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*Gratitude for the Mission  
and Ministry of Jesus Christ*

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# *Gratitude for the Mission and Ministry of Jesus Christ*

RUSSELL M. NELSON

**E**lder Eyring, President Bateman, family, faculty, friends, and fellow students, Sister Nelson and I are delighted to be with you. We are pleased to see so many here to enjoy an opportunity to learn together. “The glory of God is intelligence,”<sup>1</sup> and you confirm that fact. You look glorious to me!

I bring greetings from President Gordon B. Hinckley, his counselors, and my associates of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We thank you for your faith and devotion. We are grateful for your desire to learn and to serve.

Knowledge is a wonderful thing. Not all information is of equal importance, however. Nothing can reach the pinnacle of knowledge spoken by the Lord to his Heavenly Father: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”<sup>2</sup>

As one among the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”<sup>3</sup> I believe I would serve you best if I teach and testify of him. First, I might ask you the same questions that he once posed to the Pharisees: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?”<sup>4</sup>

These questions often come to mind as I meet with leaders of governments and various religious denominations. Some acknowledge that “Jesus was a great teacher.” Others say,

“He was a prophet.” Others simply do not know him at all. We should not be totally surprised. After all, Christianity is a minority religion in the world. And members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are but a small minority among those who claim to be Christians.

In a world populated by more than five billion people, our large numbers here, augmented by many more watching on television, are really but a relative few. Our circumstance today was foreseen centuries ago by Nephi:

*And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few . . . ; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small. . . .*

*And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered*

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*Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this Campus Education Week -devotional was given on 18 August 1998.*

*upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.*<sup>5</sup>

That righteousness, that power, that glory—indeed, all of our many blessings—stem from our knowledge of, obedience to, and our gratitude and love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

During his relatively brief sojourn in mortality, the Savior accomplished two overarching objectives: One was his “work and [his] glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>6</sup> The other he stated simply: “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done.”<sup>7</sup>

His first objective we know as the Atonement. This was his magnificent mission in mortality. To the people of ancient America, the resurrected Lord gave his mission statement:

*I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.*

*And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me.*<sup>8</sup>

In continuing his sermon, he revealed his second objective—to be our exemplar: “Ye know the things that ye must do . . . ; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do.”<sup>9</sup>

His first objective I have defined as his *mission*. His second objective I would like to identify as his *ministry*. For our discussion today, let us review these two components of his life—his mission and his ministry.

### **The Mission of Jesus Christ—The Atonement**

His mission was the Atonement. That mission was uniquely his. Born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father, he was the only one who could voluntarily lay down his life and take it up again.<sup>10</sup> The glorious consequences of his Atonement were infinite and eternal. He took the sting out of death and made

temporary the grief of the grave.<sup>11</sup> His responsibility for the Atonement was known even before the Creation and the Fall. Not only was it to provide for the resurrection and immortality of all humankind, it was to enable us to be forgiven of our sins—upon conditions established by him. And his Atonement opened the way by which we could be united with him and with our families eternally. This prospect we esteem as eternal life—the greatest gift of God to man.<sup>12</sup>

No one else could effect the Atonement. No other person, even of the greatest wealth and power, could ever save one soul—not even his own.<sup>13</sup> And no other individual will be required or permitted to shed blood for the eternal salvation of another human being. Jesus did it “once for all.”<sup>14</sup>

Though the Atonement was consummated during the time of the New Testament, events of Old Testament times frequently foretold its importance. Adam and Eve were commanded to offer sacrifices as “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father.”<sup>15</sup> How? By the shedding of blood. From their own experience they confirmed the scripture that “the life of the flesh is in the blood.”<sup>16</sup>

May I say how significant that statement is to a medical doctor? Physicians know that whenever blood ceases to flow to an organ, trouble begins. If blood flow to a leg is interrupted, gangrene may follow. If flow to the brain is stopped, a stroke may result. If blood fails to flow normally through a coronary artery, a heart attack may develop. And if hemorrhage is uncontrolled, death ensues.

Adam, Eve, and generations to follow learned that whenever they shed blood from an animal, its life was terminated. For their sacrificial rite, not just *any* animal would do. It was to be a firstling of the flock, and one without blemish.<sup>17</sup> These requisites were also symbolic of the eventual sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God.

Adam and Eve were given a commandment: “Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.”<sup>18</sup> From that day to the meridian of time, animal sacrifice continued to be a type and shadow of the eventual Atonement of the Son of God.

When the Atonement was accomplished, that great and last sacrifice fulfilled the law of Moses<sup>19</sup> and terminated the practice of animal sacrifice, which had taught that “the life of the flesh [was] in the blood.” Jesus then explained how the elements of ancient sacrifice were subsumed by the Atonement and commemorated by the sacrament. I read from the book of John, chapter 6, verses 53 and 54. Note again references to the life, the flesh, and the blood.

*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind, even as many as will, shall be redeemed. The Savior began shedding his blood for all mankind not on the cross but in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he took upon himself the weight of the sins of all who would ever live. Under that heavy load, he bled at every pore.<sup>20</sup> The agony of the Atonement was completed on the cross at Calvary.

The importance of the Atonement was summarized by the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said:

*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; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.*<sup>21</sup>

With that authority and with profound gratitude, I so teach and testify of him today.

### **The Ministry of Jesus Christ—The Exemplar**

The Lord’s second far-reaching objective in mortality was to serve as an example for us. His exemplary life constituted his mortal ministry. It included his teachings, parables, and sermons. It encompassed his miracles, his loving-kindness, and his long-suffering toward the children of men.<sup>22</sup> It embraced his compassionate use of priesthood authority. It included his righteous indignation when he condemned sin<sup>23</sup> and when he overthrew the tables of the money changers.<sup>24</sup> It also included his heartaches. He was mocked, scourged, and disowned by his own people<sup>25</sup>—even denied by one of his disciples.<sup>26</sup>

Wonderful as his ministerial acts were, they were not and are still not unique to him. There is no limit to the number of people who may follow the example of Jesus. Similar acts have been done by his prophets and apostles or others among his authorized servants. Many have endured persecution for his sake.<sup>27</sup> In your own time, you know brothers and sisters who have earnestly striven—even at a terrible price—to emulate the Lord’s example.

That is as it should be. That is his hope for us. The Lord asked us to follow his example. His appeals are crystal clear:

- “What manner of men ought ye to be? . . . Even as I am.”<sup>28</sup>
- “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”<sup>29</sup>
- “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done.”<sup>30</sup>

These and other similar scriptures were not written as suggestions. They are divine imperatives! We are to follow his example!

To facilitate our desire to follow him, perhaps we could consider qualities of his life that we can emulate. Time would not permit us to list all of them, but perhaps we could identify five specific aspects that would be helpful to us.

### Love

If I were to ask which characteristic of his life you would identify first, I think you might name his attribute of love. That would include his compassion, kindness, charity, devotion, forgiveness, mercy, justice, and more. Jesus loved his Father and loved his mother.<sup>31</sup> He loved his family and the Saints.<sup>32</sup> He loved the sinner, without excusing the sin.<sup>33</sup> And he taught us how we can show our love for him. He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”<sup>34</sup> Then, to underscore that his love was not *unconditional*, he added: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”<sup>35</sup>

Another expression of our Savior’s love was his service. He served his Father, and he served the people with whom he lived and labored. In both ways, we are to follow his example. We are to serve God, “to walk in all his ways, and to love him.”<sup>36</sup> And we are to love our neighbors by serving them.<sup>37</sup> We start with our families. The deep love that binds parents to their children is forged by service to them through their period of total dependence. Later in life, dutiful children may have the opportunity to reciprocate that love when they serve their aging parents.

### Ordinances

A second aspect of the Savior’s exemplary life was his emphasis upon sacred ordinances. During his mortal ministry he demonstrated the importance of the ordinances of salvation. He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Even John asked, “Why?”

Jesus explained: “For thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness.”<sup>38</sup> Not only was the ordinance essential, but the example set by Jesus and John was also essential.

Later the Lord instituted the ordinance of the sacrament and linked it to that of baptism. He so instructed his disciples: “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the

baptism that I am baptized . . . shall ye be baptized.”<sup>39</sup> He again explained the symbolism of the sacrament and administered its sacred emblems to his disciples.<sup>40</sup>

Our Heavenly Father also gave instruction regarding ordinances. He said:

*Ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.*<sup>41</sup>

During the Lord’s postmortal ministry, the higher ordinances of exaltation have been revealed.<sup>42</sup> He has provided for these ordinances in his holy temples. In our day, washings, anointings, and endowments are granted to individuals who are properly prepared.<sup>43</sup> In the temple, an individual may be sealed to husband or wife, to progenitors, and to posterity.<sup>44</sup> Our Master is a God of law and order. His focus on ordinances is a powerful part of his example to us.<sup>45</sup>

### Prayer

A third aspect of the Lord’s exemplary ministry is prayer. Jesus prayed to his Father in Heaven and also taught us how to pray. We are to pray to God the Eternal Father in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>46</sup> I love the great intercessory prayer offered by the Lord recorded in John, chapter 17. In it he communicates freely with his Father on behalf of his disciples, whom he loved. It is a model of effective and compassionate prayer.

### Knowledge

A fourth aspect of the Lord’s example is the use of his divine knowledge. As mentioned earlier, many non-Christians acknowledge that Jesus was a great teacher. Indeed, he was. But what truly distinguished his teaching? Was he

a skilled instructor of engineering, mathematics, or science? As Creator of this and other worlds,<sup>47</sup> he surely could have been. Or as Author of scripture, he could have taught literary composition very well.

The feature that distinguished his teaching above that of all other teachers was that he taught truths of *eternal* significance. Only he could have revealed our purpose in life. Only through him could we learn of our *premortals* existence and of our *postmortal* potential.

On one occasion, the Master Teacher told his skeptical listeners that they had three witnesses of him:

- John the Baptist,
- The deeds that Jesus had accomplished, and
- The word of God the Eternal Father.<sup>48</sup>

He then proffered a fourth witness: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”<sup>49</sup>

The word *think* in that phrase may at first seem to be out of place. But it is vital to the meaning Jesus was trying to convey. He knew that many of his listeners did actually *think* that eternal life was in the scriptures. But they were wrong. The scriptures alone *cannot* bestow eternal life. Of course there is power in scripture, but that power comes from Jesus himself. He *is* the Word: *Logos*. The power of eternal life is in him, who “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>50</sup> Then, because of the stubborn stance of his skeptics, Jesus went on to rebuke them: “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have [eternal] life.”<sup>51</sup>

The Master could overwhelm us with his supernal knowledge, but he does not. He honors our agency. He allows us the joy of discovery. He encourages us to repent of our own mistakes. He permits us to experience the freedom that comes from our willing obedience to his divine law. Yes, the way he uses his knowledge provides a great example for us.

### Endure to the End

A fifth aspect of the Lord’s ministry I have chosen to emphasize is his commitment to endure to the end. Never did he withdraw from his assignment. Though he experienced suffering beyond our comprehension, he was not a quitter. Through deepening trials he endured to the end of his assignment: to atone for the sins of all humankind. His final words as he hung from the cross were, “It is finished.”<sup>52</sup>

### Application to Our Lives

These five aspects of his ministry—love (including obedience and service), focus on ordinances, prayer, use of knowledge, and a commitment to endure to the end—can be applied in our own lives. Surely the best evidence of our adoration of Jesus is our emulation of him.

When we begin to realize who Jesus is and what he has done for us, we can understand, to some degree, the logic of the first and great commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, all that we think and do and say should be steeped in our love for him.

Ask yourself, “Is there anyone whom I love more than the Lord?” Then compare your answer to these standards set by the Lord:

- “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”
- “He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”<sup>54</sup>

(Some of you may wish to add a boyfriend or girlfriend to that list.)

*Love* for family and friends, great as it may be, is much more profound when anchored in the love of Jesus Christ. Parental love for children has more meaning here and hereafter because of him. All loving relationships are elevated in him. Love of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ provides the illumination,

inspiration, and motivation to love others in a loftier way.

*Ordinances* provide a focus for service of eternal worth. Parents should consider which ordinance is needed next by each child. Home teachers should think of an appropriate ordinance needed next in each family they serve.

The Savior’s example of *prayer* reminds us that personal prayer, family prayer, and prayerful pursuit of our assignment in the Church should become part of our lives. To know and to do the will of the Father provides great spiritual strength and confidence.<sup>55</sup> To be on the Lord’s side is where we want to be.

*Knowledge* “of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be”<sup>56</sup> allows us to act upon true principles and doctrine. That knowledge will lift our level of behavior. Acts that otherwise might be driven by appetite and emotion will be superseded by deeds shaped by reason and right.

A commitment to *endure to the end* means that we will not ask for a release from a call to serve. It means that we will persevere in pursuit of a worthy goal. It means that we will never, no never, give up on a loved one who has strayed. And it means that we will always cherish our eternal family relationships, even through difficult days of disease, disability, or death.

Now may I administer a quiet quiz to help you evaluate your answer to my opening questions: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?”

With your silent declaration in mind, ask yourself two more questions:

*What does his mission—his Atonement—really mean to me?*

*What does his ministry—his example—really mean to me?*

To help you to be even more specific, let me ask:

- What do you think about when you partake of the sacrament?

- What do you do with your precious eyesight? What do you read? What do you watch on TV or look for on the Internet?
- What do you do with your ability to hear? To whom do you really hearken?
- What topics are worthy of your most intensive study?
- What do you allow into your body—your unique temple and gift from him?
- What kind of language is spoken from your lips?
- How does Jesus affect the way you use your time and talents?
- How does he influence the use of your means and resources?
- How does he influence your love for your wife or husband? Parents? Children? Brothers and sisters? Friends? Associates?
- How do his mission and his ministry affect who you really are? And who you may become?

With all my heart I pray that the transforming influence of the Lord may make a profound difference in your lives. I leave my love and blessing with you, along with my testimony that God lives. Jesus is the Christ. His mission and his ministry can bless each of you now and forever more, I testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Notes

1. D&C 93:36.
2. John 17:3.
3. D&C 107:23.
4. Matthew 22:42.
5. 1 Nephi 14:12, 14.
6. Moses 1:39.
7. John 13:15.
8. 3 Nephi 27:13–14.
9. 3 Nephi 27:21.
10. See John 10:14–18.
11. See 1 Corinthians 15:54–55.
12. See D&C 14:7.
13. See Matthew 19:24–26.
14. Hebrews 10:10.

15. Moses 5:7.
16. Leviticus 17:11.
17. See, for example, Exodus 12:5.
18. Moses 5:8.
19. See Alma 34:13–14.
20. See D&C 19:18.
21. *Teachings*, p. 121.
22. See 1 Nephi 19:9.
23. See Romans 8:3.
24. See Matthew 21:12.
25. See Mosiah 15:5.
26. See John 18:25–27.
27. See Matthew 5:10, 3 Nephi 12:10.
28. 3 Nephi 27:27; see also 12:48.
29. Matthew 4:19.
30. John 13:15; see also John 14:6.
31. See John 19:25–27.
32. See John 13:1, 2 Thessalonians 2:16.
33. See D&C 24:2, JST Matthew 9:2.
34. John 14:15.
35. John 15:10; see also D&C 95:12, 124:87.
36. Deuteronomy 10:12; see also 11:13; Joshua 22:5; D&C 20:31, 59:5.
37. See Galatians 5:13, Mosiah 4:15–16.
38. Matthew 3:15, emphasis added; see also JST Matthew 3:43.
39. Mark 10:39.
40. See Matthew 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–24, Luke 24:30.
41. Moses 6:59.
42. See D&C 124:40–42.
43. See D&C 105:12, 18, 33; 110:9; 124:39.
44. See D&C 132:19.
45. See D&C 132:18.
46. See Matthew 6:9–13, 3 Nephi 13:9–13, JST Matthew 6:9–15.
47. See Moses 1:33.
48. See John 5:33–37.
49. John 5:39.
50. John 1:1; see also 2 Nephi 31:20, 32:3.
51. John 5:40.
52. John 19:30.
53. Mark 12:30.
54. Matthew 10:37.
55. See D&C 121:45.
56. Jacob 4:13.