

## Come Follow Me Class Insights – 45 – Doctrine and Covenants 125-128

I'm Taylor, and I'm Tyler. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 125 through 128.

So to orient ourselves with these particular sections, there is a lot happening in this time period that's being covered, so just to put us on the same page, you have March of 1841, that's where we get section 125 and section 125 is not a faith-doctrinal section or a grand theophany – theophany, it's an administrative revelation - it's an administrative revelation setting up a new city across the river, across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo in the Iowa territory called – and the Lord wants them to call it Zarahemla. They're going to establish other – other towns and cities over there on the Iowa side of the Mississippi River in – in subsequent months and in the coming years.

Then you get to July of that year, 1841, and you get section 126. So this one we're going to talk about is for Brigham Young. Then, watch what happens. I'm going to leave a gap here because we get over to September of 1842, this is September 1<sup>st</sup> when you get the first of the two letters which are section 127 and then you'll get to section 128 next which comes a week later in September of – of 1842, September 6<sup>th</sup>, you get 128. Now, why the gap? Because there's a lot that's going to happen in Nauvoo right there between July of 1841 and September of 1842. You'll notice we're skipping a year and two months and – and, by the way, we're now less than two years away from the martyrdom and we're getting really close to the winding up scenes and it's here where Joseph is in hiding and he's on the run from – from warrants for his arrest from Missouri – from the Missouri group because there's an attempt on Governor Lilburn Boggs' life and we'll talk about that in its context.

Right here, the significant elements that we want to include are the beginning of the Relief Society and Joseph beginning to now prepare and – and give his first endowment ceremony to some people in Nauvoo and then slowly growing that and we'll talk about that and some of the beginnings of that. So this is kind of the – the bird's eye view of where we are today.

What's important here is that sometimes we might be convinced, because there's these canonized revelations, and a gap, that somehow revelation must have ceased. And really, revelation is ongoing but some of it just doesn't get canonized in our scripture, so you might even consider today, there is ongoing revelation and inspiration to guide the Lord's church but it's not showing up in the Doctrine and Covenants, and so that's why we often hear how important it is to read the General Conference talks on a regular basis because it is the modern-day scripture for us, and these things were significant revelations, very important, and that would have been great if they'd been put into the canon – they're not but they're still deeply important for the governance of the Church as well as the truth for how the restoration is to roll forth.

Absolutely. So let's dive in to section 125. This – again, this section is more administrative. It tells them in verse 1 that it's the will of the Lord in the Territory of Iowa that they gather themselves together unto the places which I shall appoint unto them by my servant Joseph and build up cities unto my name, that they may be prepared for that which is in store for a time to come. So it's a simple thing to gather my people over here in the Territory of Iowa and build up the city specifically, he lists in verse 3, a city opposite the city of Nauvoo and let the name of Zarahemla be placed upon it, and he tells people to come in from the different parts around east, west, north, south, come in and take their inheritance as well as in the city of Nashville, not Nashville, Tennessee, Nashville Iowa over there on the – in the Iowa Territory as well, and in all the stakes which I have appointed, saith the Lord. He's establishing once again these - these stakes of Zion, these gathering points for saints to come to, to strengthen one another because there's just power in coming together.

And the naming of cities is interesting here because it follows some conventions we see throughout the Americas, we have a lot of cities that are named after cities from the past or from the old world, like today you can find cities named Paris throughout the United States or Moscow. Consider the fact that we have a place called New York – it's not York, it's the new York or new England or it used to be called New Amsterdam – New York. So we have Orleans, New Orleans on and on, yeah, so calling this place Zarahemla is kind of following this pattern of let's name places based on important locations.

Section 126 is interesting because it's directed specifically to Brigham Young and as we know, Brigham Young is this crucial force in the Church. He becomes the second president, second prophet after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and many of us think of Brigham as this great, American Moses who like Moses at the time of the Children of Israel, leading them through the desert to the Promised Land, you have this American Moses, Brigham Young, who leads the saints through the desert to the Promised Land and we see him as a city builder, a pioneer, the Lion of the Lord. All those things are true, what we may miss is that after he was baptized in April of 1832, the first nine years of his time in the Church was primarily focused on serving missions. We may often miss that Brigham Young was a great missionary. In fact, his original identity as a member of the Church was as a missionary.

So let me just share with you the number of missions that he served before this revelation was received and you'll start to see why this revelation is so significant for Brigham, and I just find it a very tender revelation for how God knows his servants individually and their needs. So here are some of the missions that Brigham young served: he's baptized April, 1832, according to records he's off serving a mission that summer preaching to others what he's learned. Late in December of 1832 he goes to Canada, he does a mission in 1833 to New York, another mission to New York and New England in 1835, another mission in 1836 to New York and New England. Obviously those people needed a lot of help from Brigham Young. In 1840 we know that he is one of the key leaders on a mission to Britain that does so much good - that does so much good to bring six to eight thousand converts into the Church and to strengthen the Church after the difficulties that we've been seeing in Kirtland and Missouri, and he's gone for a year.

He gets back and he's been away from his family for quite some time and we get this beautiful revelation and I just love how it begins. This first sounds like the words of Joseph Smith. It says, "Dear and well-beloved brother, Brigham Young, verily thus saith the Lord unto you." Now here's what the Lord says directly to Brigham Young: "My servant Brigham, it is no more required at your hand to leave your family as in times past, for your offering is acceptable to me. I have seen your labor and toil in journeyings for my name. I therefore command you to send my word abroad," don't send your body abroad – you've

done that a lot – now it's time just to, "send my word and take especial care of your family from this time, henceforth and forever. Amen."

Now I haven't done the research on this, but I wonder, it's my sense that Brigham Young never served another mission after that in the typical sense of serving a mission. Definitely, he served in many, many ways, but it would be interesting to look up that – look that up further if he served any missions after this point or if he actually fulfilled the command from God to make sure he was there for his family after he had served so many missions. There were from six to nine missions before this revelation's received.

Let me share a few words from Brigham himself about the experience of heading off on a mission to Britain under very difficult circumstances. Here's what he said. You might recall that many of the Twelve went and they were under health problems financial straits, and he said, "We started from home without purse or scrip." Basically, they didn't have a wallet, they had no money, and most of the Twelve were sick and those who were not sick when they started were sick on the way to Ohio. "Brother Taylor," that's Brother John Taylor, "was left to die by the roadside. But old Father Coltrin, though he did not die, I was not able to walk to the river, not so far as across this block, no not more than half as far, I had to be helped to the river in order to get into a boat to cross it. That was about our situation, I had not even an overcoat. I took a small quilt from the trundle bed and that served as my overcoat. While I was traveling to the State of New York, when I had a coarse (satinette?) overcoat given to me. Thus we went to England to a strange land to sojourn among strangers." So I just love the tenderness from the Lord that he - he knows Brigham Young and he knows all the toil, the labor, the sacrifice that Brigham has done on behalf of the Lord and on behalf of the Lord's children. God knows you. He knows of your toils, your labors and if you listen to his voice, you will also hear him telling you things that will uplift your soul and give you peace in times of trouble.

It's beautiful, and many of you will remember seeing – seeing the Church-produced videos of Brigham Young embarking on that mission when he leaves his family and the grand shout, "Hurrah for Israel" as they – as they leave under those difficult circumstances.

Now, let's get into 1842 into this time period that isn't in our Doctrine and Covenants but wow, the things that happened here affect the Church today and back then as much as almost anything that we've read thus far this year. Here's the fascinating thing. The Relief Society is - is started. It's begun because of some righteous desires of some women who come up with an idea, so initially, it's in the spring of 1842 when Sarah Granger Kimball and her seamstress Margaret Cook, they – they got talking about their idea of sewing clothing for workers constructing the temple there in Nauvoo and Sarah Granger Kimball was fairly well-off, she's fairly wealthy in comparison to other – other people in Nauvoo. Her husband is not a member of the Church but is sympathetic to her living her religion and she wants to do something grand and she wants to contribute so she talks to her seamstress Margaret Cook, and they come up with this idea and then they say, well wait, we've got all these other ladies in Nauvoo who could help us with this effort.

I love the fact that they then go and petition these other women to join them in this effort and they ended up writing a constitution and by-laws for their organization and they submit it – they submit their constitution, their written bylaws done just by these women in Nauvoo. They give it to Joseph Smith to review it. So Joseph looks at their documents and he says, quote, "They are the best he had ever seen, but he said, this is not what you want. Tell the sisters their offering is accepted of the Lord and he has something better for them than a written constitution. I will organize the women after a pattern of the priesthood. That's interesting, he says you've done a really, really wonderful thing here, but I'm going to organize you in a – in a beautiful pattern. So it's now March 17<sup>th</sup> 1842 when they gather in an upper room of Joseph Smith's red brick store there in Nauvoo, and there are twenty women that are present as well as some men and the – the Relief Society is born that day, March 17, 1842 with Emma Smith put in as the first President of the Relief Society. She presides in that organization and there's great power there and there was, in that first set of interactions, there's a great debate among the women about what they should be called and most of them wanted a certain name but it was Emma who said she loved the word relief and what it – what it entailed and what it embodied and what she wanted the Spirit to be able to do – to bring relief to those who were struggling and so she prevailed

with the group and they voted and – and decided they would call it the Relief Society.

Now that – that organization was disbanded a short time after the death of Joseph Smith in 1844 and then it was reorganized in 1867 so there's – there's – there are a couple of decades there where the Relief Society isn't functioning but then it restarts in Utah and today is, I believe, considered to be the longest running and largest women's organization in the world and the errand of angels is given to the Relief Society and it is incalculable the amount of good that is done in helping bring relief to the sick, the afflicted, the downtrodden, the homeless, the fatherless, the - those in prison, everything. This is – this was one of the most amazing revelations that we get in the dispensation of the fullness of times and yet, nothing's canonized, so just because it's not in the Doctrine and Covenants; don't skip over it. This is a significant revelation and a significant event.

Let me write down some words that relate to the word relief and you'll just see the beautiful connections there are with this powerful word. So if you look at the etymology of the word relief, these are some of the words that's connected to (unclear) when I read them out, I want you to think again about what the Relief Society commenced for. In this word alleviate, elevate, elevation, elevator, leaven like we get in the parables of the unleavened bread or the what we find in the Old Testament as leaven and unleavened bread, a lung crucial for breathing in and out so that you can have life, an interesting connection, and even relevance. So these are just interesting connections we have with the word relief and, of course, this is not containing all that relief means in terms of the actions and service and love that is spread throughout the world by God's daughters who choose and purposely live according to his commands.

Okay now let's go with the second major event that's happening in this year period where we're not getting any sections recorded in our canonized Doctrine and Covenants. So on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1842 in the upstairs room of the red brick store, Joseph has brought in some plants and some foliage and he's done the best he can to – to create an interior feeling necessary to teach some pretty important principles that he's going to call the endowment, so he

has there Brigham Young is included in the group, Hyrum Smith, William Law, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, William Marks, Newel K. Whitney and George North – two bishops – and then a close friend, Judge James Adams from Springfield, Illinois. Those nine men are brought in and Joseph is excited to share with them some – some things and we get our first presentation of the endowment.

Now, throughout the rest of 1842, 1843 and up to his death in 1844, Joseph is going to continue to initiate other men as well as some women. Emma is going to have an integral part in presenting this – this endowment ceremony in the Nauvoo – in that early Nauvoo period and so you have this group of about fifty men and women that called themselves the anointed quorum, or the quorum of the anointed. That's – that's how they referred to themselves. Anybody who had – who had gone through this experience with Joseph had now entered and joined this quorum of the anointed. From their view that's how they – they referred to it.

Now, it's important to recognize that right before this, Joseph has become interested in, very shortly before this, he becomes interested in masonry there in Nauvoo. Keep in mind, Joseph, Sen. was involved in masonry, Hyrum Smith, his brother, was a master mason and now in Nauvoo Joseph quickly works his way through the ranks of the Masonic lodge there and becomes a master mason and then shortly thereafter introduces this endowment. This has caused a lot of people to scratch their head and ask a lot of questions, and they're valid questions regarding the crossover between the Masonic rituals and what happens in the temple endowment.

The Church has prepared a wonderful video in their Now you Know series, if you look up on the internet and it will provide a link for this particular one, where they talk very clearly and very openly about masonry and the temple and the fact is, if you look closely at the Masonic ritual, there is crossover in some of the clothing, in some of the – the procedures and in some of the wording at certain points during the endowment ceremony, and this is – this is disconcerting to some people. They want – they want the endowment to be this brand new, revelatory thing that's a stand alone in isolation of everything

else in the world, as if it's not connected to anything, as if God does anything in a vacuum.

Let's actually play upon this or actually build upon it, we're going to be talking about section 128, 129, and it's Joseph Smith needing additional revelation based on insights in scripture. And I don't ever hear anybody complaining so here in D. & C. 128 verse 16 he reads 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:29 about baptism for the dead and Joseph Smith, through inspiration and revelation, is inspired by reading past scripture to bring forth new knowledge. And we all understand that, we look at James 1:5, Joseph Smith was inspired to go pray to learn, and so it turns out that Joseph Smith is learning from this experience in ways that helps educate people and teach them how to be more like God. We might ask all of ourselves, have you ever been in a moment where you read a book or see a newspaper clipping or have a conversation and it prompts inspiration or understanding that gets you closer to understanding God's work or gives you some form of revelation? And I find it beautiful that God uses potentially everything in the world to encourage us to be uplifted and drawn closer to him and the endowment literally means the process of being clothed in knowledge and glory and goodness and that's what God wants. And you'll note that over time, the process of the endowment has been updated from time to time. God's okay with that just like he updates scriptures, he provides new revelation for new context and new understanding. So we can just feel deep appreciation that the circumstances were such that Joseph Smith was exposed to masonry which has this beautiful story-telling techniques that teach people about God's love and that inspired Joseph Smith to reveal something that's so important for us today.

And let's just talk briefly about the endowment. If you think about the scriptures, it's God's revealed word and sometimes it's revealed through a narrative format and it turns out one of the most powerful ways for humans to learn is through stories and narratives and we look at the Bible, for example. We have these stories of Adam and Eve, the story of Abraham receiving covenants and promises from God and what the endowment invites us to do is to actually participate in living scripture and the endowment experience is we welcome you, God welcomes you into the story of salvation and he allows you to interactively act out the plan of salvation. He explains to you creation.

He explains to you the fall of Adam and Eve and each of us participate as if we were Adam or Eve falling out of the presence of God and then having to be redeemed by Jesus Christ to be brought back into his presence. It's a very powerful way to immerse people in the story and in the plan of salvation. Sure, we could read about it, we could document it with bullet points, but from an educational and a learning standpoint, one of the most powerful ways to get people to learn in a long-standing fashion is to immerse them in the story itself and that is what the endowment invites us to do.

Now before we move on to section 127 let's make something else very clear here. The endowment is – steeped in symbolism, kind of like the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, it shares its message often through symbolic allegory. They're trying to paint a picture for you through symbols. Now we've used the example before in a previous episode last year where we talked about – let me repeat it using a different word here. If you look at this in your own thoughts, just quickly describe that. Now chances are that 99+ percent of you instantly started thinking the first image that came to your own mind is your own car if you have one or you pictured four wheels and a hood and a windshield and windshield wipers and an engine and gas and an exhaust system and a steering wheel and that's really quite silly because what did I ask? I said think about that. What is that? Well, let's be technical here for a minute. That is a black C and an A and an R and they all happen to be capital letters on a white board. That's it; that's all that is. These are symbols. They're place holders for the real thing but your brain instantaneously jumped from the symbol and didn't get stuck on the symbol. You looked beyond the symbol to this rich body of experiences that you've had that represent – that are represented by this really simple English word that we have all agreed is pronounced CAR, that's it.

Now when we go to the temple, our invitation is don't have your focus be on the symbols or exactly what is said, what we wear or the different ritualistic procedures, but constantly be looking at the layer upon layer upon layer upon layer of potential representation of those symbols, what they – what they're supposed to allow us to learn at varying degrees or varying levels as we continue to go back again and again and again, we're learning a foreign language. We're learning symbols that are teaching us things that we didn't

know before, but there's a beauty and a depth and a purpose there that's encapsulated behind all of those front-facing symbols, but if we'll pay the price and if we'll go to God and ask him, he'll help us unlock that meaning at different levels for different purposes in your life when you need them most; it will be instructive.

Now, let's get into section 127 – 128. Notice we're – we're in September of 1842. Now some interesting things have happened shortly before this that have caused 127 and 128 to become letters to the saints rather than speeches to the saints because Joseph's in hiding. Why? Because there was an assassination attempt on Governor Lilburn Boggs in Missouri and there were many people who speculated, huh, who would want him dead? Well clearly, Joseph Smith would want him dead and Orin Porter Rockwell, Joseph's personal bodyguard is kind of a colorful character in Church history and so this rumor and this potentiality gets started even though Joseph hasn't left the State of Illinois and there are hundreds and thou – even thousands of witnesses that he's there on the week of and the day of and the night of this assassination attempt and he – he says I had nothing to do with it. And, by the way, Orin Porter Rockwell said later on, I love this, he said it wasn't me, because if it had been me, I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have injured him. I would have killed him. It's just kind of a – a funny part of that story. That does make me laugh and we don't mean to be flippant that somebody's life was under threat, even somebody like Governor Boggs who was still a child of God, but it puts Joseph in peril yet again and there are people who are seeking to extradite him to Missouri where he's already been in prison for months, it's not going to go well if he gets put in Missouri so for the safety of his own life and for the progress of the Church, he goes into hiding.

Yeah. So Andy Hedges wrote a great article on this whole series of events because there's a lot going on with the legal issues between the two states, Missouri and Illinois. And for five months basically, Joseph is going to be in hiding and on the run to varying degrees, all over an illegal claim because under the law, under the U. S. Constitution for one state to turn over one of its residents to a different state it means that that resident has to have been in the state and committed the crime and then fled to another state in order for the extradition to be legal and Joseph was not in Missouri when this

happened and they – he's willing to show all the evidence and Missouri doesn't have any proof that he caused this – this attempt on Governor Boggs' life and so they – the whole foundation of the claim is on very, very false premises and it takes about five months and a new governor to be put in, in Illinois, and the District Attorney to get involved to cut through all of the bias and all of the attempts to just get their hands on Joseph and bring him to Jackson County, Missouri where they can – where they can kill him, basically. And so because of that, Joseph finds himself on the run and going in hiding and Emma and some of the faithful leaders of the Church around him are doing what they can to keep him safe in different places and they'll do a variety of things like one of his friends will take his horse and with no rider on it go walking across the Mississippi River to the other side in plain view of the people looking for Joseph thinking, oh, he must be over there, and so they'll go over there and all along, he's been in Nauvoo in a house and they'll – they'll move him around and they're doing some things to keep these constables off of his track but it's kind of sad that Joseph wants to be out with the people, he wants to be building the kingdom, but he has to end up in hiding.

There's a lesson here. It's very easy to lie. It takes enormous effort to show evidence. It takes a lot of effort, it takes humility. It takes clear-eyed thinking and I find it really sad that people were more willing to lie and falsify than actually get to the truth and the evidence, and unfortunately, humans are still fallen today and we still see this today that people for their own nefarious purposes to seek after power and pride, will lie and convince other people to believe lies for their own benefit, for their own empowerment, but not for the good of the people and instead of slowing down and saying what's the evidence here for the claim? And it's interesting that God always wants us to be truth seekers. One of the Ten Commandments is thou shalt not lie. And these people in Missouri who probably claimed to be Christians, were breaking one of the cardinal Ten Commandments and showing disloyalty to God's covenant and I think all of us can ask ourselves, Lord, is it I? Lord, am I making sure that when I make claims about anything in the world, I'm doing so with good evidence and good faith instead of simply making claims that make me feel better or ideologically support an opinion I have, but end up actually detrimentally impacting those around me and perhaps even my society.

Yeah, one of the problems here is that John C. Bennett we talked about last time, he has recently been excommunicated and part of his effort to try to overthrow the Church and to attack Joseph is to sign multiple affidavits and send them to Governor Boggs and the leaders in Missouri saying it's Joseph, it's Joseph, so this idea coming from an insider who used to be right there with Joseph, it makes it far easier for them to believe this narrative that oh, yep, it must be Joseph. Let's get him so we can get our revenge now.

Now, here he is in hiding, his first letter comes out. Look at verse 1, and I hope you can sense a different tone than perhaps if you're reading a section 84 or section 88 or section 93, for instance, of the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord is speaking through Joseph in these high, lofty revelations. This is Joseph in this situation. Look at his words. By the way, verse 1, look at its length. This is – this is three sentences is all, this huge verse 1. Listen to the tone. "Forasmuch as the Lord has revealed unto me that my enemies, both in Missouri and this State, were again in the pursuit of me; and inasmuch as they pursue me without a cause, and have not the least shadow or coloring of justice or right on their side in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest dye, I have thought it expedient and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season, for my own safety and the safety of this people." That's one sentence. He's – it's like he's venting here in this letter but watch what happens now when you shift over to verse 2. "As for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world for some good end, or bad, as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves. God knoweth all these things, whether it be good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me; and I feel like Paul, to glory in tribulation; for to this day has the God of my fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it."

This reminds me of one of my favorite verses in my favorite hymn, How Firm a Foundation, a verse that says that when through the deep waters I call thee to

go, the rivers of sorrow shall not thee overflow, for I will be with thee, they troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. You can sense Joseph has – he's – he's progressed from – from these various experiences through New York and Pennsylvania over to Kirtland and then Missouri and Liberty Jail and now in Nauvoo, there's been a softening and you sense that in this verse 2, he's not spending as much time – he's mentioned it and it's a big deal, but then he's more quick to jump to the solution rather than his problem.

As we've been talking about this, it's significant to note again the difference between Joseph speaking under inspiration versus Joseph speaking in the name of the Lord and in section 127 and 128, we literally see from one sentence to another, that shift. And as we look at verses 4 and 5 and 6 and 7, you can actually see the difference between Joseph's own personal expressions often under inspiration when versus times he's actually speaking in the name of the Lord. It's really incredible. If you look at section 128 which we're not going to yet, but just how long those verses are, just the kind of vocabulary that is used, the tone, the sentence structure, it's quite different than most of the rest of the Doctrine and Covenants so if you want to really determine or see where the voice of God is coming out, you can see that. In fact, we were talking earlier, wouldn't it be interesting to be able to color code the scriptures based on who's talking or what time period it is and to be able to better see that oh my gosh, this is directly the quoted voice of God versus this is Joseph Smith as a man speaking under inspiration. So they're similar but also very different things.

Yeah. So here, verily thus saith the Lord comes in verse 4 regarding the work in his temple and the work on the temple to keep building it. So here's Joseph in hiding, he can't be up at the temple helping encourage the people so he's like keep going, keep going, keep building this thing. And then he gives them some instructions regarding the baptism for the dead. Notice there's been a whole series of baptisms performed for the dead but there oft times is no recorder present. So he's saying so we have no record, and it's been a little haphazard – of these baptisms and so this is the section that makes that very clear, verse 6, "Let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness of your baptisms; and let him hear with his ears, that he may testify of a truth, saith the Lord." Why? So that whatever is recorded on the earth may be recorded in

heaven and it's – he's using this sealing idea and we'll come back to that in section 128.

Look at verse 8. "For I am about to restore many things to the earth, pertaining to the priesthood, saith the Lord of Hosts." This isn't saith Joseph Smith the Prophet. But even Joseph Smith's name shows up at the end of this epistle, God is almost interrupting Joseph Smith, he's like Joseph, I know that you're feeling lots of things, but this is my work and I need to have you say some things in my name and so we get this – it's almost like we get this mutual conversation going on that God has to grab Joseph Smith's attention and say, I have something to say here (overtalk) that you need to hear.

Exactly, now notice that Joseph switches back to his own voice very clearly in verse 10. "I will say to all the saints, that I desired, with exceedingly great desire, to have addressed them from the stand on the subject of baptism for the dead, on the following Sabbath." But basically I couldn't do it, it's not in my power, so I'm going to do this all by letter. And then he prays for them and then he closes signing - signing the letter with his name.

Then a little less than a week later, section 128 comes and he starts out saying, yeah, "As I stated in the letter before ... that I would write to you from time to time and I'm going to give you information on many subjects. I now resume the subject of the baptism for the dead." It comes back. Why? Because "that subject seems to occupy my mind, and press – press itself upon my feelings the strongest, since I have been pursued by my enemies." That's interesting. I'm being pursued by my enemies and the subject that just won't leave me alone, it's just pressing on me, is baptism for the dead. That's fascinating. Sealings powers and bringing families together. That's not what I'm thinking about when I'm in distress.

Interesting. So he then gives more instructions about this recording and in verse 3 you get this instruction – there were four wards in Nauvoo and, by the way, today in our Church we use that word ward all the time, but it begins not as a religious thing. In Illinois at the time a ward was a district or a voting precinct, a geographic area for political purposes. That's it. So you move into that house that happens to be inside of that geographic boundary, you are in that political ward. Well, the Church just used those ward boundaries to

denote their – their congregations and to this day in the Church in more established areas, that's the word we use.

And it's proper because we don't go shopping around for a bishop, right? Or we don't go shopping around for a congregation like you move into a place and that is your – your ward family, your community, and so God purposely I think has put this together and allowed it to persist because it creates the opportunity that we have to learn how to live in a covenantal community with people that we may not have chosen to live with otherwise.

Now you think about marriage. Two people choose to be in a covenantal relationship, you think about a ward, we all have to kind of figure out who we are and how to get along and in some ways, there is more on opportunities to learn about yourself and others in a ward environment than perhaps in a marriage because here you're kind of a bound unit like we're on eternity together. In a ward, there are just a lot of differences but we're in a covenantal community and there's a real opportunity to practice the gospel when we have to deal with differences.

So verse 3 is setting up this precedent to say every ward needs their own recorder then verse 4 we need a general Church recorder. We have got to keep good records and have them be accurate and witnessed, duly witnessed. And then notice what he does in verse 6. "Further, I want you to remember that John the Revelator was contemplating this very subject in relation to the dead, when he declared, as you will find recorded in Revelation 20:12 – And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out those things which were written in the books, according to their works." And he goes on to describe that that book is a record kept on the earth of what? Of these saving ordinances, of the things that God has given to the earth to connect them with heaven, that it's in order. That it's not – it's not just done and then forgotten. It's recorded and it's systematized and it's – he calls it the book of life here.

Now in verse 8 he – he introduces once again this idea of the sealing power, whatever you bind in earth will be bound in heaven, what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. And he's – he's taking this to the level – verse 9 – he

says, "It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of – a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven." That's giving an awful lot of power to men on the earth to say that you have power to bind in heaven but he then verifies it, verse 10. Again, for the precedent, he then quotes Matthew 16: 18-19 where he tells Peter whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

And then verse 11, he takes it to this level, "now the great and grand secret of the whole matter, and the summom bonum," the ultimate application "of the whole subject that is lying before us, consists in obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men." And then he describes this is where we get glory and honor, immortality and eternal life, the ordinance of baptism by water and he says this is in likeness of the dead, it's like a death, burial and a resurrection. That doctrine is taught in the New Testament as well.

So you get the bottom part of verse 12 making that very clear distinction, "Hence, this ordinance was instituted to form a relationship with the ordinance of baptism for the dead, being in likeness of the dead." And then he talks about the baptismal font being down below, underneath.

Verse 15: "And now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers – that they without us cannot be made perfect – neither can we without our dead be made perfect." Did you catch that? You sitting here with – in the generational chains – so you might have children and grandchildren or you might be an individual, it's okay, because you all have ancestors, you all have this – this tree back here that branches out. Well eventually that tree comes back together until you get to our first parents, Adam and Eve, right? And what Joseph now is starting to see very clearly, is wait a minute, our mission isn't just to go out and preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people and baptize them. It is that, plus baptizing everybody in the family all

the way back to Adam and Eve and he's seeing the fact that I need my kindred dead just as much as my kindred need me to do their work. This is a powerful, little motivator for me when it comes to family history work and temple work I'm not just learning stories about random people, I'm learning about my own past, my own history, and when I go and do something for them that they can't do for themselves, that's how we become Saviors on Mount Zion. We become a little bit more like Jesus by doing this vicarious or proxy work standing in for them and doing things that they can't do for themselves.

In the process, we are not just helping save them, but we're providing stepping stones, generational stepping stones for all of us to be linked as one family back to Adam and Eve as well. We can't be saved without our dead and our dead can't be saved without us. Temple and family history work is – it goes hand in hand with our missionary efforts. They're not – Elder Bednar has said, they are not separate efforts, they're the same thing focused on different sides of the veil is simply the way I see it, trying to invite all to come unto Christ and enter into these covenants with him.

So this leads into verse 18 after he's quoted Malachi 5 to chapter 4, verses 5 to 6 but look at verse 18, "Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union of welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time."

I want to just focus for just a minute on that word perfect, but I love that he uses these other words as well, whole and complete. We often think of perfect to be without blemish, unspoiled, sinless. Those things are all true but the word perfect in a covenantal context means to be complete, to be whole, entire, fully. When you think about it, if you go back to the Abrahamic promise, the Abrahamic promise includes that all the kindreds and all of the people of the earth will be blessed through Abraham and his posterity which includes us and so there is this huge connection. Everybody gets bound into one great whole and things cannot be whole or complete or full if members of the family of Adam or the children of God are strands that flow off into the ether. God

wants every single strand, wherever you fit in the tree of life, God wants you grafted in. Otherwise, the tree is not whole. It isn't perfect because it's not complete. That's why we need you. God cannot fully complete his work without you. You are part of this perfect, complete whole in entirety. That's what's going on here and you can imagine Joseph Smith even in the throes of being persecuted and in hiding, is having this glorious, grand vision of how God is working to save everybody. Now we have to choose to be brought in. We have to choose to be grafted in, we have to choose to have those ordinances work for us but that is God's work is for everyone to be saved.

And it's fascinating for me to watch Joseph's understanding unfold as he shares these things. In section 127 - 128 his full attention is on the baptism for the dead, that everyone needs to be baptized and next week's lesson we're going to see that it's as if the Lord's saying yes, that's absolutely true as well as we now need to have a welding link, a sealing performed to seal the whole family together in one big, united whole, an entire fully sealed family which is going to come in the next lesson. So it's this line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little, and we just watch it unfold in these scriptures.

Now as he winds down with this letter, look at verse 19, remembering Joseph is on the run, in hiding, being – being oppressed. Look at verse 19. "Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; and a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy."

Then he asks in verse 20, what do we hear again? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven. You come down halfway through he says you hear the voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! And then you get the voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river possessing the keys of the kingdom, and the dispensation of the fulness of times!

And what do you hear in voice 21? The voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, and at other times you hear the voice of Michael,

the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, the voice of Raphael, and of diverse angels, from Michael or down to the present time. What are they doing? They're declaring their dispensations, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory and the power of their priesthood given how? Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

Now he finishes with – these are, in my opinion, these are some of Joseph's most profound words. He's not saying thus saith the Lord, he's – this seems to be Joseph's voice in this letter that he's writing but wow, he – he's speaking very powerfully, very, very prophetically. "Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward." By the way, that's really good advice for us today because if you spend your time looking backward at what was wrong or the injustice or the trials or the tribulations, you're probably not going to be going forward because human beings generally move the direction they're facing. So he's inviting everybody to go forward, not backward. "Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free. Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy! And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever. And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality and eternal life, kingdoms, principalities, and powers." And then he tells them the great day of the Lord is at hand and we're going to make an offering in righteousness so we as a Church, as a people, what are we going to do? We're going to finish a book containing the records of our dead which shall be worthy of all acceptance.

So as we finish today, we just want to leave you with our assurance that God does work with imperfect people to accomplish his grand designs and there will be occasions when you get promptings, when you get ideas, when you get

revelations, and you act on those but there will be other times where you just have to go forward to the best of your ability trusting in God that he's guiding your efforts and your steps and your words in helping to build up his kingdom, not just on this side of the veil, but on the other side of the veil as well.

Know that he lives. Know that he loves you and we leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Spread light and goodness.