

The Restoration of the Priesthood
Sacrament Meeting Talk 2004
By Cameron Ford

Before getting into the Restoration of the Priesthood and the events leading up to it, I think it will be helpful to define exactly what the Priesthood is and why it is important that it was restored to us. Elder Bruce R. McConkie in Mormon Doctrine defines the Priesthood in two different ways. The First way is the Priesthood as it relates to God. He says:

"As pertaining to eternity, priesthood is the eternal power and authority of Deity by which all things exist; by which they are created, governed, and controlled; by which the universe and worlds without number have come rolling into existence; by which the great plan of creation, redemption, and exaltation operates throughout immensity. It is the power of God."

Now that is a pretty awesome and humbling definition of Priesthood! The Priesthood touches every facet of existence. There is nothing that has not been touched by it. The immensity of this definition is staggering! There is no greater power in existence than that of the Priesthood.

Elder McConkie goes on to state that mankind is given a portion of this power as it relates to the affairs of man. He says:

"As pertaining to man's existence on this earth, priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things for the salvation of men. It is the power by which the gospel is preached; by which the ordinances of salvation are performed so that they will be binding on earth and in heaven; by which men are sealed up unto eternal life, being assured of the fullness of the Father's kingdom hereafter;"

Given the immensity of the first definition I think mankind should feel privileged to use even a small portion of such an awesome power.

Many people outside of our Church and perhaps even inside do not quite understand why the priesthood is important to the salvation of mankind. Why do we need the priesthood and priesthood ordinances? To illustrate I would like to share a couple of analogies. The first one that comes to mind is the example of a police officer. A police officer has been given authority by the government to enforce the laws. If I was to break the law by speeding, a police officer could write me a speeding ticket. Since he has the correct authority the government would expect me to respond to the ticket by either paying it or appealing it or whatever might be applicable. If I did not the court would punish me for ignoring the authority of the police officer. Now what if someone who was not a police officer decided to give me a ticket? Even if I really was speeding and the person had really good intentions in trying to enforce the law, there is not one single court of law that would honor and enforce a ticket written by such a person. He does not have the proper authority. My second analogy is that of a lottery. [Not condoning the lottery:)] What if someone decided to start issuing lottery tickets, but did not get the authority to do so from the people running the lottery? Would they honor a winning lottery ticket issued by such a person? Of course not; he does not have the proper authority. The ticket was not received in the way that they had intended. Since they are running the lottery can they not decide in what way a winner is to be chosen?

The priesthood authority works in the same way. Remember that salvation in its highest sense is to become like God. To inherit everything that he has. If we are to receive such an incredible gift from God is it not reasonable to expect that we are to receive it in a way that he determines and by the authority that he has chosen? Being all wise and all knowing does he not know much better than we what is the best way to receive such a gift?

Looking at it this way the phrase "The Authority . . . by which the ordinances of salvation are performed so that they will be binding on earth and in heaven" has new meaning. If saving ordinances are done on earth by

the proper authority they will be upheld by the "courts" in heaven. If they are done by someone that just takes the authority upon themselves, the same ordinances cannot be recognized in heaven.

So the priesthood is important enough to want it restored, lets us now talk about how it was lost in the first place. After Christ established his Church it flourished for a while, but due to the actions of uninspired men the church stumbled and finally fell into apostasy. Rumbings of problems within the Church can be found in the New Testament. Paul shares his concerns for the early Church in Acts 20:28-31:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

Similarly, in Jude 1:3-4 Jude writes:

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"

Paul even foresaw that an apostasy would occur before the Second Coming would happen. He says in 2 Thessalonians 2:3

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first"

Finally Paul states in 2 Timothy 1:15 that the beginning of the Apostasy had already begun within the Church:

"This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;"

With all of these problems within the Church, when the Apostles were all killed there was nothing but chaos and disorder in the Church. Bishops of the various congregations began vying for power and authority over each other. The doctrines were diluted or changed to blend better with the pagan religions of the area presumably so that it was more easily accepted. Finally a few bishops gained more prominence than others and took the title of Pope. The disagreements between popes became so bad that in 1054 AD the pope of Rome and the Pope of Constantinople excommunicated each other and thus was born the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church. With all of this confusion and fighting in the Church the Lord removed his priesthood authority from the earth and waited for the appropriate time to restore it to the earth.

The political influence and power of the corrupted Christian church was so much that any restoration within the early years might have been quickly crushed, so in the Lord's wisdom he inspired men to pave the way to allow for a full restoration of his Church and its priesthood authority. These men were the protestant reformers. These men could see that the Church was not following the New Testament version of Christianity, but there was so much missing from the New Testament that they had a hard time piecing together just exactly what the Church should be like. Each had their own interpretation. The first was Martin Luther who in 1517 nailed a list of 15 grievances with the Catholic Church to a church door in Germany. He is

generally thought of as the beginning of the reformation. He was followed by John Calvin, John Wesley, Alexander Campbell and many others. We owe a great debt of gratitude to these men for their courage in standing up to the intense intimidation and persecution that resulted from their actions. If it had not been for them the United States would not have developed the kind of religious tolerance and freedom that was necessary for the restoration of the gospel to take hold and flourish as it has.

So after nearly 1800 years the Lord decided the time was right to restore his church in its fullness. The Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph in the spring of 1820 and set in motion the events and the restoration of doctrine that would culminate in the organization of Christ's true church containing his true authority. To this end on May 15, 1829 the Lord sent John the Baptist to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to give to them the Lesser priesthood necessary for baptism. Shortly thereafter the ancient apostles Peter, James and John appeared to Joseph and conferred the higher priesthood necessary to give the gift of the Holy Ghost and govern the church.

I don't think the importance of the restoration of the Priesthood can be overstated. Without it, even if our beliefs were correct, we would just be another denomination among many with good intentions but no authority. We would be just another unauthorized lottery vendor handing out invalid lottery tickets.

Now to the important question; even if the Priesthood *is* important and necessary, how do we know if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints contains the true priesthood, or in other words how do we know if the Church is true? (Because it is really the same question is it not?) This is a topic that could take up large amounts of time. But if it had to be summed up in a phrase I would say it would have to be "ask God, with a sincere heart, with real intent, if it be not true, and he will reveal it to thee

by the power of the Holy Ghost." I would like to add three corollaries to this wonderful formula.

1. Live worthily - As a good friend of mine used to say, you cannot do wrong and feel right. How can we expect to receive a message from the Lord if we are not worthy to hear it?
2. Study it out completely. Follow the Lords admonition of "Seek and ye shall find" If we do not put forth the effort to study out a question as important as this, how can we expect to receive a serious answer?
3. Complete commitment - Fence sitters need not apply. An answer will not come just for curiosity sake. The question being asked is not a simple question. It is no less than asking what the meaning of life is. Because if you get a "yes" answer you will truly know what the meaning of life is. The answer will not come until you are ready to do something with the information. I think this goes hand in hand with the real intent and sincere heart that Moroni talks about.

I think this is why some people are afraid to investigate and ask the question, or at least ask it sincerely, because they are afraid of what the answer will be and what it will require of them. I believe there is a direct correlation between the strength of the answer we get, and the strength of the commitment we make to get the answer. I know this from personal experience.

Friday night we had the ward Fathers and Sons campout which is also used by the church to commemorate the restoration of the priesthood. We watched a movie that described the apostasy and restoration. While we were watching it my Eldest boy surprised me by whispering to me during the movie: "Dad, I know this movie is important, because it is the real truth." I think sometimes we underestimate the spirituality and understanding of our small children. Even a 5-year-old can feel the spirit and understand the importance of the restoration. My son is correct. This is

the real truth. Brothers and Sisters, This **is** Gods true Church. I know it is.
We have his priesthood authority. How grateful we should be to be
members of this wonderful Church. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.