

## OUR BELIEF IN CHRIST

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 of Latter Day Saints  
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THEME TEXT: 1 Cor. 8:6 .... But to us there is but one God, the Father,  
 of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus  
 Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:14-19

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He who believeth on him is not condemned; but he who believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the Only Begotten Son of God, which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testified of me. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

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"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

The central figure of the ages -- the personality who has influenced more lives, who has changed more of the world's thinking and more of the world's ways than any other personality who ever lived -- that man is Jesus Christ. Belief in him is fundamental to all who call themselves Christian. Yet among the many church bodies which call themselves Christian, one finds an almost infinite variation of belief concerning the nature, the identity, the purpose, and the mission of Jesus, the Christ. For that reason, we come to you with this discussion of our belief in Christ.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints places Christ at the center of its faith. Our official "Statement of Belief" opens with the words: "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son, Jesus Christ...." Christ is the central figure of the Book of Mormon, which many of our friends have ignorantly and erroneously believed to be a non-Christian book. Jesus Christ is the central figure of the revelations given through Joseph Smith and his successors, and contained in the book of Doctrine and Covenants; and these revelations also give a modern and timely testimony that he lives, that he is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. As Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son in the vision which prefaced the Restoration Movement, it was the Son to whom the Father turned as he commanded the young prophet to "Hear Ye Him."

The opening verses of Genesis tell us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; but there are many other verses which indicate that Christ was the agent or instrument through whom God performed this work of creation. John says, "All things were made by him; (i.e., Christ) and without him was not anything made which was made." (John 1:3) Paul wrote to the Colossians, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible....and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col. 1:16,17) To the Hebrews Paul wrote, "God....hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son....by whom also he made the worlds." (Hebr. 1:1,2) In the book of Revelation Christ is called "the beginning (i.e., the origin or source) of the creation of God." (Rev. 3:14)

We believe that Jesus Christ is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8; D.C. 36:9) God was not taken by surprise when Adam fell. Jesus was not an afterthought, but one appointed before all time, to come as the Savior of the human race. He was with the Father in the beginning. John opens his gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the Word (the Logos, or Christ) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." The promise of his coming was given to Mother Eve, who was told that her seed should bruise the head of the serpent, or Satan, and break his power of death. (Gen. 3:15) Moses prophesied that the Lord God would raise up another prophet like unto himself, and that all who would not hear the words of that prophet should be cut off from among the people. (Deut. 18:18) Paul says that Moses, having this promise, esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. (Hebr. 11:26) Abraham was promised that the Messiah who would bless all nations should be of his seed. (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8,16,17)

Many of the ancient prophets looked forward to this Messiah's coming, gave his lineage, and prophesied the time, the place, and the manner of his birth. Isaiah foretold his virgin birth, his deity, and his kingship, calling him "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." It was the Christ, the Son of God who gave the law of Moses as a schoolmaster to lead Israel to him; the sacrifices of the Mosaic law were a symbol of his death on the cross. Paul asserts that all Israel "drank of that Rock, and that Rock was Christ."

How did Jesus differ from ordinary men? Was it a difference in kind, or only a difference in degree? Jesus Christ was the "Only Begotten of the Father." (D.C. 76:3) This phrase "Only Begotten" indubitably applies to Jesus' birth in the flesh, and that alone makes Jesus unique; but it also implies that there was something unique about Jesus' spiritual existence long before his earthly advent. We are told in Scripture that we, like Jesus, were with the Father in the beginning. Scripture frequently speaks of us as well as of Jesus, as Sons of God. We are told that Lucifer, who fell from heaven to become Satan, was once a son of God. But while our spirits were "created", Jesus was "begotten, not made." Just what is the kind or degree of uniqueness in the relationship of God and Christ, just how his relationship with the Father differs from ours, we do not know, and probably could not comprehend. Yet it is plain that Jesus bore a unique relationship to his Father, a relationship shared by no other person.

Much modern theology and philosophy take the position that Jesus was only a superlatively good man -- that any divinity or deity he possessed was only the divinity common to all the sons of God -- that he differed from other men only in degree, but not in kind. In other words, they deny his miraculous virgin birth, his divinity, his deity, his physical resurrection, his second coming in glory. Standing squarely in opposition to this brand of modernism are the teachings of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, derived not only from the Bible, but from the Book of Mormon and the book of Doctrine and Covenants. We believe that Jesus was miraculously conceived, that he was deity in human flesh, that he came to reveal God to men; that he voluntarily gave up his life in physical death; that he miraculously arose again on the third day as the prophets had said he would and as he himself had predicted. We believe that such divinity was necessary in the one who was to break the power of death, and make an infinite atonement for the sins of the world. Only deity could live in the flesh without sin; and only one without sin could destroy death.

We therefore believe that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." (2 Cor. 5:19) The name, "Immanuel," bestowed on him by the prophet Isaiah, means literally "God with us." Jesus was the image of the invisible God; (Col. 1:15) he was God "manifest in the flesh;" (1 Tim. 3:16) In him dwelt all the fullness of the godhead bodily. (Col. 2:9) In Jesus, the power and glory and wisdom of the godhead were manifested in a way and to a degree that the limited powers of men

could tolerate and comprehend; for no man in the flesh can see all of God's glory and live. As a man who has seen a candle knows the quality of light, and could imagine the brilliance of the sun, even if he had never seen it, so he who has seen Jesus knows the quality of God, and insofar as his human comprehension can go, he can deduce the nature of God and his glory and love. I believe that this is what Jesus meant when he said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9)

If Jesus was God, he was also man, because he was born of woman, and tabernacled in a human body. Voluntarily he submitted his deity to the limitations which the flesh imposed upon him. Voluntarily he suffered temptation, pain, loneliness, sorrow over the loss of loved ones and over the perfidy of friends. Voluntarily he yielded up his life on the cross; yet because he had lived without sin, Satan had no claim on him, and he rose again on the third day, the first fruits of them that slept. We believe in a resurrected, living, working, loving Christ, whose presence is with his church today, and whose purposes are still being fulfilled in today's world -- for he is the rightful king of kings, and Lord of Lords.

Some have expressed their belief in a Christ whose mission was completely finished for all time by his death, resurrection, and ascension -- a Christ whose ministry was confined to a few of the house of Israel dwelling in the relatively tiny territory of Palestine. Others believe in a Christ who came to save only a few who were "elected" or "predestined" to salvation, leaving millions of others without hope.

We believe that the atonement of Christ was an infinite atonement. We shall discuss the atonement at greater length in a later sermon, but here we may state briefly that we believe that the atonement cancelled the effects and the power of Adam's original sin for all men, on conditions of their repentance and acceptance of his saving grace and power. By his own death and glorious resurrection Jesus overcame death, and cancelled Satan's claim on fallen man. Through that infinite atonement comes the resurrection of all men, in which spirit and body are inseparably reunited and restored to the presence of God for judgment. Thus the atonement brings all men back to God -- but not all men will be found worthy to abide there. As a result of God's judgment, all men will receive reward or punishment according to the deeds done in the flesh, during their time of probation in the body. Those who by their faith and works have proved their worthiness to abide in God's presence may remain. Those who have proved unworthy must depart into another kingdom, to receive that for which they themselves have prepared.

When we say that Christ made an infinite atonement, we mean that it was efficacious for all who died before Christ's advent in the flesh, but who looked forward in faith to his coming. It is efficacious for the heathen nations who have died in ignorance of him, who will have opportunity in the spirit world to hear the gospel preached and to accept him as their Savior. It is efficacious for little children who die in their innocent infancy before the years of accountability. It is efficacious not only for the elect -- but for all men, anywhere in time or space, if they will accept Christ as their Redeemer, and exercise faith in him to salvation, proving and demonstrating that faith through good works.

We believe in a Christ who was preached to Adam, who was foretold by the prophets, who was the hope of Israel. We believe in a Christ who appeared and ministered not only to the few remnants of Israel who lived in the Palestine of his day, but to other large remnants of Israel who had migrated to America some six hundred years before his birth, and whose history is recorded in the Book of Mormon. To these American Israelites, Christ preached his saving gospel, and extended his saving grace. Among them he established his church, ordained his priesthood, taught his principles of life. The record of this ministry, as contained in the Book of Mormon, constitutes a second powerful witness to the divinity of the Christ who is at the center of our whole body of belief.

We believe in a Christ who came to reveal God to man, to show God's love and all the other attributes of his nature in such a way that man could comprehend; to show that God was a God at hand, and not a God afar off; to show that he was actively, personally, lovingly interested in and concerned about the destiny of man.

We believe in a Christ who came to experience for himself in the flesh the pains, trials, temptations, the joys and sorrows, which are common to man, that through this experience he might be fitted to become our advocate with the Father. As Paul said, "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebr. 4:15)

We believe in a resurrected, living Christ, who is still concerned and busy in the continuing and unfinished task of building his church and his kingdom. We believe in a Christ who still speaks to his prophets and servants, and as head of his church directs them in his work. We believe in a Christ who will soon return in glory to the earth, call forth the dead from their graves, and bring all men, all nations, and all worldly institutions to judgment. We believe in a Christ who soon shall rule over the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, when all the kingdoms of this world shall be one in the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

We testify anew that Christ lives, that he has spoken and does speak in Latter Days, and that the command of the Father is still to "Hear Ye Him." We invite all men to come to him and partake of his grace, his love, his life everlasting.