

D&C 84

JANIECE JOHNSON: Beginning on the evening of the 22nd of June 1832, Joseph Smith received, what he called, a revelation on the priesthood. The prophet had recently returned to Kirtland and was meeting with six missionaries returning from the east. A later revelation described the men “together in [these] seasons of joy.” When Joseph asked a question of the Lord and received the revelation that we now know as section 84. The revelation continued late into the night, perhaps into the early morning hours. We presume they got a bit of sleep before Joseph continued the revelation the next day, then in the presence of eleven elders. An understanding of priesthood was still developing for Joseph and the members of the Church of Christ. This knowledge began to be revealed when Joseph and Oliver Cowdery asked God about the power required to baptize in the Book of Mormon, in 1829. But the word priesthood wasn't specifically used until June of 1831. The Joseph Smith Papers teach us that, by this time, the priesthood was understood to refer to the office of high priest specifically as well as broader authority. This section will continue to build on that understanding of priesthood and expansive directions.

JOHNSON: Hi, Joey.

JOSEPH STUART: Hey Janiece, how are you?

JOHNSON: I'm good! How are you today?

STUART: Oh, I'm just living the dream. I love section 84. It's something that has meant a lot to me in my religious life. As a researcher and educator, it's meant a lot to my students as well.

JOHNSON: Let's dig into 84. We begin with this idea of the New Jerusalem and the temple that will be built at the center place of the New Jerusalem. A house "built unto the Lord," in verse 5. The location of this first temple has been revealed, and the Lord is orienting the Saints to the temple and its relationship to the priesthood.

STUART: In earlier sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord has revealed where a temple will be built and has hinted at the power of gathering together in a sacred place. But in section 84, the Lord connects the temple to priesthood. This is something that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints would have found very familiar in thinking about priesthood not only as ordination (in priesthood office), but also those who have been endowed by priesthood power. In section 84, it connects the idea of a sort of temple priesthood or those who have been given the power of God to act in their callings. We see this with missionary service in this section but there are other examples as well.

JOHNSON: As we begin talking about priesthood, we get this genealogy: How Moses received. We learned that Moses received the priesthood through the hand of his father-in-law Jethro, which solves an Old Testament conundrum of how Moses received the priesthood through this obscure branch of the House of Israel median, where his father-in-law Jethro comes from. But then we move and when we look at verse 17, it begins to expand our notion of priesthood, "Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning

of days or end of years." Now, sometimes, we don't get past this discussion of a list of priesthood offices and their duties. Certainly, that is an important part of the ecclesial functions of priesthood authority.

STUART: What do you mean by ecclesial, Janiece?

JOHNSON: Ecclesial is how the church organization and structure functions. When we get to section 107, we are going to have lots of different offices of the priesthood and lots of really long lists of duties and responsibilities. But here, as we have this first connection, perhaps the first really explicit connection of priesthood and temple, it seems to me that the Lord's trying to get us to think more broadly about priesthood. This is without beginning of days or end of years. This is not something that can be encapsulated in a laundry list of offices and duties. This is the power by which the Earth was created. This is something way more expansive than our finite minds can grasp and get around.

STUART: I'm so glad that you pointed that out. Because sometimes I think that Latter-day Saints get bogged down in the idea of a priesthood holder, or we thank the priesthood for passing the sacrament, or for putting up chairs, or whatever sort of earthly task that we are looking towards. But I think that there is a greater and more expansive definition that can help each of us as we are operating under priesthood authority, as we are set apart in our callings, to do the work of the Lord in the broadest sense possible.

JOHNSON: Yes, I want it to bring us back to 2013. Linda K. Burton was the Relief Society General President at the time. In Women's Conference at BYU, in 2013, she said, "We hope to *instill* within each of us a greater desire to better understand the priesthood." Now, I'm not sure how many people heard her when she originally taught that. She then followed it with an injunction for the Sisters to read section 84 and to read the oath and covenant of the priesthood, which we will talk about. But I suspect more people heard it when Elder Oaks quoted Sister Burton in his April 2014 priesthood session talk, which was called the "Keys and Authority of the Priesthood." He said there, he quoted Sister Burton, "We hope to *instill* within each of us a greater desire to better understand the priesthood." Then he said, "That need applies to all of us." I think this is fascinating that even Elder Oaks, now President Oaks, says this need applies to all of us. We all need to better understand priesthood. None of us can just snap our fingers and think that we've got it. "Priesthood power," he continues, "blesses all of us. Priesthood keys direct women as well as men, and priesthood ordinances and priesthood authority pertain to women as well as men."

STUART: That expansive view of priesthood that I mentioned before, I think it's essential to remember that priesthood is much more than ordination, it's authority to do things and something that we can all study to better appreciate. Also, in connecting it to the temple, I know that so many well-meaning people have said, "Oh, I have participated in temple ordinances for all my life and I feel like I'm barely beginning to scratch the surface of what it means."

JOHNSON: We do hear that a little bit, don't we?

STUART: Yeah, that sort of statement can be helpful in thinking we are not always going to have all the answers, but I think that it can sometimes put an artificial limit on what we are willing to seek out for ourselves. If there's no hope of finding an answer, sometimes, we don't realize that the purpose is to seek the answer, not necessarily to arrive at one. I am interested, though, in something that President Oaks said when he quoted President Joseph Fielding Smith, who said, "While the sisters have not been given the priesthood, it has not been conferred upon them, that does not mean that the Lord has not given unto them authority. ... A person may have authority given to him, or a sister to her, to do certain things in the Church that are binding and absolutely necessary for our salvation, such as the work that our sisters do in the House of the Lord. They have authority given unto them to do some great and wonderful things, sacred unto the Lord, and binding, just as thoroughly, as are the blessings that are given by the men who hold the Priesthood." I absolutely love this point by President Smith as quoted by Elder Oaks because it's essential to remember that there are no parts of the body of Christ that can say, "I don't have need of you." Men should not say, "Oh, a woman is speaking. I don't need to listen to her because of X, Y, or Z reason." In the same way that a woman shouldn't say, "Oh, a man is speaking, so I have no need to listen to them." This is something that I think we can focus on much more. We all have much to learn from each other, and if we focus more on priesthood office, rather than on trusting the ability of the Spirit to convey to us, through any person, what we can do to become closer to Jesus Christ, then we miss the mark.

JOHNSON: Verse 19, I think reinforces this. The Lord has just taught us that all priesthood is priesthood. There is the lesser priesthood and greater priesthood, but it's the same thing, just a different quality or condition. But this greater priesthood, "administereth the gospel and holdeth the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God." Priesthood has the ability to unlock the knowledge of God and to teach us about God. Now verse 20, "Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is made manifest." I love Elder David E. Sorenson, who was a Seventy. In 1998 he gave this talk, it's called "Small Temples, Large Blessings," when they were just in the process of expanding temples and making temples available to so many more people. That work has expanded exponentially since that time. But he taught us that each ordinance is calculated to reveal to us something about Christ in our relationship to God. For me, verse 20 is my favorite verse in the whole section, "in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is made manifest." If we think of Godliness as God-likeness, covenants teach us about God and covenants lead us to become like God. When we are baptized, we are made clean like God is clean. When we receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost, we are sanctified, like God is sanctified. When we make temple covenants we demonstrate that we are committed and learning and loyal, that we are keeping the Law of Obedience, the Law of Sacrifice, the Law of the Gospel, the Law of Chastity, and the Law of Consecration as Elder Bednar enumerated for us in April of 2019. And when we are sealed, when we are married in the temple, we are sealed up together as our Heavenly Parents are sealed up together. Covenants teach us about God and lead us to become like God.

STUART: Thank you Janiece. I think it's essential to remember that having the power of Godliness made manifest in our lives can be a very individual thing for each of us, but I think that it can be universal as well. To begin with the universal, we know from the Pearl of Great Price that God's work and glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children. God is able to help us each attain immortality and eternal life, when we enter into sacred

covenants, such as baptism, confirmation, and temple ordinances, like you just said, Janiece. We take on those promises that Elder Bednar enumerated. And through it, we become more like God as a more universal experience. But I think that it can also be an intensely personal experience too. Some of the most important times that I can remember having experiences with the Holy Spirit are when either I have partaken in ordinances or I have seen others do the same. I think there is this specific feeling, at least for me, associated with watching other people participate in temple ordinances, in baptism, and in becoming closer to their Heavenly Parents.

For instance, I served a mission in the United States. I've been able to travel back to see friends that I have helped teach and decided to enter into the waters of baptism and to be sealed together in the Portland temple. On one occasion, for example, I had friends that I had taught where the father of the family had been attending church for decades, but had not chosen to be baptized until the six week period where I was in their ward. Now, to be clear, I had very little to do with anything other than happening to be the missionary there at that time. But I remember sitting in the sealing room of the Portland, Oregon temple and seeing family members, ward members, and missionaries who had taught this family for many years, sitting in the room and smiling, watching them be sealed to one another. And seeing the difference that it made to have them sealed together to have the power of godliness made manifest in their lives. They were a happy family. They had great relationships between parents and children. Everyone has their differences, but they stuck out to me as a family that truly wanted to be together. They told me, years later, that their family never felt more together than it had when they had seen the power of godliness made manifest through the sealing ordinance. Even sitting here telling you this story, I can feel that power of godliness return to me as I remember that situation. That's why we have group participation when someone is baptized. It's not only to witness, it's to be able to celebrate, to have group experiences feeling the Holy Ghost, the power of godliness made manifest together.

JOHNSON: I like thinking about that community aspect of godliness and coming together. The ordinances lead us together as a community. In verse 22, the revelation says, "For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God." I don't believe this is privilege in literal sight here, but that we are able to see the face of God in many different ways.

STUART: To borrow from Les Miserables, right, "To love another person is to see the face of God." While this is not in the Doctrine and Covenants, I think it's certainly one way of thinking. We feel a power of Godliness through the power of God's love extended between one person to another. Does that make sense to you, Janiece?

JOHNSON: Yes! And I think that as we try to become like God, that love begins to pour out of us. As Joseph Smith said, we will "run throughout the earth" to share that love with other people. I'm intrigued by bringing Moses into it. As a kid, I thought Moses messed up. He didn't get to go to the Promised Land, so what's wrong with Moses? But I love this piece here of bringing us back to the covenant people, the children of Israel. Moses literally wants to bring them up the mountain with him. When he goes to the children of Israel, though, and says, "Here, come with me!" A) they are distracted because they wanted to see God, and so they created this golden calf,

so they could visually see and touch God. But he wants to take them up the mountain. Their response was, "Nope, we've heard the lightning. We've seen the thunder." That would be the opposite way. Let's say, "We've seen the lightning and we've heard the thunder, and that's too much of a risk." But Moses wants to bring them up the mountain with him to see the face of God. But that will always require risk. The children of Israel, at that point, were not ready to take that risk, and so the Lord pulled the Melchizedek priesthood and those ordinances from them.

STUART: Certainly. I am grateful that although the Melchizedek priesthood was taken away, it was, in fact, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. In this section, we think about the oath and covenant of the priesthood. Could you tell us more about that, Janiece?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think that sometimes we talk about this thing. I've actually had students write research papers on the oath and covenant of the priesthood and never actually defined their terms. Never actually tell me what the oath and covenant is. So, I think we should start there. I also think, to go back to Linda Burton, to just think about how significant that was that a Relief Society general president was asking the sisters to study the oath and covenant of the priesthood. I've given a number of lessons on priesthood to Relief Society sisters. I remember one sweet sister in my ward in Rexburg, when I gave what I thought was a fantastic lesson on the priesthood, she came up to me afterwards and patted me on the shoulder and said, "That's all nice and lovely, but isn't it great that we don't have to think about that because we are women." Sister Burton is directly calling that sweet sister out. Women as well as men need to study and understand the oath and covenant of the priesthood. As we begin, let's define our terms. I think we do pretty well with covenant. The Oxford English Dictionary defines covenant as "a mutual agreement between two or more persons to do or to refrain from doing certain acts." Now, an oath on the other hand, maybe we need a little help with this: "a solemn or a formal declaration invoking God, as a witness to the truth of a statement, or invoking God to the binding nature of a promise or an undertaking." That's what's critical here.

STUART: Yeah, I think about the oath that a person takes to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (maybe as a law and order junkie that's what comes to me). What do you think it means in the context of an oath related to the priesthood?

JOHNSON: Well, I believe that it's God's oath to us. The promises that He makes to us, if we fulfill our portion. I kind of think of a handshake: the two hands covenanting, two parties, a two-way promise. God's oath is a full other hand; another assertion that God will be faithful to these promises that we've made. When we have chosen to fulfill these covenants and to live these covenants, then God promises us that He will fulfill His promises to us.

STUART: I think that distinction is so important. I know that in wider Christianity, many folks believe that God can arbitrarily do things because He is God. But as we learn from the Book of Mormon, God lives by law. God lives by things that He agrees to do. If He were to break those laws or break those promises, He would cease to be God.

JOHNSON: Very good. So, let's start with us: what we covenant. Verse 35 of section 84 says that we receive the Melchizedek priesthood in good faith. I would say, for me, I have not been ordained to a specific priesthood office, which means that I would receive covenants of the

temple—those Melchizedek priesthood covenants available to me in the temple. We've talked about receiving before, but I have to choose to receive them. They may be offered, but I have to choose to receive. The verses 35 through 38 talk about receiving priesthood, receiving servants of the Lord, receiving the Lord, receiving the Father, all of these things are part of receiving the Melchizedek priesthood in good faith.

STUART: I also recognize that in receiving those ordinances and in receiving the Lord's servants, they are set apart by the authority of the Melchizedek priesthood as well. There is a logic and order to how things are done. We've discussed in previous episodes about how the Lord does not always present all at the same time, but rather bit by bit, little upon little. I think that it's important to remember that there is a logic to how people are ordained and are able to pass on the blessings of Melchizedek priesthood to others.

JOHNSON: The second thing in verse 33 to magnify callings -- Now, I just accepted a calling that is feeling a little weighty on my shoulders today. I've been thinking about this magnifying callings a lot. Often, we think about a magnifying glass and perhaps its ability to make things bigger. I want to talk to all of you pyros out there and think about other functions of magnifying glasses. We can take the rays of the sun and a magnifying glass can magnify, focus them to burn up stuff. But I think perhaps there is a good illustration here. I cannot do everything, but I need the help of the Lord to know that the effort I make will be focused where it needs to be focused and then it will also be made larger than what I have to offer.

STUART: A hundred percent! That also entails obeying the commandments and living by every word of God. By finding the opportunities to obey as President Benson taught that, "When obedience ceases to be an irritant and becomes our quest, it is in that moment that God endows us with power." When we take it upon ourselves to do everything that we can to be worthy of His spirit to be with us, that's when we see these marvelous events take place in our callings, where we have the opportunity to bring to pass the work and glory of our Heavenly Parents, which is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all of their children.

JOHNSON: So, that was verse 43, gives us "obey the commandments." Verse 44, "live by every word of God." I like to think about this in an expansive way. I think we are talking about scripture, we are talking about personal revelation, we are talking about the words of prophets and apostles as the Spirit directs that we live by the word of God as it is presented to us.

STUART: Now, God also makes an oath to us. He's the second part in the covenant. The first promise is that we will be sanctified by His spirit. We will be made holy through the influence of the Holy Ghost.

JOHNSON: The second promise is that we will be numbered with the elect of God. Now, we haven't perhaps talked about election as much as it does in the Doctrine and Covenants, but the concept of election is something that has been long debated in the history of Christianity. Whether you have a Calvinist idea that says, "You three over there are the chosen and the rest of you are damned to hell for all eternity," or we have an idea of universal salvation. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us that the elect are those who hear the voice of the Lord and act on it. God's oath to us is that if we want to be the elect, if we choose to be the elect, He will honor that

choice. God will not be a mercurial God at the last moment and say, "Yeah, you tried, but sorry, you weren't one of the three I picked."

STUART: That sort of radical acceptance by God would've been mind blowing in Joseph Smith's time, and is something that, I think as modern Latter-day Saints, we don't necessarily pick up on. I also think that the third promise in verse 38 that we will be given all that God has is something that I can't fully comprehend. But what it means for me is that all of God's joy, all of God's purpose, all of God's ability to bless those that they have created becomes something that I will have their joy. I will be able to participate in their work.

JOHNSON: There is a lot more that we could talk about in this revelation in section 84. The last thing that I want to talk about here is found in verses 54 through 57. The Lord chides the saints a little bit. There have been a lot of revealed truth here and reasons to be joyous, but here we get some condemnation from the Lord. "And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written." Now, oft times, we think about this in terms of the Book of Mormon. President Benson, in 1984, brought us back to the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is central to us understanding scripture and reading scripture, but I would like to point out here that the Book of Mormon is not the only book of scripture that is mentioned. All the former commandments. Now we could think of the commandments sometimes used as a synonym for covenants or for revelations like we have here in the Doctrine and Covenants, but, I think more broadly, we could think about commandments as other books of scripture. None of us is paying attention to all books of scripture equally at all times. There is always one book of scripture or something that we are neglecting, or that we are treating lightly. The Lord calls us back, because maybe it's that we know the words that are in scripture, but we are not actually doing them. Scripture needs to be central, and if we think of that part of the oath and covenant—the covenant that we make to “live by every word which proceedeth forth from the mouth of God”—scripture is part of that. It is an injunction that we get from the Lord for each of us. I just want to point out President Benson gave a talk in 1984, Elder Oaks gave a talk in 1994 and said, "Condemnation is still there." In 2005, President Hinckley challenged us to all read the Book of Mormon before the end of the year. Just a little more than a decade after that, President Nelson did something very similar, challenging us again to read the Book of Mormon. I think we've still got something to work on here.

STUART: Perhaps my favorite verse in the Doctrine and Covenants actually comes in section 88, where the Lord says, "I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left and my spirit shall be in your hearts and mine angels round about you to bear you up." This verse is associated with missionaries because that's who the Lord is describing in the text, but I think that it applies to many tasks that we undertake to lead others closer to God's loving arms. I know that I've benefited from those who have served me, who have gone before me in callings and prepared hearts and minds for me to be able to make a difference.

There is a lovely sermon by President Eyring, where he says that he was sent to a conference for a group of religious leaders in the United States to discuss the problem of competition among churches. When he arrived, he realized that he would have to speak in place of Elder Neal Maxwell, who was known not only as a warm and lovely person, but as a wizard with words. So he calls President Hinckley, who tells him, "Use your best judgement." I can only imagine how President Eyring must have felt to be coming in and speaking in place of not only a mentor, but someone who was well-known for their ability to speak. He says that he prayed through the night and somewhere near dawn, he recognized what he should say. After he spoke the next day, he said, "To my amazement, the ministers lined up to speak to me. Everyone of them. One after another coming to me, telling me essentially the same story. Each of them had met a member of the church somewhere in the lives that they had admired. Many of them said that they lived in a community where the stake president had come to the aid of not just his church members, but of the community in a disaster. They asked if I could take back their greeting and their thanks to people." I not only didn't know, but had no hope of ever finding. The Lord went before President Eyring's face in preparing the hearts and minds of these ministers who would speak through people that he would never meet or be able to know.

As President Eyring teaches later in the sermon, "What is impossible for you is possible with God's help in His service. Even when you are very small and in the years since, He has, with His Power and His spirit, gone before your face, been on your left hand and on your right hand, when you went in His service. You can receive assurance that God will watch over you if you pray for it in faith. I know that." And I will add that I know that as well.

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