

Podcast Episode 32: Temples, Part 1

QUESTION: This is the first installment in a multi-part series about the Temple, where Denver addresses the meaning behind both ancient and modern temple worship, as well as some of the features and purposes of the temple to be built in New Jerusalem.

DENVER: The restoration was never intended to just restore an ancient Christian church. That is only a halfway point. It must go back further. In the words of the ancient prophet, God intends to do according to His will and to “...*preserve[d] the natural fruit that it is good even like as it was in the beginning*” (Jacob 5:75). This means the beginning, as in the days of Adam, with the return of the original religion and original authority—everything must be returned as it was in the beginning. Civilization began with the temple as the center of learning, law, and culture. The temple was the original university because it taught of man's place with God in the universe.

There's a reason why, when the temple message began to roll out, the message began with telling the story of the creation and Adam and Eve.

Ordinances that were ordained by God cannot be changed. If they're changed, they're broken; if they're broken, they're ineffective. Therefore, an altered ordinance can be informational, and if you take it sincerely and if you adhere to the covenants and if you obey, God can work with that because God can work with any soul. And you can ultimately realize every blessing and every promise of the temple, as God, by the Holy Spirit of Promise, works with you to confer upon you blessings that are intended for you. So there's no downside, but there's a considerable upside if you're true and faithful to the things that you obligate yourself to do.

The purpose of a temple is to allow the communication of great knowledge and greater knowledge, to restore what has been lost since the time of Adam, in order for people to rise up and receive the Holy Order.

The ordinances of the Old Testament, beginning with Exodus, were revealed through Moses, and so when you speak about “Moses and all the prophets” you should expect Christ would necessarily begin with the ordinances of the Law of Moses. When those ordinances are their most relevant, they're talking about the sacrifices that took place there, and they point to the great atoning sacrifice which He would perform.

In the tabernacle, and subsequently in the temple that was built by Solomon, the temple divided up into three areas. There was an outer court into which was welcomed all of Israel. You had to enter Israel whether you were a priest or not a priest—all of Israel entered into the outer court. There was a Holy Place into which, on a rotating basis, the priests alone were allowed to come. They would come for the morning service; they would come for the evening service. And then there was the Holy of Holies, into which one priest, the presiding High Priest, would enter one time each year for one specific ordinance, on Yom Kippur (or the Holy of Holies). So you had—as a matter of separation—you had everyone, and then you had a smaller group, and then you had a single person. Or, if you were to draw it out in terms of how the divisions looked, you create in the structure of the temple itself the mountain of the Lord's house.

In the Holy Place there was a separation between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies by a veil. In front of the veil there was an altar on which incense would be burned. On the one side, there was a menorah (or a candlestick). On the other, there was the table of the shewbread, and this is the structure into which the priests would pass for their ordinances. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, together with the Mercy Seat and the symbolic presence of God the Father and Christ. These represented ascending levels of holiness which were symbolically separated by who got to enter. The three degrees—the three levels of holiness—are represented there. It is inside the Holy Place—*that* is the place in which the New Testament begins, and the New Testament ends. It begins chronologically in that room, and it ends in its narrative in the Book of Revelation, where Christ appears in that same room in John's vision of Patmos.

I want to turn back to the beginning of the dispensation in which Christ will come, and turn to Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 5: *"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia."*

This is what James Talmage wrote about this course:

"About fifteen months prior to the Savior's birth, Zacharias, a priest of the Aaronic order, was officiating in the functions of his office in the temple at Jerusalem. His wife, Elisabeth, was also of a priestly family, being numbered among the descendants of Aaron. The couple had never been blessed with children; and at the time of which we speak they were both well stricken in years and had sorrowfully given up hope of posterity. Zacharias belonged to the course of priests named after Abijah, later known in later time as the course of Abia. This was the eighth in the order of the twenty-four courses established by David the king, each course being appointed to serve in turn a week at the sanctuary....

“During his week of service each priest was required to maintain scrupulously a state of ceremonial cleanliness of person; he had to abstain from wine and from food, except that specifically prescribed; he had to bathe frequently; he lived within the temple precincts and thus was cut off from [his] family association; he was not allowed to come near the dead, nor to mourn in [any] formal manner if death [occurred to] rob him of even his nearest and dearest of kin. [They select daily] the priest who should enter the Holy Place, and there burn incense on the golden altar, ...by lot; and...we gather, from non-scriptural history, that because of the great number of priests [and] the honor of so officiating, seldom [this honor] fell twice [in] the same person.”

That’s from *Jesus the Christ* at page 71.

Not only was it seldom, later Jewish tradition has it that a person, a priest, who got to go in there and to do that in this room was considered rich, having been allowed to do this on one occasion. Zacharias is well stricken in years; the lot hasn’t fallen on him. He spent his lifetime hoping for it, and now the lot falls onto him. And by the way, there are no coincidences. This was, at it turns out, exactly the right time.

“...his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth” (*Luke 1:5*). Both sides of this family are Aaronic, Levitical, so that there’s no doubt about the right, the inherited right, that John will have to officiate in the ordinances that he will later officiate in.

“...they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord” (*verses 6-9*).

So his job was to come with coals from off of the outer altar, and bring it in to the inner altar, and put the coals on the altar, and then put on top of it incense. And then he had a job to do, and his job was to offer a prayer. The altar of incense, which had horns at its corner, would have burned with the smoke of the incense ascending upward in the Holy Place. When it hit the ceiling, it would then move outward, the rising of the incense column being a symbol of the prayers ascending to God from the Israelite nation. When it hit the ceiling and began to spread out, it represented as well the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, with the trunk and with the upper limbs extending. This was a symbol of the original Garden of Eden setting, all of this occurring within the Holy Place.

“And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense” (verses 10-11).

See, this—the veil—was fastened hard on the left but ended on the right in front, and behind it, it was fastened hard on the right and ended on the left, so that a person could pass through. But if you passed through, and you came from inside the Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies) into the Holy Place, you would be standing, as it turns out, on the right side of the altar. Symbolically, that meant that this person who has now come to stand on the right side of the altar has just emerged from the symbolic presence of God.

We tend to think of things as being non-physical, but when these encounters occur it gets very concrete and very specific. And there we have the right side of the altar of incense, and that description fixes the angel in the right location for him, inside the temple, to have emerged from this symbolic presence.

So the dispensation of the Meridian of Time, when the Lord is going to come, begins right here, in this spot. That ought to tell us something, too, about the terrible significance of tying into everything that the Lord does, the temple. So here we are, standing on this side of the veil with the dispensation launched, with an angel who has emerged, not from just the figurative or symbolic, but from the literal presence of the Lord, and we’re going to have to, as part of this dispensation, at some point pass through that veil and enter into the Holy of Holies.

When Moses passed through the veil, the presence of the Lord was shielded by a covering of a thick cloud. The cloud operated as a veil to the onlookers of Israel, but Moses was allowed to pass through or enter through the cloud into the very presence of God. We have an account of that in Exodus chapter 24, in verses 15-18.

“And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.”

See, just like in the mountain of the Lord’s house you have the pinnacle—the spot at the top of the mountain at which when one stands there, they are no longer of the earth, but they have become a part of the sky. That’s one of the reasons why the mountain of the Lord’s house is the symbol that gets used in scripture to describe the phenomenon, because it is no longer connecting you to the earth. The only thing that touches is the soles of your feet; you have become part of

the heavens. Moses ascends up, and the ascension that's being talked about here in the cloud, at the top of the mountain of the Lord's house, inside there is where we find the presence of the Lord.

Similarly, one of the things that had happened was in the dispensation of the Meridian of Time. Christ also passed through the cloud and entered into the presence of the Father. There were three disciples who were able to see Moses, Elias, but they were not permitted to see the Father, though they heard His voice. They heard the voice speaking from inside the cloud; only Christ passed into the Father's presence. That's recorded in Matthew 17:1-8. The relevant part:

"...after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid."

It's intimidating.

"And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."

See, He was risen again from the dead. There is no reason now to withhold the information about the Lord having passed through the veil on the Mount of Transfiguration into the presence of God the Father.

In the rites of Moses there was one occasion when it was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies. It took place only one time each year on a specific day. The day is set out in Leviticus 23 where it says: *"...on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement...And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement"* (verse 27-28).

This orientation as to time and number orients us on the tenth day to remind us of the "Ten Commandments" at Sinai. Ten is whole; it's complete. We use ten because of our fingers as the basis for our numbering system. And seven, on the seventh month, is a symbol of creation or completion or perfection. These two numbers combined in a symbolic testimony of the significance of the Day of Atonement, which is also testament of the perfection, the completion, the exactness of the timing of the actual atonement. It was no accident the Lord came and did

what He did at the very moment that He did it, and it's no accident that the angel appeared at the very moment he did.

The Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) was originally associated with the deaths of Aaron's two sons. That's sort of an odd thing to think about. That's where it comes from; that's where it gets started. They had taken incense into the Holy of Holies and burned it there in an unauthorized manner, and that offense—in entering into the presence of God in an unauthorized way—resulted in Nadab and Abihu being killed. Fire came out and devoured them; they were killed. The Day of Atonement was the day in which there was a method provided for Aaron to enter into the Holy of Holies without being destroyed. The entirety of the ordinance reaches out, first to cleanse Aaron (or Aaron's successor) as the High Priest, and then to cleanse the temple, and then to cleanse all of Israel. It was a progression in three degrees, as if the atonement were intended to include redemption for the celestial, the terrestrial, and the telestial; as if the mercy of God was intended to extend to every living creature regardless of their obedience to Him. It was intended to be all-inclusive and all-encompassing.

In the context of the Day of Atonement, there was a prescribed use for incense. It symbolizes the cloud covering the presence of God, just as the cloud covering Sinai when Moses entered the presence of God, and the full account of the rite is set out in chapter 16 of Leviticus.

Well, I want to take a look at what that says, only for purposes of saying what necessarily the Lord had to suffer in order to enter into His glory. We don't look at these old books anymore. We tend to think that they were all done away with, and they were. We don't celebrate them anymore, but they were intended to give an orientation to who it was the Messiah was and what it was the Messiah was intended to do. It is a testimony. See, if God knows all things beforehand, and He does, then He knows how to set out in a ritual all of the details of what it is He's about to do—because it is fascinating to take a look at what the Lord suffered in the actual atonement in order to see what the rites were intended to reveal about Him. You don't understand the Lord until you understand what He set out in symbol to testify about Himself.

So if we go to Leviticus 16:1, *“And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron....”* That incident occurred in Leviticus 10:1-3. *“...when they offered before the Lord, and died; And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.”*

So you don't get to control the timing of events. The Lord reserves to Himself the timing of events. If you think that there are moments when you are ready for something, you may not be. It's the Lord who decides and the Lord who fixes the time, and those things are determined

according to the mercy and the wisdom of the Lord, just as it was when Zacharias was surprised in the Holy Place.

Verse 12 says: “...*he...*” that is, Aaron—when he goes in—and his descendants “...*shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not...*” (Leviticus 16:12-13).

So he’s supposed to bring (from off of the altar of burnt sacrifice) coals with him, and he’s supposed to bring a collection of incense with him, and he’s to enter into—through the veil—into the Holy of Holies, and there he is supposed to set the coals and set the incense, in order for a cloud to be produced inside the Holy of Holies. So he’s inside the veil of the temple, but he’s also being drawn into a further cloud, or veil, inside the Holy Place, “that he die not.”

Well, unlike the room in which the altar of incense appears, the room in which this takes place is literally a cube. Every dimension is exactly the same inside this room. It is a perfect cube, and it’s significantly smaller than the room from which he’s traversed to get there. The incense behaves in a different way, and the cloud that’s produced there does not become columnar, it fills the room because it’s a much smaller space. And so while he’s in there ministering, he is inside the cloud and in the symbolic presence of God, just as Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration had accomplished that, and the elements from Sinai are brought as well. You have Moses on the Mount Sinai, you have Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, and you have an ordinance. And the ordinance is symbolically recreating these actual events—one that had occurred at the beginning of the dispensation, one that will occur in the Lord’s own life, and it is to be modeled every year on the Day of Atonement.

The Messiah’s life necessarily included an ascension through a cloud or veil into the presence of God. He was touching on one of the required elements of His ministry when this ordinance was established and when He said: “Ought not these things to have occurred?” One of the things that ought to have occurred was the incident on the Mount of Transfiguration. It satisfied one of the elements of the Law of Moses which would identify Him as the Anointed One, as the Lord, as the promised Messiah. In all things, Christ was required to fulfil what had been foretold of Him. When He asked: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?” on the road to Emmaus, it’s the same sort of question that He and John the Baptist exchanged at His baptism. “Suffer it to be so because we need these things. There’s a pattern here. I must conform to the pattern. I am the one who will fulfil the pattern, therefore, I must do this, John. It’s necessary, it’s essential.” And if so for Him, then for us, also. When He said, “Come, follow me,” I don’t think He had in mind merely walking around Palestine—the Savior was talking about things that were transcendent.

The great Day of Atonement had elements included throughout the ritual which associate with the events of Christ's life and of Christ's sacrifice. Let's look at how Luke described some of what happened in Luke 22:39-46:

"And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives..." This is after He has introduced the sacrament ordinance, after Judas has disassociated himself. The Savior now goes out to the Mount of Olives—Luke 22:39.

"And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (verses 40-46).

Here, Luke identifies three elements of the Day of Atonement:

First, he orients us to the place involved. It's the Mount of Olives. This mount, the Mount of Olives, was east of the temple.

Second, he identifies the sprinkling of blood upon the ground. Luke tells us Christ, at the eastern location, suffers until "drops" of His blood are sprinkled upon the ground.

Third, Luke tells us that Christ was left alone at the moment of these events. No man accompanies Him. Those who were "a stone's throw" away have lapsed into sleep, so as the blood is sprinkled on the ground, Christ is alone. Interestingly, the place that the priest would enter alone on the Day of Atonement is about a stone's throw away from those that would be in the outer court waiting as he performed the ordinance inside the Holy of Holies.

In our dispensation, the Lord confirms His suffering in Section 133 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*: *"I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me"* (D&C 133:50). This had to be a solitary event.

So if we go to [Leviticus] 16, and look at the Day of Atonement, look in verse 14. The High Priest, when he comes in: *"And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward...."*

He comes into the east side of the Mercy Seat, and he sprinkles there the blood of the sacrifice that's been offered, just as Christ went eastward from the temple into the Garden of Gethsemane, where He sprinkles the blood upon the ground.

“... before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place...” (verses 14-16).

Verse 17: *“And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place.”*

Christ's suffering and the “sprinkling” of His blood on the Mount of Olives was necessary to fulfil the Law of Moses. He needed to suffer these things in order to fulfil the symbols that identify Him as the Messiah, in the rights that He had established as the way to identify who He would be. It would be more correct to say that the rites needed to include these elements because the events would include the elements, because He foresaw the elements of what He would suffer before He ordained the ordinance itself, and the two of them fit together.

Continuing with the events in Luke, we read that Christ was taken before Israel and an option was given to Israel to either let Him or let another man go free, as Luke describes it. This is in 23— Luke 23:16 (Pilate is speaking):

“I will therefore chastise him, and release him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast). And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time...”

Interesting that it has to be repeated three times.

“...Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will” (verses 16-25).

Well! Knock me over with a feather if the Day of Atonement doesn't do this exact same thing. And one of the parts of the Day of Atonement that has generated, I would guess, more doctoral theses in the divinity schools of Christendom than probably any other speculative point, this account conforms to the Day of Atonement.

First, you offer one to be sacrificed and one to be released. Second, the choice is made before all the congregation of Israel. Third, after the choice is made, one is sacrificed for sin. And fourth, the one to be released is laden with sin when it is turned free.

So, Leviticus 16:7-10 & 20-22: *“And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a [sacrifice]. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness...And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness...He shall let [go] the goat in the wilderness.”*

Confess over him all their sins, release him who “that for sedition and murder was cast into prison,” and so the one laden with sin is let go.

The elements of the ritual in the book of Leviticus and the events in the life of Christ are not inadvertent. The Lord saw the events of the day when His own life was going to be laid down. The rituals of Moses were fashioned by the Lord in the revelation given to Moses to reflect the events that were actually going to occur.

The two goats are alike in the ritual. Just so, too, are the positions of Christ, the Son of God, and Barabbas, on the other hand. “Bar” meaning “the son of,” “Abba” meaning “the father.” Whether that was his given name or the name he assumed as a zealot, I don't know. But this name title co-identified “The Son of God” and “the son of God, Barabbas.” So we have the actual Son of God, on the one hand, and a man whose name refers to him also as “the son of God” standing co-equally before the congregations of Israel. “And whom shall I free?” And the lot falls upon the Savior.

The two goats are treated differently in the ritual—one is killed; the other, laden with sins, is set free. Barabbas is set free. The similarities are striking. No doubt the risen Lord would have pointed these things out as they walked on the road to Emmaus, about how all these things ought to have occurred and were necessarily so.

The next element was the location. Luke describes the place of Christ's killing in Luke 23:33, *"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left."*

The place where the crucifixion occurred would be to the north of the location of the temple mount. Inside the temple environment, inside the larger temple area, the place where the animals were killed on the grounds was the place of slaughter, and it was located to the north of the altar for burnt sacrifice, and outside of the temple itself but in the court of the temple—just as the scriptures make clear it was outside the city wall and at a location to the north of Jerusalem.

Leviticus 16:[11], *"Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, ...and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself...."*

This site would have been in the northern part of the outer court of the temple, the location of the actual crucifixion corresponding to the location of the rites performed within the temple. Crucifixion outside the temple walls (or outside the walls of Jerusalem) corresponding once again with killing the sacrifice outside the walls of the temple building. Then once this has occurred, once this slaughter has occurred, it's necessary to bring the blood.

In verse 15: *"Then shall he..."* Aaron or the successor High Priest *"...bring his blood within the veil, ...and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat...."*

So it has to come into the presence of (and the attention of), symbolically, God the Father. The Mercy Seat is inside the Holy of Holies. It's inside the veil of the temple. It's the most holy spot of the temple. When, therefore, the actual events of the Day of Atonement occur, it should be necessary for the offering to be brought into the holiest place and offered to the attention of the Father.

So in Luke 23:44, at the moment of Christ's death, after He shouts with a loud voice and gives up the ghost: *"And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."*

Matthew 27:51 says: *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks [were] rent..."*

Christianity says that's because they did away with all that stuff, and it had now been superseded, fulfilled, and it was no more. The rites of Moses suggest it was necessary for the offering to be accepted within the holy place. And as no one who was officiating would draw aside the veil to allow the presence of God the Father to acknowledge the sacrifice, God the

Father Himself drew it apart with an earthquake, rending the veil of the temple to accept the sacrifice. As Christ completed His sacrifice, the Holy of Holies opened to acknowledge and accept the offering. It should not be a mystery to us why this happened. It completes the acts required under the rites to confirm that this was the Anointed One, to whom all the rites and ordinances pointed as our common hope for the One who would enter in and make atonement for us.

Well, the notion that Christ has a mission—has a destiny—for mankind; the idea that His glory necessarily encompasses us; the idea that the temple anciently divided things into three levels of holiness; and the idea that His plan is robust enough, that His glory is robust enough to provide for both the immortality, on the one hand, and eternal life, on the other hand, of mankind suggests a Lord who is collegial, who is friendly, who is social, who is as interested in you as you may be curious about Him—a person who, in describing His own glory, necessarily includes within it others—is the kind of being worthy of worship and worthy of admiration.

Well, the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ involves the path to and through the veil into the presence of God, becoming joint heir, becoming a son of God. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, page 375, he refers to sons of God who exalt themselves to be a god even before they were born. And all can cry Abba, Father.

Joseph wanted us to take the religion that he restored to the earth rather seriously and to search into and contemplate both the heavens and the darkest abyss.

Here's the problem: People do not believe Him even though He rose from the dead. Period. Today, us—you and I—do not believe Him, even though He rose from the dead. It was not intended to be a one-off event that occurred in the meridian of time. It was intended to be a gathering. I mean, the little seed grows up into the great mustard plant into which the birds—or as Joseph put it, the angels—were intended to come and watch. It was intended to be a super structure for housing contact between the divine and the mortal. It was intended to be the moment of intersection between all that is in eternity and the life of the mortal. It was intended to be the journey into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God.

In the ordinances as they have been restored in the temple today, everyone who enters in is expected to come to the veil possessing certain knowledge, capable of identifying themselves as having been true and faithful, and be received in an embrace and then welcomed into the presence of God. It's a normal and expected part of the ordinances as they have been restored. Those ordinances are supposed to be teaching us something. They are the Lord's way of shouting in a multimedia presentation, "Here is how I did what I did, and what I would like you to do in the process of you becoming like me—a son of God, a daughter of God, a member of the

household of faith, and part of the church and kingdom of the Firstborn.” You have to become the Firstborn. You have to become one with Him. You have to become part of that, not in an organized group-think kind of way, in an individual way in which you connect up with Holiness, in which you become a vessel of Holiness. You are someone to whom sacred things have been entrusted, and you become, in turn, sacred as the bearer of them.

The Law of Moses prescribed the death penalty for a variety of offenses. One of the ways to avoid the execution of the penalty was to go to one of the safe harbor cities. Another way was to go and to come in contact with the altar, because if you came in contact with the altar, it was considered most holy. Things that are most holy communicate holiness—you can’t profane them. If you come in contact with them, and you are unholy, you don’t make it unholy—it makes you holy, because it is most sacred. Part of the rites in the temple are intended to communicate to you things that are most holy. They are intended to make you holy. They are intended to make you a suitable recipient for an audience. They are intended to make you a suitable companion for a walk down a dusty road with the risen Lord who is trying to get you to notice exactly who it is that speaks to you. It’s intended to have you understand that He lives, and that He’s willing to associate with you. And that it’s not, as Joseph Smith put it, relying on the words of an old book, the people who lived once long ago—that’s going to save anyone. It’s the dialogue that you engage in with Him now. It’s the living, breathing, vital—He uses the figure of the living vine, and you have to connect to the living vine, and He’s the vine, and you connect to it, and you get life through that. Words could not be more plain.

He’s trying to get—I mean, what does it mean to be connected up with the vine and to derive sustenance from it? I mean, you have to be alive, which is not inert or an object that you move from there to there. If it’s alive it’s going to grow, it’s going to increase, it’s going to improve. It’s going to have connection with. It’s going to have—Christ was extraordinary in His selection of the things that He wanted to use to communicate to us what He intended the gospel to be.

In a description of Christ when He appears standing among the seven candlesticks (a symbol of the menorah which is placed in the temple symbolically before the veil before you enter into the Holy of Holies) Christ, standing before the veil at the menorah in the vision that John has, speaks, and when He speaks, out of His mouth comes a sharp, two-sided sword. Why is the word that proceeds forth out of the mouth of Christ sharper than a two-edged sword? You could hurt yourself with a two-edged sword—you’re going to split yourself open because it cuts both ways. And in handling the word of God, every one of us had better take care not to injure ourselves, lest we be found to fight against the work of God.

All of that stuff in the LDS temple that was designed to prepare you in all things for further light and knowledge by conversing with the Lord at the veil was not just a symbolic trip to dress up

funny and go down and do a show. It was designed to convey a message in which you literally expect to converse with the Lord through the veil preliminary to entering into His presence. And the purpose of that was to open your mind to the possibility, as the *Book of Mormon* says, that you *can* enter into the presence of the Lord.

God does want to reveal Himself, and that is the constant theme of the *Book of Mormon*. And knowledge of God is the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing greater than Christ, the originator and the finisher of our faith. Everyone always mutilates the account: They felt the nails in His hands and feet and side— hands and feet and side. That’s not the way the *Book of Mormon* account begins. It begins with an embrace. The first wound that is felt when they come to the Lord at Bountiful is an embrace. It is the wound on His side. The first place He brings you is to Himself, standing in His presence, beside Him, in an embrace, in plain humility, as if any of us were good enough to stand in His presence. That’s where it begins. Then His hands. And then as it fully dawns upon you the enormity of the gulf between you and Him, well, you end up kneeling at His feet. It’s the wounds on the feet you see last.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver’s “Opening Remarks,” given at the Covenant of Christ Conference in Boise, Idaho on September 3, 2017;
- His fireside talk entitled “The Holy Order,” given in Bountiful, Utah on October 29, 2017;
- His talk entitled “Christ’s Discourse on the Road to Emmaus,” given in Fairview, Utah on April 14, 2007; and
- His remarks given at the Joseph Smith Restoration Conference in Boise, Idaho on June 24, 2018.