

## 252.2: Redeeming the Dead (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 30)

### “The Prisoners Shall Go Free”

Hook	In Mormonism, the question is not “are you saved?” Rather, it is “How can we all be saved, together?”
Goal	Class members should appreciate the beauty and power of ordinances for the dead and contemplate the scope of salvation it suggests. The goal is for the whole family to come home.
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss the reading/Redeeming the Dead in early Church history</li><li>• Ancient precedents (ancestor worship, cult of the dead, interpretation of 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Peter 3:19-20; 4:6)</li><li>• Theology of Redemption of the Dead (use all the most compelling ideas and quotes)</li><li>• Points to consider (bring them up, frame them, leave them for the discussion)</li><li>• How does this practice solve a fundamental problem with Christianity?</li><li>• What do we get out of performing vicarious ordinances for the dead?</li><li>• In what way do the dead need the ordinances to be saved?</li><li>• Why not just wait until the millennium?</li></ul>
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• President Hinckley said that we are never closer to the Savior than when we serve others and do for them what they cannot do for themselves. How can work for the dead motivate us to also care for the living?</li></ul>

### **Church History**

<http://bycommonconsent.com/2011/07/14/mormonisms-adoption-theology/>

Adoption theology is a reminder that the idea world of early Mormons was in some ways strikingly different from that of the early twenty-first century. Understanding this aspect of early Mormonism on its own terms may be useful to our era’s engagement of questions of human relationships and identity. The adoption theology of early Mormonism may inform discussions about topics as diverse as spirit birth, agency, kinship, salvation, and the nature and shape of family relationships. As one example among many, on the matter of spirit birth we feel that this expanded view of adoption theology provides a possible lens for understanding premortal divine parenthood as a process of adoption rather than the more familiar model associated with the Pratt brothers.

We do not suggest that the views held by the earliest Latter-day Saints should be normative for twenty-first-century Mormons in any specific tradition. We do believe that understanding the earliest meanings of this theology helps to illuminate its development and many of its modern instances. We believe that these insights can be brought into productive dialogue with later and current approaches.

More than anything, adoption is a testament to the extent to which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was meant to be the society of heaven and full membership in it the sign of and pathway to salvation and exaltation.

(Read sections from Brown’s article; Stapley’s article discusses policies up to Wilford Woodruff who instituted the familial sealings known to us today)

Summary of BYU Studies Article by Gordon Irving (from the conclusion)

<https://byustudies.byu.edu/PDFLibrary/14.3IrvingLaw-40221750-48c0-4eef-b628-423a4648ba70.pdf>

Consistent with the Latter-day Saint belief that the Lord gives revelation “line upon line and precept upon precept” as needed and as the Church is ready to accept it, the Mormon concept of salvation was continually broadened and deepened throughout the nineteenth century. From a simple picture of an afterlife divided into a heaven and a hell, the saints went on to learn of varying degrees of glory and finally of the godlike status of those who win exaltation. Originally seen as attainable through baptism, which was eventually extended to the unbaptized dead as well as the living, salvation in its highest sense was later defined as available to those who were sealed and adopted into the family of god. With the 1894 revelation the doctrine of sealing was broadened to include all the saints’ ancestors who had ever lived. For fifty years the policies governing adoption had meant that exaltation was limited to the small patriarchal society that the Church then was and to a few thousand dead relatives of the saints. Now, with the new light received by President Woodruff, exaltation was made available to millions of persons, provided they accept the gospel, and Woodruff told his people that very few would reject it. Living Mormons were now important not so much as fathers and heads of kingdoms but as agents acting for the rest of the human family. George Q. Cannon recognized the implications of the expansion of the law of adoption as he spoke the following:

How wide-spread and far-reaching is the ordinance to which allusion has been made, by which children will be sealed to their parents, one generation connected with another, and the whole human family be brought within the family of God, to be His recognized and acknowledged sons

and daughters, bound together by the power of the everlasting Priesthood and in the new system of salvation spread out before us in the contemplation of that which the Lord has revealed! What a feeling of tenderness and love wells up in our hearts in thinking that we are the children of God, and that we shall be bound together by ties that can never be broken.<sup>61</sup>

The chain of the priesthood so often referred to by Brigham Young could now better be viewed as a network into which all men and women can be brought as members of the family of God. While the limited view of salvation held before 1894 was possibly appropriate for a church confined to the limits of the Great Basin, the new understanding better prepared the Church to fulfill its mission to spread into all the world in the new century.

### **Ancient Precedents**

Ancestor Worship (note the belief in the interdependence of the dead and living); see <http://www.wheatandtares.org/449/mormon-ancestor-worship/>

2 Maccabees 12:43-46

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing this he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

1 Cor. 15:29

Most interpreters of 1 Cor. 15:29 interpret as “baptized in behalf of the dead”, even though we don’t have any other evidence of such a practice. Other interpreters translate the phrase “baptized on account of the dead”, i.e. motivated by either the example of those who have died or motivated by the hope of being resurrected with those who have died. The latter points seem a bit circular though—“what would people get baptized because of the hope of resurrection if there were no resurrection?”

1 Peter 3:19-20; 4:6

“The description of these imprisoned spirits at vv. 19-20 suggests that they are the angelic beings of Gen. 6:1-6 whose disobedience ultimately led to the Flood. It would, in any case, be strange if Christ’s preaching to the spirits of deceased humans were restricted to the disobedient contemporaries of Noah, even if ‘spirits’ most naturally referred to dead humans, which it does not. The point is then that at his resurrection Christ proclaimed his victory to the archetypally

wicked spirits that had troubled humanity; as a consequence of his resurrection Christ now reigns with God and all spiritual powers have been made subject to him”

4:6 is difficult to interpret. Does it mean pre-Christian dead? Is the good news proclaimed to Christians who have died? (three commentaries I consulted took this interpretation, that “Christians who accepted the gospel and have since died are alive in God’s eyes” Brown, p. 715). The function of this verse is that there is hope for the dead as well and they have not died in vain.

“spirits” is more likely to refer to angels rather than dead spirits. Again, the reference to Noah suggests these verses refer to angelic powers. “1 Pet. 3:19 has the risen Christ go down there to proclaim his victory and crush the Satanic forces” (Brown, Introduction to the NT, p. 716)

Gospel of Peter 10:41 “Have you preached to the fallen-asleep?”

Ascension of Isaiah (Second century, complex history of composition) 9:16-17; 10:14; 11:23-24

9.16: And when He hath plundered the angel of death, He will ascend on the third day, [and he will remain in that world five hundred and forty-five days].

17. And then many of the righteous will ascend with Him, whose spirits do not receive their garments till the Lord Christ ascend and they ascend with Him.

14. And afterwards from the angels of death Thou wilt ascend to Thy place. And Thou wilt not be transformed in each heaven, but in glory wilt Thou ascend and sit on My right hand.

11.23. And I saw Him, and He was in the firmament, but He had not changed Himself into their form, and all the angels of the firmament and the Satans saw Him and they worshipped.

24. And there was much sorrow there, while they said: "How did our Lord descend in our midst, and we perceived not the glory [which has been upon Him], which we see has been upon Him from the sixth heaven?"

Odes of Solomon (2<sup>nd</sup> century, composed in Greek or Aramaic) 17:9; 42:15

17. 9 And from there He gave me the way of His steps, and I opened the doors which were closed.

42.14-20: And I made a congregation of living among his dead; and I spoke with them by living lips; in order that my word may not be unprofitable.

And those who had died ran towards me; and they cried out and said, Son of God, have pity on us.

And deal with us according to Your kindness, and bring us out from the bonds of darkness.

And open for us the door by which we may come out to You; for we perceive that our death does not touch You.

May we also be saved with You, because You are our Savior.

Then I heard their voice, and placed their faith in my heart.

And I placed my name upon their head, because they are free and they are mine.  
Hallelujah.

Melito of Sardis, On the Passover 102, "I am the one who trampled hell, bound the strong one, and snatched people away and up to heaven on high."

Gospel of Nicodemus. Part II narrates Christ's descent into hell:  
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelnicodemus.html>

Review this: <http://www.wheatandtares.org/449/mormon-ancestor-worship/>

## **Theology**

From EoM:

When this doctrine was first taught at Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842 (D&C 127;128), the Prophet Joseph Smith said it was the "burden of the scriptures" and that it exhibited "the greatness of divine compassion and benevolence in the extent of the plan of human salvation" (TPJS, p. 192). It is in harmony with the Jewish idea that the family is the instrument of holiness and redemption and that the dead may need Atonement. It is also a Christian concept in the writings of Paul and Peter (see [Baptism for the Dead](#)). "[It] justifies the ways of God to man, places the human family upon an equal footing, and harmonizes with every principle of righteousness, justice, and truth" (TPJS, p. 223).

Elder Scott: Any work you do in the temple is time well spent, but receiving ordinances vicariously for one of your own ancestors will make the time in the temple more sacred, and even greater blessings will be received. The First Presidency has declared, "Our preeminent obligation is to seek out and identify *our own* ancestors

Elder Christofferson: Christian theologians have long wrestled with the question, What is the destiny of the countless billions who have lived and died with no knowledge of Jesus? <sup>1</sup> With the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ has come the understanding of how the unbaptized dead are redeemed and how God can be “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also. There are several theories concerning the “unevangelized” dead, ranging from an inexplicable denial of salvation, to dreams or other divine intervention at the moment of death, to salvation for all, even without faith in Christ. A few believe that souls hear of Jesus after death. None explain how to satisfy Jesus’ requirement that a man must be born of water and spirit to enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:3–5). Lacking the knowledge once had in the early Church, these earnest seekers have been “forced to choose between a weak law that [allows] the unbaptized to enter heaven, and a cruel God who [damns] the innocent” (Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* [1987], 101).

The principle of vicarious service should not seem strange to any Christian. In the baptism of a living person, the officiator acts, by proxy, in place of the Savior. And is it not the central tenet of our faith that Christ’s sacrifice atones for our sins by vicariously satisfying the demands of justice for us? As President Gordon B. Hinckley has expressed: “I think that vicarious work for the dead more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Savior Himself than any other work of which I know. It is given with love, without hope of compensation, or repayment or anything of the kind. What a glorious principle.”

\*\*Look at this for Corrections to Consider:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/360411960680762/permalink/526043074117649/>

(talk about how temple work solves a fundamental problem with Christianity)

Talk about corporate salvation

Resources

Radiolab Inheritance? (not yet, do heart to children children to fathers?)

<https://familysearch.org/blog/en/elder-dennis-brimhall-address-2012-october-center-director-open-house/#comments>

Jonathan Stapley has done a lot of work on that and you should check out his article ([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1885588](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1885588)). Richard Bennett did an article on the transition of the temple work around 1877 (<https://byustudies.byu.edu/showtitle.aspx?title=6944>).

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/360411960680762/permalink/531800166875273/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/athoughtfulfaith/permalink/496553407097463/>

Geoff Nelson:

It allows one to retain belief in the essential nature of Christian ritual while also facilitating a universal salvation

And my personal favorite is to phrase it this way:

1-we believe that everyone will have the ordinances performed, either in person, or vicariously

2-because everyone will have this done, the ordinances have no bearing on our salvation/exaltation. Because of vicarious work for the dead, the "judgment" is based solely on how well we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, etc.

Bearing, not bedding

Encyclopedia of Mormonism: Salvation of the Dead

[Corey Philpot](#) There is a tendency to hyper-focus on specifics and haggle over whether they are absolute requirement. Therefore, taking a step back, I believe the larger question is the following: are temple ordinances (with associated blessing/curse) true, as declared by God and, therefore, subject to His alteration/change/cessation; or, are they absolute eternal truth, and, therefore, God is required to obey them, as well.

1. In one respect, the difference is moot because obedience is required either way. However, if the former is accurate, then the understanding of the difference between relative and absolute allows for greater acceptance of change, greater ability to identify a hierarchy of principles, develop a stronger, more sophisticated testimony.

2. While it is hard to believe that God relegates spirits to some sort of spiritual cell until ordinances are performed, It is not difficult to accept that our departed ancestors feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that our hearts are turned toward them in temple service.

3. Even relative truth is necessary for your salvation, now. Even though it may not be for your children - they may have to follow a slightly different set of "truths".

4. With regard to exclusivity claims, one of the most beautiful and logical aspects of Mormon doctrine is the concept of judgement and levels heaven: We all get what we deserve based on Divine evaluation, and we'll be happy with it! Nobody's going to hell - well, maybe just a few. The multi-mansioned heaven doctrine itself, is rather unique. Contrast it with the Catholic/Protestant concept of heaven and hell wherein there is some arbitrary 50 yard line that divides the burning sinners from the air conditioned saints.

Mormon Kingdom Heaven and its overriding principle of inclusivity and eternal progression probably is not understood on those terms by the mainstream Mormon. As I grew up, we preached a sense of justice but in reality, what we thought in our own minds was that heaven would be full of the bunch of Mormons. However, if you look at early Mormon leader statements

such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, you would find that their perspective of heaven included a whole bunch of people. I didn't quite understand your evaluation of "patronizing". I find it hard to believe that the doctrine itself is patronizing in that it simply relegates one's eternal consequence as wholly between the person and the Lord.

- Ancient precedents to vicarious rituals including the interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:29
- The background to vicarious ordinances in Church History
- The way approaches to redeeming the dead have changed over time with a focus on the concept of adoption
- The logic behind the idea of vicarious ordinances.
  - How does this practice solve a fundamental problem with Christianity?
  - What do we get out of performing vicarious ordinances for the dead?
  - In what way do the dead need the ordinances to be saved?
  - Why not just wait until the millennium?