

There Must Needs Be a Christ

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Jennifer and I are filled with joy and gratitude to be here with you today. In the fall of 1978, we were both freshmen at BYU and in the same ward. We never spoke, but we knew of each other. Five years later, after we had both served missions, we finally became acquainted and began dating. And thirty-seven years after that, it is sweet to have another date here on this campus.

We recognize that college life is fun, but not always. A few weeks ago, our three-year-old granddaughter was moaning, whimpering, and even crying.

Jennifer bent down and said, “Katherine, what’s happening? Whyever are you crying?”

Little Katherine, with her big brown eyes, looked up and, in a quivering voice, said, “Oh, Grandma, I don’t want to go away to college.”

There are some of you who might feel that way now. Just know that there is a little three-year-old girl out there who feels your pain.

My prayer today is that the Spirit, who has guided and attended my preparations, might now magnify this important message in your hearts.

The Doctrine of Christ

Near the end of his ministry, Nephi declared, with some urgency, “I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ.”¹ He then spoke or wrote of faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end—principles and ordinances he identified as the doctrine of Christ. As I have thought about and prayed for you in preparation for this assignment, I have been filled with a similar sense of urgency. Today, I feel that I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ. In doing so, however, I speak of a doctrine even more foundational than the principles and ordinances identified by Nephi as the doctrine of Christ. I speak of the core belief and simple doctrine that there must needs be a

Kyle S. McKay, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on March 23, 2021.

Christ. That is what I mean today when I use the phrase “doctrine of Christ.” Naturally, if there must needs be a Christ, then His identity is just as important as His existence.

In the scriptures, we read how this doctrine of Christ has been disputed, debated, and defended throughout the ages.² I find it interesting that the people among whom Jesus came during His mortal ministry did not reject the doctrine of Christ. They believed in a Messiah and Deliverer. They were not anti-Christ; they were anti-Jesus.

By contrast, the antagonists in this land during Book of Mormon times were not necessarily against the person of Jesus. They seldom got to His identity. Instead, they rejected the very idea of a Christ. They did not recognize the need for a Messiah or Redeemer. They were anti-Christ. The sophisticated secularists of our day seem to resemble more closely those found in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, the Book of Mormon is both testament and type.

As you know, many nations of the earth have begun to identify themselves as “post-Christian.” In this country, it seems that those who make such a claim or push such a movement are also the ones asserting that this country was not established on Christian or Judeo-Christian values. These *anti-Christian* crusaders are not looking beyond the mark, as did biblical Jews; rather, they are seeking to erase the mark altogether—blotting it out through rules and revisions, “seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God,”³ just as the Nephites did on the eve of their destruction. You may have observed, as I have, the difficulty of simultaneously arguing that this nation was not founded on Christian values *and* that, after 250 years, this nation is now “post-Christian.” Arguments against the doctrine of Christ often lack logic,⁴ but they are almost always flattering and enticing.

In December 2017, Elder D. Todd Christofferson delivered a Christmas message on this campus. I commend it to you, particularly those portions that were reprinted in the December 2020 issue of the *Ensign* under the title “Why We Need Jesus Christ.”⁵ To Elder Christofferson’s message I add my own witness and observations as I seek to explore and answer what Amulek called “the

great question which is . . . whether there shall be [a] Christ.”⁶

“If There Be No Christ”

In Frank Capra’s 1946 Christmas classic, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey was shown what the world would have been like without him. For George, this exercise was moving and convincing, albeit a bit frightening. For a few moments, it may be helpful for you and me to consider the frightening hypothetical, What if there be no Christ?⁷

I appreciate Elder Christofferson’s understated response to that question. He said, “Well, to start with, . . . there is this small matter of death.”⁸ Indeed, if there be no Christ, then there is no Resurrection. And if there is no Resurrection, death is the end. Or, in other words, death *has* no end. Those who reject the doctrine of Christ embrace the idea of extinction, the doom of never-ending death.

Anyone who has taken a marketing class on this campus can confirm that everlasting death is not a particularly strong selling point for any product. So the secularist, anti-Christ pitch necessarily focuses on the immediate and is almost always some variation of “‘eat, drink, and be merry,’ because this is it.”⁹

The good news of the gospel is that our potential is higher, deeper, and fuller than simply living the life of a beer commercial. Our life is forever, and the Resurrection is real because there is a Christ.

If there be no Christ, then there is no healing from our sorrows, no relief from our pain, no hope for deliverance. You may reflexively be inclined to say what has been said by so many for so many years: “Time heals all wounds.” No, it doesn’t! Time doesn’t heal anything. Jesus, with time and over time, heals all wounds. He graciously grants interim and ultimate victories over suffering and death, even to those who do not believe in a Resurrection or who fail to acknowledge His hand in their healing. Isaiah likened such people unto a staff that purports to “lift up itself, as if it were no wood.”¹⁰

Remember this grand key: faith in Jesus Christ accelerates and magnifies all healing. He took upon Himself *all* our infirmities¹¹ so that He can come to us “with healing in his wings.”¹² If there

be no Christ, there is no healing, no deliverance from suffering, no matter how much time may pass.

If there be no Christ, there can be no change; there can be no choice. Think about that. The revelations teach us that Lucifer sought—and still seeks—“to destroy the agency of man.”¹³ It is tremendous irony that Lucifer and those who sided with him got what they fought for. They lost their agency. They are eternally unable to choose happiness, liberty, and eternal life. Instead, they are forever miserable, forever captive, forever dead as to things pertaining to righteousness. If there be no Christ, that is our fate as well. Jacob taught, “Our spirits must [have] become *subject to* [the devil and] . . . *like unto* him,”¹⁴ forever unable to choose, forever unable to change. What a relief it is to know that there is a Christ and that through His Atonement our agency has been preserved, including our ability to choose to repent—to change permanently for the better in Him.

In a related matter, if there be no Christ, no wrong could ever be undone. The wrongs we have committed and the effects thereof would remain forever. The wrongs committed against us and the effects thereof would remain forever. The unfairness and injustice of this life would perpetuate forever unchecked, never undone.

Who among you has figured out how to unsay the unkind words you have spoken? You can apologize for saying them, but you cannot undo the fact that they were said. You can return a stolen item, but you can't undo the fact that it had been stolen. Some have unintentionally caused injury to or the death of another, perhaps even a child. Has anyone figured out how to undo that?

We have all been injured or wronged by someone else. We didn't deserve it. Some of us have lost a loved one prematurely through the negligence or recklessness of another. That is so unfair and cannot be undone by monetizing our pain in a court of law. Moreover, in the simple process of living life, we are likely to experience crippling pains and injuries, debilitating conditions, and undeserved infirmities of mind and body. All these persist forever if there be no Christ.

Elder John A. Widtsoe taught, “The ‘fall of Adam’ had made possible the earth experience,

but another act was necessary. . . . Someone must cancel out the effect of the fall.”¹⁵ Only a Christ—a Messiah and Deliverer—could undo the effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Only a Christ can undo the effects of the fall of you and me.

We are taught that for those who do not repent, it is as though no redemption had been made.¹⁶ Consider the converse. For those who do repent—truly repent—it is as though no sin had been committed. “I, the Lord, remember them no more,”¹⁷ not because He has some godly power to forget but because there is simply nothing to remember. In His world, the eternal world, it is gone, its effects are canceled, it is undone. President Boyd K. Packer taught: “The Atonement [of Jesus Christ] leaves no tracks, no traces. What it fixes is fixed . . . , and what it heals stays healed.”¹⁸

Through the tenderness of His mercy, we are delivered from the just consequences we would otherwise deserve because of our sins. But what about the wrongs and injustices foisted upon us that we *don't* deserve? What about those? In this, His justice is as tender as His mercy, and it joins in perfect union and cooperation with mercy for our good and gladness. With the prophet Jacob, I invite you to “prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous.”¹⁹ In that day, every wrong shall be righted, every unfairness shall be undone—perhaps as though it had never happened.

But remember, if there be no Christ, there is no tender mercy, no tender justice—only cold, calculated, inflexible justice for our sins and the cold, random *injustice* of a fallen world. *If there be no Christ.*

There Must Needs Be a Christ

You may want to consider, on your own, other things or conditions that would or would not be if there be no Christ—think, creation of the world,²⁰ for example. But for now, let us move beyond this hypothetical and return to the joyous reality that there is and must needs be a Christ, and Jesus is that Christ.

To shore up your belief that there must needs be a Christ and to bind your souls to Jesus, who is the Christ, I invite you to read again King Benjamin's final address and the surrounding

events, as recorded in Mosiah 1–6. Observe how King Benjamin taught the doctrine of Christ by establishing with brutal candor the people’s desperate need to be saved. This need arose because of their condition (they were unprofitable, less than the dust of the earth, and natural enemies to God) and their conduct (they had sins, including improper thoughts, words, and deeds).²¹ Having thus established that there must needs be a Christ, King Benjamin introduced them to Jesus, who is the Christ:

And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death. . . .

And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God. . . .

*And lo, he cometh . . . that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name.*²²

Read those chapters. They are a dissertation on the doctrine of Christ. As you read them with an open mind and a soft heart, the Spirit will help you remember that our potential is beyond our present capacity. We cannot attain it in our current condition and we cannot attain it on our own. We need help. We need a helper. We need Jesus, who is our Helper.²³ This need for help, and especially the *acknowledgment* of a need for help, is the beginning of an understanding of the doctrine of Christ and the beginning of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If faith is the first principle of the gospel, then humility may be the chief attribute of the faithful. Only the humble recognize their frail and fallen state—their need for help, their need for a Savior. Humility is a forerunner and a magnifier of faith. I encourage you to live continually humble.

As you seek to increase your understanding of the doctrine of Christ and your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I remind you of two things Alma taught about this process. First, recall that he compared the *word* to a seed and invited us to “give place, that [this] seed may be planted in your heart.”²⁴ Faith is not the seed. The word is the seed. Faith is what nourishes the word, or the seed. So what is the word we are invited to plant in our hearts? It is the doctrine of Christ.

Alma explained:

If ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly? . . .

. . . Then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection. . . .

*And now, my brethren [and sisters], I desire that ye shall plant **this** word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith.*²⁵

The second thing we need to remember is something Alma said as he established the parameters of this experiment upon the word. He invited us to “exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe.”²⁶ The way this is written, and especially the way it is often read, it can seem as though a desire to believe is not the preferred starting point but some sort of fallback position: “If that’s the best you can do, well, then start there, I guess.”

Please hear and understand. A desire to believe is absolutely critical. Ultimately, it marks the difference between those who come to “know . . . the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [He] hath sent”²⁷ and those who ignore the evidence, spin the facts, reject the truth, and “trample under their feet” the Holy One of Israel because they “hearken not to the voice of his counsels,”²⁸ whether it be His own voice or the voice of His servants.²⁹ You will never believe what you do not want to believe. Please, protect and guard your precious, sometimes fragile, desire to believe.

Jesus Is the Christ

A few years ago, my friend’s two-year-old daughter climbed unnoticed into their small wading pool, lost her balance, and silently drowned. I do not need to tell you—I cannot tell you, it is impossible for me to tell you—the grief and shock and anguish that family experienced at the passing of their little girl. If there be no Christ, they never recover from it. Their little girl stays dead. There is no Resurrection, no hope for a reunion.

But there is a Christ, there is a Resurrection, and there will be a sweet reunion. That little girl lives on. She continues to be an influence on her family, and not merely through memories. If you were to see that family today, you would marvel at how “the sting of death is swallowed up in [Jesus] Christ.”³⁰

Not long ago, I sat in the Draper Temple, observing the sealing of a beautiful young couple. I marveled because I had some knowledge of the groom’s dark past. I did not know everything he had been involved in; I just knew that he had been involved in, well, pretty much everything. He had fallen deep and far. If there be no Christ, that young man does not change; that young man *cannot* change. Yet there he was in the sealing room, changed. I searched his face, trying to detect some residue from his dark past, but there was none. Instead, his countenance shone with light and love and hope and joy. Why? Because there is a Christ, and His Atonement leaves no tracks, no traces.

No matter how far or how deep you may have fallen, Jesus has descended farther and deeper. During His descent, He became acquainted with your grief, and He was bruised by your iniquities.³¹ He voluntarily did this so that He could bring you back home where you belong. Nor is it His aim to simply save you by the skin of your teeth. No, His promise is sure: “I am able to make you holy”³²—without spot.

In a stirring exchange recorded in the book of Matthew, Peter had the opportunity to bear his testimony of Jesus *to* Jesus—an opportunity each of us will likely have one day. In response to Jesus’s inquiry, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter testified, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”³³

Jesus responded, saying, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”³⁴

Let’s pause and consider that. Think of all the things Peter saw or experienced with Jesus in the flesh. He saw the sick healed and the lepers cleansed. In the flesh, Peter saw the lame walk, the dumb talk, the deaf hear, the blind see, and the dead brought back to life. He helped Jesus feed multitudes. And he walked on water with Jesus.

All of these and so much more Peter saw or experienced *in the flesh*.

But Jesus said to him, in essence, “*Peter, that’s not why you know; that’s not how you know I am the Christ. You know I am the Christ because of the spirit of revelation—the Holy Ghost confirming to your mind and to your heart that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”³⁵

By the same power and by the same process, I bear the same witness as that chief apostle in the primitive Church. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Over a lifetime I have come to view and understand my own pitiful, fallen state. I have experienced sin and sorrow, suffering, and infirmities of mind and body. I have experienced unfairness and injustice at the hands of others and through the harshness of life. All of these and so much more have given me a sure knowledge that there must needs be a Christ.

I have also searched the scriptures, pondered and prayed, wrestled in the spirit, and basked in the Spirit. I have earnestly, sometimes desperately, sought for relief, forgiveness, solace, and testimony. And in Jesus I have found them. All of these and so much more have led me to a sure knowledge that Jesus is the Christ.

With all my heart, I invite you to “seek this Jesus.”³⁶ He is so accessible. I bear witness that He is alive right now. Jesus is saving and helping and healing and forgiving right now. He is quick to forgive and slow to anger. He is mighty to save, and, to that end, He is mighty to change you and me. I testify that the answer to “the great question” is this: There must needs be a Christ, and Jesus is the Christ. Let us come unto Him in humility and faith so that we will be prepared when He comes unto us in power and great glory. This is my invitation and my prayer, in the name of Jesus the Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 31:2.

2. Sherem used “flattering” words “to declare . . . that there should be no Christ. . . . And this he did that he might overthrow *the doctrine of Christ*” (Jacob 7:2; emphasis added). Similarly, the Zoramite prayer included a statement “that there

shall be no Christ. . . . [And] the foolish traditions of our brethren . . . doth bind them down to a belief of Christ” (Alma 31:16–17). Korihor “preach[ed] unto the people that there should be no Christ” (Alma 30:12). In the face of miracles and wonders immediately before Jesus’s birth, many “began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying: That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come” (Helaman 16:17–18). These anti-Christes did not focus on faith, repentance, baptism, etc.; rather, they attacked the core belief and doctrine that there must needs be a Christ. In like manner, Nehor and those after his order believed and taught that there was no need for repentance, no need for a Christ, because “in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4; see also Alma 15:15; 18:5; 21:4, 6). These philosophies were and continue to be popular because, among other things, they invite virtually every type of conduct without any kind of consequence, “suppos[ing] that whatsoever [a person does is] right” (Alma 18:5), or, in other words, “whatsoever a [person does is] no crime” or sin (Alma 30:17). Modern-day Nehors include those who believe that God’s love will save all, period. For them, God so loved the world that He *didn’t need* to send His Only Begotten Son (see John 3:16). There seems no greater paradox than the God-fearing anti-Christ.

3. Moroni 8:28.

4. See, e.g., Jacob 7:7, 9. Sherem claimed no man can tell of things to come, then confidently predicted the future, saying, “There is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be” (verse 9).

5. See D. Todd Christofferson, “A Message at Christmas,” BYU devotional address, 12 December 2017; excerpted in Christofferson, “Why We Need Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, December 2020.

6. Alma 34:5. If “the great question” of the Book of Mormon is whether there shall be a Christ, then the great question of the Bible is “Who is Jesus?” That question dominates the New Testament and is restated in several ways on several occasions: “What manner of man is this?” (Matthew 8:27); “Art thou the Christ?” (Mark 14:61); “Art thou he that should come?” (Matthew 11:3); “Art thou a king?” (John 18:37);

“Art thou the King of the Jews?” (Matthew 27:11); “Who art thou?” (John 8:25); “What shall I do . . . with Jesus which is called Christ?” (Matthew 27:22); “Whom do men say that I am?” (Mark 8:27); “Whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Then and now, people are free to give weight to the evidence and, depending on the witnesses they most believe, reach any number of conclusions. For example, during the Savior’s time, many of the religious rulers considered Him to be a blasphemer, a devil worthy of death (see Mark 3:22; 14:64). Pilate is representative of those who found no fault in Him but recognized no divinity either (see Luke 23:4, 14). Others who saw Jesus’s works and heard His words were curious, even “amazed,” but remained unengaged (Luke 4:36; see also Mark 7:37; Luke 4:32). Still others, then and now, consider Him to be a great teacher, even “a prophet” (Mark 6:15; see also Mark 6:14–16; Luke 7:16). And then there are those who stand with Peter and declare that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

7. See 2 Nephi 11:7.

8. Christofferson, “A Message at Christmas”; also in Christofferson, “Why We Need Jesus Christ.”

9. 2 Nephi 28:7.

10. Isaiah 10:15.

11. See Alma 7:11–13.

12. 2 Nephi 25:13; 3 Nephi 25:2.

13. Moses 4:3.

14. 2 Nephi 9:8–9; emphasis added.

15. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 74.

16. See Mosiah 16:5; Alma 11:41; 12:18; 34:16.

17. D&C 58:42.

18. Boyd K. Packer, general conference training meeting, 7 April 2015; quoted in Allen D. Haynie, “Remembering in Whom We Have Trusted,” *Ensign*, November 2015.

19. 2 Nephi 9:46.

20. See D&C 76:24. Nephi taught, “If there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation” (2 Nephi 11:7; see also 2 Nephi 2:13).

21. See Mosiah 2:21; 4:2; 3:19; 4:30.

22. Mosiah 3:7–9.
23. See Hebrews 13:6.
24. Alma 32:28; emphasis added.
25. Alma 33:21–23; emphasis added.
26. Alma 32:27.
27. John 17:3.
28. 1 Nephi 19:7.
29. See D&C 1:38.
30. Mosiah 16:8; see also Alma 22:14; Mormon 7:5.
31. See Isaiah 53:3, 5.
32. D&C 60:7.
33. Matthew 16:15–16.
34. Matthew 16:17.

35. President Joseph F. Smith confirmed that we come to know the Father and the Son by no other way:

*How then can we know “the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent?”—for to obtain this knowledge would be to obtain the secret or key to eternal life. **It must be through the Holy Ghost, whose office is to reveal the things of the Father to man, and to bear witness in our hearts of Christ. . . . There is no other way or means of attaining to this knowledge.*** [GD, 59; emphasis added; see John 17:3]

36. Ether 12:41.