

THE LIVING CHRIST:

Apostolic Testimonies and Infinite Love

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Several years ago, I began to pay particular attention to the topical index at the front of the general conference issues of the *Ensign* magazine. It was part of an effort to determine the current focus of Church leaders. Upon receiving the magazine, I would turn to the topical index and note the two or three topics that were most frequently addressed. I would then determine how many of those talks were given by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. I would then add together the two numbers (the total number of talks on the topic, plus the number of those talks that were given by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve), with the idea that the resulting total would give me a rough, general sense of the current focus and priorities

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of Church leaders, especially those fifteen brethren who have the sacred duty to act as prophets, seers, and revelators.¹

In the twelve conferences from 2008 through 2013, there were a handful of topics that commanded the top spot, with the topics varying from conference to conference. During that time, the leading topics included “family,” “adversity,” “temples,” “love,” “Jesus Christ,” “obedience,” “faith,” and “service.” On average, the most discussed topic in a conference was addressed in just over seven talks, with just over five of those being given by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve (i.e., the average of the highest total combined score was just under thirteen). The highest total combined score for a single topic in any conference was nineteen (twelve talks on the topic, with seven by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve); the lowest combined total for a leading topic was nine.

Beginning with the May 2014 *Ensign* (containing the contents of the April 2014 general conference), there was a significant shift. In that April 2014 conference, one topic was addressed in fifteen talks, with ten of those by members of the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency—a combined total of twenty-five, which nearly doubled the average of the leading topic in the previous twelve conferences. In the ensuing October 2014 conference, that same topic was addressed nineteen times, with eleven of those talks being given by prophets, seers, and revelators—a combined total of thirty. The trend has continued from there. In the April 2015 general conference, the same topic was addressed in seventeen talks, with eleven of those given by prophets, seers, and revelators (a combined total of twenty-eight). In October 2015, the

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combined total was twenty-eight (nineteen and nine); in April 2016 it was twenty-six (seventeen and nine); and in October 2016 it was an astounding thirty-seven (twenty-six and eleven). In each of these conferences, one topic drew much more attention than any leading topic in any single conference between 2008 and 2013, and in each conference the leading topic was the same. The topic? Jesus Christ.

This dramatic shift may well be the result of an editorial decision to use a more comprehensive and accurate method for categorizing the topics addressed in general conference—as my guess is that the Savior has been a major focus of general conference remarks for quite some time. But there can be little doubt that one of the major areas of focus for conference speakers in the past few years, especially members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, has been the Lord Jesus Christ.

In one sense, that topic has been the main focus from the beginning of this dispensation. Jesus Christ is the core message of the restored gospel, the irreducible center of all we believe. As we read in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness.”² Or as Alma put it, “For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.”³

Further evidence that the message of Christ has been the central focus of prophets, seers, and revelators from the beginning of this dispensation to the present is found in the fact



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that Elders D. Todd Christofferson⁴ and M. Russell Ballard⁵ included the following statement from Joseph Smith in their April and October 2014 conference addresses, respectively: “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 on the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁶

It is instructive to note that Joseph Smith focused on the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Christ, rather than on just the facts concerning Christ and His mission.⁷ There is special power and impact in the testimony prophets and apostles bear of Christ, for they are called to be “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.”⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that this has been their focus at general conference and in all their ministry.

Understanding how central the responsibility of testifying of Christ is to the apostolic calling, we can more fully appreciate the blessing and significance of a remarkable revelatory document provided by those Apostles in our own generation. In 2000, all fifteen then-living modern-day Apostles issued a testimony of Christ as a group. I am not aware of any other time or manner in which such a collective testimony of the central core of the gospel has been given by those whose particular calling is to provide such a witness.

This declaration, titled “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” was produced particularly for our time and circumstances. As Elder Robert D. Hales noted in 2013, “The world is moving away from the Lord faster and farther than ever before.

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The adversary has been loosed upon the earth. We watch, hear, read, study, and share the words of prophets to be forewarned and protected. For example, ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World’ was given long before we experienced the challenges now facing the family. ‘The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles’ was prepared in advance of when we will need it most.”⁹

Note the verb tenses Elder Hales used. The family proclamation was given before we experienced the challenges now facing (present tense) the family. “The Living Christ” was prepared in advance of when we will (future tense) need it the most. That prophetic pronouncement by Elder Hales, coupled with the enhanced emphasis on the Savior in recent conference addresses by the other prophets (including multiple references to Joseph Smith’s characterization of the central role of such testimonies in the gospel message) invites us to become more familiar with the truths in that remarkable document.

The first sentence of “The Living Christ” sets forth in clear and simple terms the two basic features of that remarkable collective apostolic testimony. “As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of [1] the reality of His matchless life and [2] the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice.”¹⁰

The rest of the document provides particular details about these two core features of Christ’s central role in the plan of salvation. Each is worthy of extended consideration.

The Reality of His Matchless Life

Christ’s life was truly matchless. That life “neither began in Bethlehem nor concluded on Calvary.”¹¹ But I would like to

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focus on the importance of the reality of the matchless *mortal* period of His life, something that is becoming less accepted, even in Christianity.

Some Bible scholars now contest whether Jesus ever lived in mortality, propounding the view that Jesus was a fictional character.¹² Others, while conceding the fact that a being named Jesus did indeed live in the Holy Land, contend that His life wasn't matchless, arguing that He was not the kind of divine being the Gospel writers conveyed Him to be.¹³ In the words of one commentator, these critics assert "that Jesus was a simple itinerant preacher who never claimed to be divine and whose 'resurrection' was in fact an invention of his disciples who experienced hallucinations of their master after his death."¹⁴ Thus, while a generation or two ago it could be taken as a given among most of the American population that Jesus's mortal life was real and unparalleled, that may no longer be the case. For that reason, it is especially important that we have special witnesses who attest with divinely appointed power that He did actually live and that His life was as perfect as He claimed.

"The Living Christ" states forthrightly that Jesus actually "walked the roads of Palestine," that He actually "went about doing good."¹⁵ He did that both to encourage us to "follow His example"¹⁶ *and* to make it possible for Him to perform His great atoning sacrifice.

Talks on Easter talks normally, and correctly, focus on the two eternity-shaping events of the last week of the Savior's earthly sojourn that together constitute the core of His great Atonement—His suffering in Gethsemane and Golgotha and His subsequent Resurrection from the dead. Each of these two events is of supernal and everlasting importance to all beings

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who have ever lived on this world or on countless other worlds. Easter would not be Easter without those two events. Indeed, life would not be meaningful without them. Each is rightly the subject of volumes of inspired writings and teachings. But I think it important that we also focus part of our Easter worship on the preceding portions of His matchless mortal life because I believe they are also a part of His great atoning sacrifice. Christ did not come to earth only for the last week of His mortal journey. His life prior to that last week was not mere prelude. I believe those years of His life were also a central part of His atoning sacrifice in at least two senses.

First, Christ's entire earthly sojourn had to be lived in a way that qualified Him to perform the great atoning sacrifice. In order to be fully efficacious, His atoning sacrifice had to be perfect and complete, which required that Christ be free from any sin. But it also required that He achieve that sinless state in a mortal setting where temptations, disappointments, injustices, fatigue, and all other factors that have caused human beings to sin over the ages were fully experienced. As B. H. Roberts explained it, "The atonement must be made by deity, living man's life, enduring man's temptations, yet remaining without sin, that the sacrifice might be without spot or blemish."¹⁷ He had to be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."¹⁸ It was necessary that He be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."¹⁹

Thus, in one sense, every perfect choice, every perfect response, every perfect act in His completely perfect mortal life was part of His great atoning sacrifice. He not only gave His life in a manner that permitted Him to rescue all humankind from death and misery, He also lived His life in a way

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that made that infinite sacrifice possible. That reality of His matchless mortal life deserves some contemplation.

Second, during His mortal ministry, Christ provided an example of the things we need to do to make the power of His atoning sacrifice fully operative in our lives. The example began with His baptism, which, while not required to wash away His sins, nonetheless taught us the need to humble ourselves before the Father and to be obedient unto Him.²⁰ Thus, in the words of “The Living Christ,” Christ “entreated all to follow His example,”²¹ not just to show us what we could become, but also what we need to do to fully benefit from the atoning sacrifice that was to come.

Still, as important as His mortal life was in allowing us to take full advantage of His Atonement by following His example, there were some aspects of His mortal life that were truly “matchless” because only He could do them. Thus, the two features of “The Living Christ”—the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice—overlap. He came to earth not just to provide an example of what we should do to inherit eternal life but also to make it possible for us to do so, despite our weaknesses and imperfections. Accordingly, at Easter, our attention inevitably shifts to the culminating events of Christ’s life that form the core of his great atoning sacrifice.

The Infinite Virtue of His Great Atoning Sacrifice

Gratefully, we do not need to fully understand Christ’s Atonement in order to benefit from it. I say *gratefully* because our finite minds cannot completely comprehend a sacrifice whose breadth and depth are infinite. As Elder Richard G.



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Scott put it, “No mortal mind can adequately conceive, nor can human tongue appropriately express, the full significance of all that Jesus Christ has done for our Heavenly Father’s children through His Atonement.”²²

Still, it is important and profitable for us to contemplate the monumental events of that sacrifice in an attempt to increase our limited comprehension, for such understanding can both better fit us to take full advantage of that infinite offering and provide us with the perspective and strength we need to endure the vicissitudes of life that inevitably occur. Elder Richard G. Scott also observed, “Your understanding of the Atonement and the insight it provides for your life will greatly enhance your productive use of all of the knowledge, experience, and skills you acquire in mortal life.”²³ Furthermore, “our understanding of and faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ will provide strength and capacity needed for a successful life. It will also bring confidence in times of trial and peace in moments of turmoil.”²⁴

With that in mind, let us consider two particular scenes from that portion of Christ’s matchless mortal life that form the core of His great atoning sacrifice. The first occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane, where much of the Atonement was wrought. The scene was described by Elder Neal A. Maxwell:

He said to His disciples, “Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And He taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy.” (Mark 14:32, 33.) The Greek for “very heavy” is “depressed, dejected, in anguish.” Just as the Psalmist had foreseen, the Savior was “full of heaviness.” The heavy weight of the sins of all mankind were falling upon him.

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He had been intellectually and otherwise prepared from ages past for this task. He is the Creator of this and other worlds. He knew the plan of salvation. He knew this is what it would come to. But when it happened, it was so much worse than even He had imagined!²⁵

It was in that setting that Christ offered perhaps the most powerful, most sublime, and most heartfelt prayers of all eternity. The scriptural record indicates that there were three distinct prayers.²⁶ We may not know the exact words that He used in those prayers, but there is an interesting progressive urgency and understanding portrayed in the differing wording found in each of the three Gospels that describe the scene.

Matthew records that Christ's original prayer began, "O my Father, *if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*"²⁷ Christ was not anxious to go through the experience. It would not be surprising if He asked whether there was any other way that the plan could be effectuated. As Elder Maxwell observed, "Did Jesus hope there might be, as with Abraham, a ram in the thicket? We do not know, but the agony and the extremity were great."²⁸ The suffering was so great and burdensome that it would seem natural for Him to inquire whether there was some other means of accomplishing this most important work.

We next read in Mark a slightly different plea from the Savior: "Abba, Father, *all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me.*"²⁹ This plea seemed to remove the supposition implicit in the prayer from Matthew. Maybe it was not a question of possibility. As Jehovah, Christ had rhetorically, but instructively, asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"³⁰ During His mortal ministry, Christ Himself had

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affirmatively asserted that “with God all things are possible.”³¹ The echoes of those teachings seem to be found in this particular prayer, which is more of an assertion (all things are possible) than a question (if it be possible). The use of the intimate “Abba,” Daddy or Papa,³² only heightens the confidence inherent in that assertion. “Daddy,” He seems to say, “I know you can do all things, so please take this cup away from me.”

But was it that simple? Was it possible for God to accomplish His work without exacting such a price from His Only Begotten Son? Could the full effects of the Atonement have been achieved by some other means? Perhaps the demands of the eternal law of justice could be satisfied in some other way. Maybe each individual could pay the price for his or her own sins, and the plan of salvation could be achieved without inflicting such cumulative pain on one who did not deserve it. Full answers to such ponderings are beyond our mortal reach, but there are several reasons to believe that there was no other way that the plan of salvation could be fully effectuated for God’s children than by application of what Elder Maxwell called the “awful arithmetic of the Atonement.”³³

First, while it is clear that those who do not repent will pay the price for their own sins,³⁴ they will not be exalted³⁵ and will not reap the full benefits of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The power that Christ provides through His Atonement extends beyond the mere propitiation for our unrepented-of sins. It also enables us to be sanctified and changed. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has noted, “Because of His atoning experience in mortality, our Savior is able to comfort, heal, and strengthen all men and women.”³⁶ But such power comes about only through a sacrifice that is both eternal and infinite.³⁷ Christ could heal,

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comfort, and sanctify all of us only if He fully experienced and overcome everything that requires healing, comforting, and sanctification for every human being. And all of those must be overcome if God's purpose in exalting His children is to be realized. Thus, while each individual might be able to satisfy the demands of justice by paying for his or her individual sins, that alone would not achieve all that Christ made possible with His Atonement. Although, as a matter of pure power, God could have spared His Son the extreme agony he was undergoing, it likely would have been at the cost of the plan of salvation.³⁸

Second, at a more abstract and yet more personal level, B. H. Roberts theorized that the extent of Christ's suffering and the scope of Heavenly Father's love for His Son were both so deep that there could not have possibly been a way for God to accomplish His work other than the infinite Atonement, which cost them both so much:

The absolute necessity of the Atonement as it stands would further appear by the confidence one feels that if milder means could have been made to answer as an atonement, or if the satisfaction to justice could have been set aside, or if man's reconciliation with the divine order of things could have been brought about by an act of pure benevolence without other consideration, it undoubtedly would have been done; for it is inconceivable that either God's justice or his mercy would require or permit more suffering on the part of the Redeemer than was absolutely necessary to accomplish the end proposed. Any suffering beyond that which was absolutely necessary would be cruelty, pure and simple, and unthinkable in a God of perfect justice and mercy.³⁹

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Some may view the assertion that there was no other alternative for God but to sacrifice His Son to make His plan operative as inconsistent with the omnipotence of God. Yet, the mere fact that God operates in harmony with eternal laws does not mean He cannot accomplish everything He desires to do. It merely recognizes that He accomplishes those things through eternal laws, which He fully understands. Just as good lawyers can accomplish much through the use of laws even though they are not free to ignore them, a perfect “lawyer” can accomplish all things through the use of “perfect” laws. Indeed, only those who are “able to abide the *law* of a celestial kingdom” are able to “abide a celestial glory.”⁴⁰

In any event, the prayer recorded in Luke sets aside the perhaps unanswerable questions of possibilities raised in Matthew and Mark and comes to what was the critical point in the long run. “*Father, if thou be willing,*” Christ prayed, “*remove this cup from me.*”⁴¹ In the end, it was not a matter of God’s power or might, but of His will. And each of the three prayers made clear that Christ was ever willing to submit to that will. Echoing the sentiment He had expressed in the premortal council when the plan was described and accepted,⁴² the Savior concluded each of His heartfelt pleas with the same, most important phrase: “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.”⁴³ Whatever possible inferences might be drawn from the various words recorded in the different Gospels, each recorded prayer ended with the identical unwavering commitment by Christ that He would do whatever the Father willed Him to do.⁴⁴

And it is clear that because of His great love for each of us, the Father’s will was that Christ drink every last drop of the dregs of that bitter cup which the Atonement required.⁴⁵ But

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He did not leave His Son to face that task alone. He sent an angel to comfort Christ in this moment of most agonizing distress.⁴⁶

Contrast that tender moment in which the Father sent an angel to succor His Son through the incalculable agony of Gethsemane with the second scene a few hours later. After Christ had suffered through unjust trials, mocking, scourging and nailing to the cross, after He had entrusted His mother to John's tender care, forgiven those who nailed Him to the cross, and ministered to the thief at His side, he uttered perhaps the most heart-rending, poignant cry that ever ascended from this earth to the heavens above. As recorded in Mark, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁴⁷

At that point, Abba—Daddy—was no longer there. For the first and likely only time in His mortal and probably pre-mortal existence, the Son was completely cut off from His Father's presence. It was one thing to confront the reality that His Father wanted Him to go through the most taxing ordeal any being would ever face, but it was quite another to be abandoned by that Father in that trial.

As both Elder Holland and Elder Scott have asserted, it is possible that the Father was never closer to Christ than at this moment,⁴⁸ but He had to withdraw His influence entirely from His beloved Son. How difficult that must have been for the Father. As Elder Scott observed, "It is instructive to try to imagine what the Atonement required of both the Father and His willing Son" at such a time.⁴⁹

As Elder Scott further observed, "we do not fully know"⁵⁰ all the reasons why this separation was required. However, let

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me suggest two reasons, both of which increase my appreciation for the Savior's great love for each of us. The first deals with the centrality of agency in the plan of salvation. Just as Heavenly Father needed to allow His disobedient and faithless children to make their own choices in the pre-earth life—even though that choice deprived them of their



Carl Bloch, Christ with Thorns.

ability to benefit from His plan of happiness—I believe Heavenly Father needed to allow His perfectly obedient, sinless Son to make His own choice about the Atonement. As Elder Robert D. Hales explained, “So that He could finally demonstrate that He was choosing for Himself, He was left alone. . . . At last, He exercised His agency to act, enduring to the end, until He could say, ‘It is finished.’”⁵¹

Perhaps Christ had to be willing to carry out the atoning sacrifice not just because He knew His Father wanted Him to do so, but because He, the Savior, wanted to do so. Maybe it was not enough for Christ to know that God loved us enough that He wanted Christ to suffer incomprehensible pain to spare us the same. Maybe Christ had to decide for Himself that He loved us enough to do so, that He finished the Atonement not just because we were Heavenly Father's children whom God loved,

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but because we were Christ's brothers and sisters whom He loved. And thus He was left alone so there could be no doubt that it was not just Heavenly Father who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,⁵² but that Christ also so loved the world that He voluntarily gave His own life and being.

The second reason deals with the healing power of the Atonement. Christ suffered intensely so He would be able fully to comfort and heal us in our extremities. That sometimes overlooked effect of Christ's Atonement was prophesied by Alma. Describing the Savior's ministry, Alma declared, "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people, . . . and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities." In some way that our finite minds cannot comprehend, Christ felt all the pains, the sufferings, the infirmities, the loneliness of every human being on this and countless other worlds. Why? So that he could "succor" His people.

The word *succor* is particularly apt. In Spanish it is *socorrer*—to give relief. The word also derives from the Latin *correre*, which means to run.⁵³ Thus, *to succor* can mean *to run to give relief*. I like to picture the Savior running to give us relief, anxious to share our burdens. And His being left without the Father's influence allows Him to do that, to say with perfect empathy, "I understand." He understands perfectly because He felt exactly what we feel in any situation. To paraphrase, without distorting, the teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants, "He descended below all things," and thus "he comprehended all things."⁵⁴

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As Elder Holland explained, “It was required, indeed it was central to the significance of the Atonement, that this perfect Son who had never spoken ill nor done wrong nor touched an unclean thing had to know how the rest of humankind—us, all of us—would feel when we did commit such sins. For His Atonement to be infinite and eternal, He had to feel what it was like to die not only physically but spiritually, to sense what it was like to have the divine Spirit withdraw, leaving one feeling totally, abjectly, hopelessly alone.”⁵⁵ Regardless of the reasons, Christ was left alone. And when left on His own, He forged ahead and completed His mission, ending His mortal life by saying, “Father, it is finished, thy will is done.”⁵⁶

We do not know exactly what happened next, but our human experience provides some basis for positive conjecture. Elder Holland once described a scene at an airport where it was clear that a family was waiting the arrival of a returning missionary. He noted the presence of the usual participants, including the mother, younger brothers, girlfriend, and father, a man whom he described as “a man of the soil, with a suntan and large, work-scarred hands. His white shirt was a little frayed and was probably never worn except on Sunday.” Elder Holland speculated to himself which of the group might be first to break ranks to greet the young returning elder. He thought it might be the mother, who had initially given the missionary life, or perhaps the girlfriend, who looked like she might need oxygen. But Elder Holland then explained:

It wasn’t the mother, and it wasn’t the girlfriend, and it wasn’t the rowdy little brother. That big, slightly awkward,

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quiet and bronzed giant of a man put an elbow into the ribcage of a flight attendant and ran, just simply ran, out onto that apron and swept his son into his arms. . . .

[The missionary] was probably 6'2" or so, but this big bear of a father grabbed him, took him clear off his feet, and held him for a long, long time. He just held him and said nothing. The boy dropped his briefcase, put both arms around his dad, and they just held each other very tightly. It seemed like all eternity stood still, and for a precious moment the Salt Lake City Airport was the center of the entire universe. It was as if all the world had gone silent out of respect for such a sacred moment.

And then I thought of God the Eternal Father watching his boy go out to serve, to sacrifice when he didn't have to do it, paying his own way, so to speak, costing everything he had saved all his life to give. At that precious moment, it was not too difficult to imagine that father speaking with some emotion to those who could hear, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And it was also possible to imagine that triumphant returning son, saying, "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Now, I don't know what kind of seven-league boots a father uses to rush through the space of eternity. But even in my limited imagination I can see that reunion in the heavens.⁵⁷

But even that triumphal scene is not the end of the story. As "The Living Christ" makes clear, "His life, which is central to all human history, neither began in Bethlehem nor concluded on Calvary." It is the living Christ of whom the Apostles testify. His Resurrection is the greatest single affirmation of His

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Carl Bloch, Crucifixion.

divinity and the power and reach of His atoning sacrifice.⁵⁸ As President Howard W. Hunter once explained, “Without the Resurrection, the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a litany of wise sayings and seemingly unexplainable miracles—but sayings and miracles with no ultimate triumph. No, the ultimate triumph is in the ultimate miracle: for the first time in the history of mankind, one who was dead raised himself into living immortality.”⁵⁹

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Without the Resurrection, the plan would fail. And its reality is the greatest evidence that the plan is perfect. On one occasion, Elder Bruce R. McConkie asked the question, “How do you prove that Jesus is the Christ?” He then answered, “It all centers in the Resurrection.” He then asked, “How do you prove the Resurrection?” His response: “It all centers in witnesses.”⁶⁰

Thus, it is not surprising that the apostolic testimony in “The Living Christ” attests that Christ “rose from the grave to ‘become the firstfruits of them that slept’ (1 Corinthians 15:20).” And as proof, they cite His appearances to earthly witnesses whose testimonies are recorded in scriptures, starting with “those He had loved in life” and those “He . . . ministered among . . . in ancient America” and extending to the modern day when “He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised ‘dispensation of the fulness of time’ (Ephesians 1:10).”

These, and other appearances, were designed not only to provide mortal witnesses to the reality that Christ had overcome death, but also to further His work “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man,”⁶¹ a work in which He is still personally involved. As “The Living Christ” states, “His priesthood and His Church have been restored to earth,” with “‘Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone’ (Ephesians 2:20).”⁶² That leadership role will continue into the future when “He will someday return to earth” to “rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords.”⁶³

Christ not only currently leads His Church, He is also active in our lives today—if we let Him. He knocks at the door and waits for us to invite Him into our lives,⁶⁴ and when we do, we will find the truth of the apostolic witness that

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Harry Anderson, The Resurrection, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

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“His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come.”⁶⁵ May we join those same witnesses in heartfelt expression: “God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.”⁶⁶

Notes

1. I note that I then read all of the talks and attempted to form my own personal (hopefully inspired) impressions of which of the topics they addressed were most tailored to my weaknesses and challenges.
2. D&C 76:40–41.
3. Alma 7:7.
4. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 111–14.
5. M. Russell Ballard, “Stay in the Boat and Hold On!” *Ensign*, November 2014, 91.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 49.
7. “Joseph Smith might have said that the fundamental principles of our religion are the *facts* or *evidence* concerning Jesus Christ. . . . But he did not choose those or other similar words. He said that the *testimonies* of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ provide the fundamental principles of our religion.” Cecil O. Samuelson, “The Testimony of Jesus Christ,” in *Celebrating Easter: The 2006 BYU Easter Conference*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2006), 12.
8. D&C 107:23.
9. Robert D. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 7.

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10. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, March 2008, 43.
11. “The Living Christ,” 43.
12. See Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man—The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009); Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999); Robert M. Price, *Jesus Is Dead* (Austin, TX: American Atheist Press, 2012), 271–79.
13. See, e.g., Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 2–3.
14. Robert Barron, “You’re Wrong, Bart Ehrman,” Real Clear Religion, 16 April 2014, http://www.realclearreligion.org/articles/2014/04/16/youre_wrong_bart_ehrman.html; Barron discusses Bart Ehrman’s book *How Jesus Became God* in this article.
15. “The Living Christ,” 43.
16. “The Living Christ,” 43.
17. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1995), 432.
18. Isaiah 53:3; Mosiah 14:3.
19. Hebrews 4:15.
20. 2 Nephi 31:6. His example in this regard also made clear the indispensability of proper baptism for all who would be saved. “And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!” (2 Nephi 31:5).
21. “The Living Christ,” 43.
22. Richard G. Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 76.
23. Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” 76.
24. Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” 77.
25. Neal A. Maxwell, “A Choice Seer,” *Ensign*, August 1986, 14.

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26. Matthew 26:44; Mark 14:41.
27. Matthew 26:39; emphasis added.
28. Maxwell, “A Choice Seer,” 14.
29. Mark 14:36; emphasis added.
30. Genesis 18:14.
31. Matthew 19:26; see also Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27.
32. “In that most burdensome moment of all human history, with blood appearing at every pore and an anguished cry upon His lips, Christ sought Him whom He had always sought—His Father. ‘Abba,’ He cried, ‘Papa,’ or from the lips of a younger child, ‘Daddy.’ This is such a personal moment it almost seems a sacrilege to cite it. A Son in unrelieved pain, a Father His only true source of strength, both of them staying the course, making it through the night—together.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Hands of the Fathers,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 16.
33. Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 73.
34. See D&C 19:16–17, “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but *if they would not repent they must suffer even as I*”; emphasis added.
35. Elder Bruce C. Hafen observed, “I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice.” Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 7.
36. Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2015, 64.
37. Alma 34:11–12.
38. God “had the power to remove the bitter cup from the Savior, but the consequences were unacceptable.” Edwin W. Aldous, “A Reflection on the Atonement’s Healing Power,” *Ensign*, April 1987, 13.

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39. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 428.
40. D&C 88:22.
41. Luke 22:42; emphasis added.
42. Moses 4:2, “Father, thy will be done.”
43. Luke 22:42.
44. Indeed, Christ came to earth for that purpose (see John 5:30; 3 Nephi 11:11, D&C 19:21).
45. D&C 19:16–19.
46. Luke 22:43. “Luke wrote that at a particular point, an angel appeared to strengthen Him. I do not know who that angel was, but what a great privilege to be at the side of the Son of God as He worked out the Atonement for the whole human family!” Maxwell, “A Choice Seer,” 15.
47. Mark 15:34.
48. “With all the conviction of my soul I testify . . . that a perfect Father did *not* forsake His Son in that hour. Indeed, it is my personal belief that in all of Christ’s mortal ministry the Father may never have been closer to His Son than in these agonizing final moments of suffering. Nevertheless, that the supreme sacrifice of His Son might be as complete as it was voluntary . . . the Father briefly withdrew from Jesus the comfort of His Spirit, the support of His personal presence.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “And None Were with Him,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 87–88. Elder Scott observed along the same lines: “I don’t believe Father in Heaven forsook His Son on the cross. . . . The Father did not abandon His Son. He made it possible for His perfect Son to win the eternal fruits of the Atonement.” Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” 77.
49. Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” 76.
50. Scott, “He Lives! All Glory to His Name!,” 77.
51. Robert D. Hales, “Agency: Essential to the Plan of Life,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 25.
52. John 3:16.

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53. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “succour” v., etymology (“Latin *succurrere*, < suc- = sub-prefix 6 + currere to run;”); see also Jeffrey R. Holland, “‘He Hath Filled the Hungry with Good Things,’” *Ensign*, November 1997, 64–66.
54. D&C 88:6.
55. Jeffrey R. Holland, “And None Were with Him,” 88.
56. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 27:54.
57. Jeffrey R. Holland, “I Stand All Amazed,” *Ensign*, August 1986, 73; from an address given to Salt Lake Temple workers, 24 November 1985.
58. “The Resurrection of the Savior proves that He is the Son of God and that what He taught is real. ‘He is risen, as he said.’ There could be no stronger proof of His divinity than Him coming forth from the grave with an immortal body.” Paul V. Johnson, “And There Shall Be No More Death,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 122.
59. Howard W. Hunter, “An Apostle’s Witness of the Resurrection,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 16.
60. John H. Madsen, “Easter, the Lord’s Day,” in *With Healing in His Wings*, ed. Camille Fronk Olson and Thomas A. Wayment (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 40–41.
61. Moses 1:39.
62. “The Living Christ,” 47.
63. “The Living Christ,” 47.
64. Revelation 3:20.
65. “The Living Christ,” 47.
66. “The Living Christ,” 47.