

CHAPTER FOUR

“HE IS RISEN”

ELDER L. ALDIN PORTER

The Psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). I love the word of the Lord—whether through the scriptures or through His living prophets. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit may attend us that we might have truth and light.

The golden chain that makes its way through the book of Acts and through the book of Revelation and throughout all of the scriptures is that Jesus is the Son of God and has been resurrected. The dominant message of the scriptures in all ages is “He is risen” (Matthew 28:6). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven.”¹

The Apostles Peter, Thomas, Paul, and others bore personal witness of the Resurrection, and their individual testimonies highlight different aspects of this supernal event. Ultimately, the power of their words to bring about conversion in their listeners depended upon the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost, “for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).

There is power in the witness of the spoken word. The voice has the capability to reach the heart of man in a remarkable manner. When that voice is accompanied by the Holy Spirit, there is light and truth. That light and truth is shared by the speaker as well as the listener (see D&C 50:22).

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PETER TESTIFIES OF THE RESURRECTION

On the day of Pentecost, in Peter's first recorded discourse after the Ascension of the Lord, the chief Apostle referred to the prophecies of Jesus Christ and then said: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:32, 36–38).

Later, Peter and John healed the man who was lame at the gates of the temple. As they entered the temple grounds, a large group came running together, greatly wondering. The people in this gathering were obviously very different from the people Peter spoke to on the day of Pentecost. Note the significant change in his instructions: "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. . . . Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:14–15, 19–21).

This second group of listeners apparently included those who participated in calling for the Crucifixion of the Son of God, and there would be no baptism and no hope until another distant time. It is interesting that in both cases Peter made a major point of the fact that the Savior had been raised from the dead but gave a call to repentance and baptism to one group and a call to repent with far-off possibilities to the other. Each time he boldly gave a witness that God had raised Jesus from the dead. I draw attention to not only the message but the method by which it is transmitted. Peter did not argue, he did not plead, he did not cajole—he simply bore witness of the Master and His Resurrection with a power we can feel as we read the accounts. He knew the fundamental truth that the convincing power of the Holy Ghost would accompany his words.

Earlier, while Jesus lived in mortality, Simon Peter had an experience that gives background to his testimony:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13–18)

The Savior could have said to Peter, “You have seen me feed the five thousand, restore sight to the blind, give hearing to the deaf, and bring life to the dead, and now you know who I am.” He did not say those things. What He did say is, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (v. 17).

The Lord’s work moves forward on personal revelation and the power of testimony. Today we testify before the world that these things are true. Our parents, teachers, priesthood and auxiliary leaders, missionaries, and apostles and prophets bear witness of the divinity of the Lord’s Atonement and Resurrection. We have spiritual progress in this kingdom when our quorums, classes, and pulpits resound with the sure word of testimony. President Harold B. Lee taught this supernal truth: “More powerful than sight, more powerful than walking and talking with Him, is that witness of the Spirit. . . . When that Spirit has witnessed to our spirit, that’s a revelation from Almighty God.”²

THOMAS FEELS THE SAVIOR’S WOUNDS

From the experience Thomas had with the resurrected Christ, it appears that the Lord required the reality of His physical Resurrection to be understood by those who were to be His special witnesses. Thomas’s experience occurred shortly after the Resurrection but before the Ascension, as the scriptures record:

Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. (John 20:24–27)

There is little chance that Thomas did not believe that man survived the grave. How many times had he heard the Master teach the principles of eternity?

Elder Bruce R. McConkie provided this insight: “Thomas apparently did not understand or believe that Jesus had come forth with a literal, tangible body of flesh and bones, one that could be felt and handled, one that bore the nail marks and carried the spear wound, one that ate food and outwardly was almost akin to a mortal body. Obviously he had heard the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other women, of Peter, and of all the apostles. It is not to be supposed that he doubted the resurrection as such, but rather the literal and corporeal nature of it. Hence his rash assertion about feeling the nail prints and thrusting his hand into the Lord’s side.”³

It was necessary that Thomas believe in the eternal nature of the spirit and also, to fulfill his apostleship, necessary that he know and testify of the physical resurrection of the body. Today the nature of the physical resurrection is often overlooked. When we testify of the certainty of physical resurrection, the Holy Spirit accompanies our words with power. If we are to enjoy the full benefits of the Holy Spirit we, through revelation, must testify of the certainty of the Lord’s life, death, and Resurrection.

It is a comfort as well as a warning to understand that the resurrection is physical. Consider the comfort this knowledge brings to those who lay their children in the grave. Have you not seen the power of this faith in the faces of bereaved parents? The reality of death descends on us in stark tones as we stand at the grave of a loved one. But the reality of a literal resurrection comes with the power of certainty only the Comforter can give. In that moment, the resurrection ceases to be just an abstract doctrinal subject. Instead, this glorious certainty fills the soul with joy.

Does this knowledge not impact us when we realize that we will stand

in the flesh before the judgment bar of God? The spiritual confirmation that there is a resurrection brings with it a sureness that we are dealing with life in its most certain, eternal forms. Moroni's closing words in the last chapter in the Book of Mormon have a ring of finality to them. He says, "And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?" (Moroni 10:27).

One reason the Book of Mormon is given to us in this day is so we may effectively teach and testify of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the certainty of His Resurrection. Alma taught, "Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye" (Mosiah 27:31).

Ezekiel saw the day when all must accept the Savior's position in the face of evidence which cannot be denied: "Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves" (Ezekiel 37:12-13).

It will be a tragedy for those who wait for this final day to accept the Master and His sacrifice. They who "live without God in the world" will have endured so much pain and needless sorrow. For many it will be a dark and fearsome day, but surely it will not be such for those who have received the testimony of Jesus and have overcome by faith. For them it will be a day of most sublime joy.

PAUL TESTIFIES OF THE RISEN LORD

Now we come to the testimony of the Apostle Paul. This great Apostle to the Gentiles was a powerful witness of the Resurrection throughout his life. "They came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures. Opening and alleging, that Christ

must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:1–3).

Later at Mars' hill, Paul testified: "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:29–31).

Many months passed, and Paul found himself testifying before King Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? . . . Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:8, 22–23).

Elder McConkie taught that the Apostle Paul's example is pertinent to all of us who seek to serve the Master:

Paul testifies that Jesus is the Christ. True he quotes selected Messianic prophecies to show his witness is in harmony with what other prophets have foretold. But the burden of his message is one of announcement, of bearing record that Jesus was raised from the dead; that he was seen of witnesses who now declare the glad tidings of salvation to others. . . .

It is the resurrection of Christ which proves the truth and divinity of the Christian faith. Jesus is shown to be the Son of God because he rose from the dead. The Messianic prophecies are known to apply to him because he broke the bands of death. . . . And so it is with all the Messianic prophecies; their fulfilment is known because Christ gained the victory over death.⁴

THE BOOK OF MORMON TESTIFIES OF CHRIST

The Lord, who knew the end from the beginning, revealed many years ago that we would need the Book of Mormon to carry the work forward in this dispensation:

And the Lord said unto Enoch: As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfill the oath which I have made unto you concerning the children of Noah;

And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve;

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; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth. (Moses 7:60–62)

On this passage, Brother Robert Matthews commented: “Five thousand years ago the Lord revealed to the prophet Enoch what the fundamental message of the Book of Mormon would be. Neither history, culture, nor geography were mentioned. The book would testify of the Only Begotten and the resurrection. . . . Almost every prophet in the Book of Mormon makes some reference to the resurrection.”⁵

The Book of Mormon’s title page explicitly states that it is written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Clearly He who gave us this sacred scripture has made known its divine purposes. These facts were placed in the book to draw our attention to those important doctrines the Lord wants us to understand. Therefore, the Book of Mormon is not merely the history of a people; it is the history of a message, of those who carried that message, and of the people’s response to it. The testimony of Jesus permeates its pages from the title page to Moroni’s final testimony.

REVELATION GUIDES THE CHURCH TODAY

This kingdom moves forward today on the power of the personal revelation that there is a Savior to this world and He is Jesus Christ. A living prophet was the instrument through which the Lord restored the priesthood with all of its power. We often underestimate the overwhelming importance of this revelatory gift.

On September 15, 1986, while serving as a mission president, I received a letter from an elder then serving as a missionary in Alabama. He and his

companion had been teaching an investigator who had a genuine interest in the Church. Her minister gave her some material which purported to answer the questions of Mormonism. He titles it "The Taproot of Mormonism." I quote:

Mormons teach that every individual can directly receive divine revelation. In fact, this is the Mormon method for distinguishing truth from error. Mormon missionaries teach non-Mormons that, in order to know whether or not the Mormon teachings are true, people should pray to God to send revelation directly and personally to them—God will send the Holy Spirit to speak directly to their heart.

The importance of this concept cannot be overemphasized because it is the very means by which Mormons are convinced Mormonism is true. . . . They believe because they are convinced that God himself has personally told them Mormonism is true. This is why few Mormons will reject Mormonism simply if they are shown contradictions between the Bible and Mormonism. They conclude the Bible must be in error (it has been changed through the years, etc.). It cannot be Mormonism is wrong, because they know God has told them it is true! This is the taproot of Mormonism—the source from which all Mormonism flows. It is the foundation of the structure of Mormonism. Destroy it and Mormonism falls.

When I finished reading it, the thought came to me that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). The author had rare insight.

The gentleman then went on to say: "We seek to show the validity of the following concept of revelation which we affirm is taught in the Bible: The Bible is the only revelation from God to man today. The time came when God's message was fully revealed and fully recorded in written form in the Bible. There then ceased to be a need, in God's plan, for continued direct revelation to man, so that process ceased." It is a tragedy that so many hold to the position that God no longer speaks through revelation.

MODERN WITNESSES TESTIFY OF CHRIST

Today our prophets, apostles, and other leaders testify of the risen Lord and the power of the Atonement and Resurrection. Years ago, as a new regional representative, I was on assignment to a stake conference with Elder Bruce R. McConkie. In the planning meeting Saturday afternoon

with the stake presidency, he asked that he be scheduled for one hour in the evening meeting and one hour in the Sunday meeting. It was Easter weekend. Saturday evening he spoke under the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Atonement. Sunday he spoke with the same power on the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and of all men. On the way to the airport, I said to him, "Those two discourses were magnificent." Note carefully his response: "Yes, they were. It is amazing how much I learn when I speak under the influence of the Spirit of God."

I have come to know since that day that I receive more revelations while teaching and testifying of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His servant the Prophet Joseph Smith, and of the living prophets of our day than at any other time.

This great and powerful witness that we have so abundantly seen in the scriptures has fallen upon the apostles and prophets and faithful members of the Church in our day. We are blessed with prophets who have a sure and certain knowledge of these basic truths.

President Gordon B. Hinckley testified of the Resurrection, saying:

Never had this occurred before. There had been only death without hope. Now there was life eternal. Only a God could have done this. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the great crowning event of His life and mission. It was the capstone of the Atonement. The sacrifice of His life for all mankind was not complete without His coming forth from the grave, with the certainty of the Resurrection for all who have walked the earth.

Of all the victories in the chronicles of humanity, none is so great, none so universal in its effects, none so everlasting in its consequences as the victory of the crucified Lord, who came forth from the tomb that first Easter morning.

Those who were witnesses of that event, all who saw and heard and spoke with the Risen Lord, testified of the reality of this greatest of all miracles. His followers through the centuries lived and died in proclamation of the truth of this supernal act.

To all of these we add our testimony that He who died on Calvary's cross arose again in wondrous splendor as the Son of God, the Master of life and death.⁶

We have the honor and the obligation through revelation to bear witness that Jesus literally came forth from the tomb. Our teaching should be

filled with this eternal fact. Ours is the joyful burden of standing as His witnesses in our day and time.

I add my testimony to those of the prophets. God has made known to me in an unmistakable way that He lives and that His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior of the world and was resurrected to lead all men through that incredible transformation. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 121.
2. Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 39.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 1:860.
4. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:126–27.
5. Robert J. Matthews, *Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 509.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Special Witnesses of Christ," *Ensign*, April 2001, 15.