely ran foot races and probably lost as often as he won. His mind was brilliant, for sure, but perhaps he forgot things—misplaced his father's tools, lost track of the time, had to be reminded of something. The story when he was twelve at the temple is evidence of that, as he overlooked telling his parents where he was, causing an unnecessary three-day search for a missing boy. There's no sin in any of that. It's just part of his physical, mental, social, and spiritual development, which Jesus had to experience as he grew into a man as Luke 2:52 points out. None of what I am saying here implies any impropriety in God's Divine Son. It implies mortality. It reminds us that Jesus had to grow, line upon line, grace by grace. Or, as the author of Hebrews put it, Jesus "*learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered*" or experienced (Hebrews 5:8). As Jesus learned, he always perfectly obeyed, and thus through his perfect obedience he exponentially grew in more light and truth. Doctrine and Covenants 93:28 teaches us that "he that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light," which Jesus did until he eventually received a fullness of light, truth, understanding, intelligence, glory, and power after his resurrection. Like the

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rungs of a ladder, Jesus climbed from level to level, obedience by obedience, step by step, or from “grace to grace, until he received a fulness,” as Doctrine and Covenants 93:13 reveals.

HOW WE WORSHIP

This leads us to understand *how* we are supposed to worship. Section 93, verses 19 and 20, shifts the narrative from Christ’s progression to our progression:

I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.

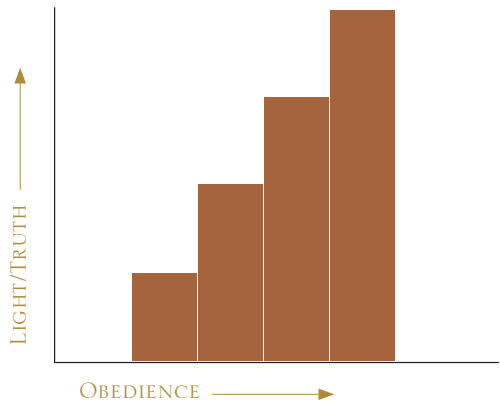
For if *you* keep my commandments *you* shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto *you*, *you* shall receive grace for grace.
(emphasis added)

The Lord reveals here that the purpose of life is about growth and progression toward God. We were “in the beginning with God” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29), just as Jesus was, and can progress to become like God, just as Jesus has. “We are the children of God,” Paul said. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17).

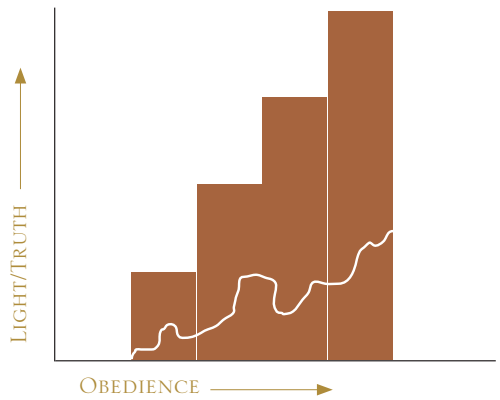
The way we are to worship is by gaining light and truth, and obeying it, as Doctrine and Covenants 93 exhorts. If we obey light and truth, we will receive more light and truth. It is almost like a graph with an X-axis and a Y-axis in which you can put “obedience” on one axis and “light and truth” on another axis.

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As a person obeys, he or she gets more light and truth. If one disobeys, he or she loses light and truth, as verse 39 says. Here is a visual representation of how Jesus progressed, grace for grace:



As he received light and truth, he perfectly obeyed and then received more light and truth, growing grace for grace exponentially. And here below is a visual representation of our mortal progression in comparison to Jesus's growth:



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We're doing great, we go to church on Sunday, and then Monday morning hits, and we begin to lose light and truth. We have some powerful spiritual experience and resolve to be better, and inevitably we regress and fall short again. The hope is that our overall long-term spiritual trajectory is upward, not downward. I know I have gained light and truth over the years as I have striven to learn obedience, despite my weakness. When I left on my mission, for example, I didn't even know that Jesus came to America. I had read the Book of Mormon twice before I went, but it had simply never dawned on me where it took place. One day in the MTC my mission companion and I were doing a practice discussion, and he said something about Christ visiting the Americas. I stopped him and asked, "When did Jesus come to the Americas?" and he said, "Um, have you never read the Book of Mormon?" I responded with something like, "That took place in the Americas??! Wow!" Ah, so much to learn. And now, more than twenty years later, I'm a religion professor.

Central to this idea about light, truth, and obedience is the reality that you and I will never live up to all the light and truth we receive. As we learn to more perfectly obey, God gives us more truth, which we struggle to live up to. Once we do begin to master that aspect of obedience, God again gives us more. Unlike Jesus, however, there's always a disconnect between what we know we should do and what we actually do. This is why we need grace, to grow in grace.

One revelation that teaches this concept is Doctrine and Covenants 76. This is the first revelation in this latter-day dispensation where the notion that a man or woman can become like God and receive of his fullness is clearly revealed. Speaking

of those who become like God in the celestial glory, the revelation is clear about something: celestial people don't always live up to everything they know they should do. The revelation says that those who are admitted to the celestial glory "are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:69). Or, as the Book of Mormon teaches it, we must "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him . . . that by his grace ye may be perfect" (Moroni 10:32). Thus, another central aspect of our worship is connecting ourselves to Christ's grace. Due to our weakness and shortcomings, we cannot receive a fullness of God unless we receive a fulness of grace. And the way we receive a fulness of grace is through covenants.

I once had a friendly discussion with an evangelical teacher who sincerely wanted to know why Latter-day Saints put so much emphasis on "works" and didn't believe in being saved by Christ's grace. I quoted a number of restoration scriptures to him that said we believe in being saved by grace, including Lehi's statement that "no flesh . . . can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8). He said, "Yes, but you think you need to do so many things before Christ's grace will save you. It's still a gospel of works." I said, "Dear brother, I could pay 20 percent tithing. I could attend Church ten hours a day. I could help every old lady I see across the street. I could set up ten thousand metal chairs for various church meetings. And none of those things will save me. I do them because I believe the Lord asks me to do them, and it's a way I show my love to him. But it's only through Christ's grace that I will be saved." He then said, "Well, what do you think a person needs to do



to be saved, then?" I answered, "Have faith in Christ, meaning we trust in his ways and teachings; repent, meaning we strive to align our lives with Jesus's teachings; get baptized, which means we make an outward commitment by a covenant with Christ to take his name on us and be his disciple; and receive the Holy Ghost, which means we strive to qualify for, listen to,

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and follow the promptings of God's Spirit." When I said that, he looked right at me and said, "Works!" I asked in return, "Well, what do you believe someone needs to do to be saved by the

grace of Christ?" He said, "If you will but accept Jesus in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is the Christ, you will be saved." I couldn't help it, but I smiled at him and said, "Works!" He said, "No, don't you say that, brother. Don't you call that works!" I said, "Why not? If you can say my baptism is a work, I can say your confession is a work. In both of them, the person must do something to show they've received Jesus." In a moment of clarity I said, "The only difference between you and me is that you believe in being saved by Christ's grace by *confession*, and we believe in being saved by Christ's grace by *covenant*." That difference is a key component to the restoration.

Why do covenants with Christ save us? Because we always fall short, despite our progress. No matter if we know that Jesus came to America or not, our merits are insufficient, our implementation of grace-for-grace is very ungraceful. When we are connected to Christ by covenant, however, his merits

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become our merits. It is very much like a marriage relationship, solidified by covenant. When a man and woman make a marriage covenant, they become one, and their lives merge. The beauty of marriage is that your spouse's gifts and abilities become part of your life, even if you lack them yourself. We each are blessed by the other's qualities as though they were our very own, even though they aren't. One of the most frequent metaphors Jesus used to describe his relationship with his loyal followers was marriage. I am married unto you," he plainly said to the Israelites (Jeremiah 3:14). "Thy Maker is



MATT REIER, *COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE*.



thine husband,” Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 54:5). Paul reminded the Romans, “Ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead” (Romans 7:4). We became metaphorically married to the Messiah when we entered the waters of baptism and made a covenant with him—a ceremony that greatly parallels a wedding. Like any marriage, when we join ourselves with Jesus we become an heir with him and gain access to all his gifts, powers, abilities, and virtues. His goodness becomes our goodness. His purity our purity. His holiness our holiness. This is because “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest . . . unto men in the flesh” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:20–21).

Since some may inadvertently read that story with the evangelical, or anything else I have written thus far, as a criticism of Protestant Christianity, I want to say clearly that I love and greatly respect our Christian sisters and brothers, particularly for their faith in Christ’s ability to save. In general, they seem to better grasp than we do, as Latter-day Saints, the perfect hope of salvation that comes through Christ’s grace. If I were in a room of one hundred evangelical Christians and asked how many of them thought they were going to heaven, I would expect a chorus of one hundred to say they know they will, followed by an “amen!” and a “hallelujah!” Not because they think their merits qualify them for heaven, but because they know that Christ’s do, and they have confidence in him.

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I have asked the same question to various Latter-day Saint groups, and they often don't respond with the same celestial confidence. At times, we place so much emphasis on obedience and progression that we overlook the fact that repentance is part of obedience, and mistakes are part of growth. What Christ asks for is complete commitment to him, not flawless following of him. While not condoning mistakes or sins, God expects them in his children, just as you and I do in ours, as we learn and grow. That's why we come unto Christ and are perfected in *him*. We have a Redeemer for a reason. We need to drop our perfectionist complex and instead develop a loyalty complex to Christ. Can I get an "amen?" Maybe even a "hallelujah"?

WHY WE WORSHIP

In conclusion, what we worship and how we worship leads us to *why* we worship. Doctrine and Covenants 93:19–20 says that the reason why we worship is so that "in due time" we can "receive of [God's] fulness, and be glorified in [Christ]." Christ has received a fulness of knowledge, power, and glory and now sits enthroned in yonder heavens, and we can be joint-heirs with him through his grace. We, too, can become heavenly royalty.

We aren't accustomed to speaking in royal terms and our receiving crowns, but that is exactly what the prophets and scriptures have told us will be the reward of the loyal covenant children of Christ. In the last general conference discourse of his life, Joseph Smith said, "Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be

Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.”³

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The Doctrine and Covenants says we can receive “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, . . . exaltation and glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20). A “royal priesthood” is how Peter put it more mildly (1 Peter 2:9).

President John Taylor asked, “Have you forgotten who you are, and what your object is? Have you forgotten that you [are] clothed upon with the holy priesthood? Have you forgotten that you are aiming to become kings and priests to the Lord, and queens and priestesses to him?”⁴

This potential to grow grace by grace through covenant to ultimately receive a fullness of God is not just the central idea of Doctrine and Covenants 93, but it is the central idea of worship in the temple. What we worship, how we worship, and why we worship is summarized in the instructions of God’s holy house. Our “endowment”—as we refer to it—is to receive the power and capacity to one day enter the presence of God and receive a fullness of his blessings. The presentation of the endowment ceremony replicates this metaphorical journey. It takes a fallen person and cleanses them, blesses them, teaches them—grace by grace—and brings them to a

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DEL PARSON, *SALT LAKE TEMPLE*.

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celestial redemption in the presence of God. If we are faithful, its patterns prepare us symbolically for what will ultimately become a reality.

To help us better grasp why the temple is central to what, how, and why we worship, I conclude with a parable:

The temple of heaven is likened unto a certain man who was invited to meet the king of his country.

A stonemason by trade, this goodly commoner loyally served his king and country.

To reward his faithfulness, he was called to the king's chambers by royal invitation.

Having arrived on the appointed day, the common stonemason presented his invitation at the castle gates.

Being allowed to pass, he was first led by the king's servants to be purified by bathing, according to custom.

After being bathed, he was perfumed and anointed with sweet-smelling ointments.

And next, he was clothed in royal apparel fit for an audience with the king.

Last, he was instructed in all required reverences to approach his Highness: The proper bows, the oaths of loyalty, and never turning your back on the king.

Then the stonemason was led to an antechamber, wherein a royal servant knocked upon the large doors of the king's court.

The doors parted, and the stonemason entered his king's presence. Demonstrating the required reverences toward his highness, the king smiled upon the man and blessed him.

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Proclaiming his faithfulness, his king initiated the stonemason as a member of the Royal Order and awarded him a gold ring.

Whosoever hath this ring must wear it well and must always be loyal, said the king.

And the king instructed the common stonemason in all the ways of the kingdom, from its inception and rise to its inevitable fall and providential redemption.

You must return, said the king to the commoner, I have more for you to understand. Come again. I will instruct you anew, that you may have a perfect knowledge of all mysteries. You are to help rule and govern in my kingdom as an heir.

He and she who hath ears to hear, let them hear.

May each of us understand what we worship, how we are to worship, and why we worship, so that as joint-heirs of God through Christ, we may, grace by grace, one day also receive a celestial crown.

NOTES

1. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “Condescend,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/condescend>.
2. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 111–12.
3. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Illinois, 7 April 1844, in *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (15 August 1844): 612–17.

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4. G. Homer Durham, comp., *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor, Third President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 229–30.