

# INTRODUCTION

**W**e feel lost. We are trapped. But our Heavenly Father has a plan. He wants us to know that his plan of redemption will work. We are not supposed to stay lost and in bondage, separated from his presence. His plan is big enough to bring all his children home. He has chosen his Only Begotten Son as our Redeemer, the one who gave his life to ransom us from our captivity and to bring us back through the covenant path. This message of hope is communicated in scriptures and in the ordinances we perform, particularly in the temple.

But we have a problem. Much of the language of scripture is rooted in an ancient world, a world of relationships and symbols that can feel foreign. The plan of redemption and its covenants are expressed in ancient words that we are filtering through modern eyes and ears. We hear the words but don't always understand the message of hope that our Father is trying so hard to communicate. The assurance of our ransom price

is likewise communicated through symbols in the ordinances that we can easily tune out or rush by in our hectic modern lives.

This book has two parts to help bring into focus this message of Christ as our Redeemer and as our Ransom. The first part helps us see Christ's identity as our Kinsman-Redeemer by exploring the ancient words that connect covenants, redemption, worship, the presence of the Lord, and sitting down enthroned in God's presence as his children and heirs. The second part helps us see Christ as our Ransom by exploring medieval images that can help us increase our confidence in the price that was paid for our deliverance. Christ invites us to "behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet" (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37). Knowing that he is our Redeemer and that his suffering and death is our ransom price allows us to "look unto [him] in every thought" and to "doubt not" and "fear not" (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36).

This is the message our Father in Heaven has been trying so hard to communicate to us—Christ can free us and bring us home if we trust him and come unto him. Learning from ancient words and medieval images can provide additional tools to help us tune in to this message of hope. With these additional resources, we can study the scriptures and participate in the ordinances with deeper and deeper experiences of God's love and assurance. We can more fully rely on our Redeemer and more fully come unto him, receiving the gift of life that he offers us.

This journey of coming unto Christ can be understood more clearly as we become attuned to the concepts and symbolic language communicated in the covenants and ordinances of salvation. These covenants and ordinances, including those of the temple, map out this journey back to the presence of God through the redemption of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of this journey of our life becomes clearer as we learn the meaning of ancient words that connect covenants, redemption, and returning to God's presence to sit enthroned. Likewise, learning to ponder images and symbols pointing to Christ's suffering and death can open our eyes and minds to more clearly behold the symbolic presentation throughout

the ordinances. A deeper study of these ancient words allows us to appreciate the power of our covenant relationship with Christ, and a deeper study of medieval devotional images gives us practice in pondering the images of Christ's suffering and death, allowing us to see the message of redeeming love communicated in the ordinances.

Part one, "Christ, Our Kinsman-Redeemer," develops core scriptural concepts to explain why faith in Christ and making and keeping covenants can bring peace and hope to all. With explanations and personal accounts, it develops the ancient sense in which covenants (*bērit*) create family relationships. It explains that Christ's role as our Kinsman-Redeemer (*gō'ēl*), the Hebrew role of one appointed to buy family members out of bondage, stems from those relationships. We can have confidence that he is our Redeemer because of our covenants with him.

When we feel Christ's redeeming love and forgiveness, we are free. Understanding ancient concepts of being freed from bondage to live lives of worship (*hwh* and *'abad*, literally "bowing down" and "serving") helps us reconcile ourselves to living as the Lord's servants, expressing our gratitude for redemption. We learn to trust him and are increasingly willing to walk in his ways, even when we don't understand them. Old Testament temple symbolism shows how covenant worship brings us to the presence of the Lord (*pānīm*). Understanding the multiple meanings of the phrase *the presence of the Lord* reminds us that we can experience his presence in this life as well as in the eternities, which encourages us to seek for holiness—the sanctification of thoughts and actions through Christ.

As we continue following the journey of this covenant path, we learn that the Lord invites us to sit down on his throne (*yāšab*). He wants us to experience his kind of life now and forever. When we despair that we can never become what we have promised to be, he reminds us of his power to redeem and exalt. Our covenants bring us into his family, allowing him as our Kinsman-Redeemer to redeem us. We need to understand the power of these covenants with our Redeemer to escape from any bondage that we experience. Through trusting in his redeeming love, we live lives

of worship, find joy in holiness, and experience the presence of God now and forever.

Part two, “Christ, Our Ransom Price,” also draws on a different cultural frame of reference to provide additional tools for tuning in to familiar gospel symbols from the scriptures and temple. With personal anecdotes, historical background, and scriptural analysis, this section uses devotional images and late medieval practices of contemplation as a strategy to help us more fully accept the Savior’s invitation to “behold the wounds” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37) and to “behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:4). By using medieval images as a counterpoint to Restoration practices and ordinances, we can more fully appreciate the gift that has been given and see it with fresh eyes.

This part of the book explores the use and limits of devotional images, particularly the image of Christ. In addition to exploring the role of devotional images in the Middle Ages, this section also gives some general background to help us see how the physical can connect us with Christ. In the early Christian period the tombs of martyrs were a sacred space for believers, and in time that role was served by the saints’ bodies, which could be transported to new places, thus bringing the holiness of the saints to others as relics. Later we see the rise of passion (Atonement-related) relics as the focus on Christ’s mortal life became more central in the later Middle Ages. This desire to be close to the sacred can be seen in the emphasis on restoring and visiting sacred places of Church history such as Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo, but more importantly, this yearning also points to the broader potential for physical connection with the sacred through ordinances.

The devotional imagery known as the *Arma Christi*, symbols of the events of the passion, was a medieval visual strategy to focus meditation on Christ’s atoning suffering and death. Learning from the practice of meditating on the *Arma Christi* helps us to slow down and ponder Christ’s ransom price for us. Developing this focus can help us draw more out of our time with both the scriptures and the ordinances. An-

other devotional image of Christ's suffering is the image of him treading the winepress, which draws on descriptions in both Isaiah and the book of Revelation. This depiction of Christ's gift of suffering for us can be seen in imagery tied in to both olive oil and the sacrament. The image of Christ with his garments red from treading the winepress alone helps us understand our need to receive the gift of his ransom price, lest it turn to witness against us.

The widely known image of the Pietà provides a way to think about how others' responses to Christ's suffering and death can help us learn to respond to him. Late medieval texts and images modeled responses to Christ and helped people know how to respond to him. While we may not ever have these kinds of visual reminders, our daily study of the Book of Mormon can also provide us with powerful textual examples of people whose response to Christ was life changing.

A lesser-known late medieval image of Christ is the Man of Sorrows, also known as the *Imago pietatis*, which captures the image both of Christ's suffering and also of his resurrection. The importance of appreciating both aspects of his Atonement can be seen by Christ's focus on his wounds in his postresurrection appearances. Bringing his atoning death and infinite life together in our minds increases our faith in his redeeming power.

The last chapter of this section explores how, as we come unto Christ, we can fully receive this ransom price by receiving the image of Christ in ourselves. The idea of taking on Christ's image in a physical sense is explored by engaging with the image of St. Francis, his life of discipleship, and his stigmata and what this example points to about embodied knowledge. The idea of knowing Christ through the ordinances as well as in our lives is critical to receiving the redemption that we have been offered. When we see knowledge as more than information—as a way of being that is modeled and enacted in the ordinances—we can more fully appreciate living at a time when the knowledge and redeeming power of the Lord are being poured out more fully than ever before.

As our vision opens up to what we are being offered through the covenants and ordinances, we can more fully receive them in our lives. As we behold the gift of his love and sacrifice, we can more fully receive Christ into our lives. The covenants and ordinances offer both the message and the power of redemption. Christ is inviting us to come unto him, and as we accept that invitation and embark on that journey, we find in him the life, light, and hope that the Father is trying so hard to share with us.