The Atonement of Jesus Christ
The Event that Makes Possible the Power of God to Save and Exalt His Children

“The Atonement of Jesus Christ, which made resurrection a reality for all and made eternal life possible for those who repent of their sins and receive and keep essential ordinances and covenants. It is doctrinally incomplete to speak of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice by shortcut phrases, such as “the Atonement” or “the enabling power of the Atonement” or “applying the Atonement” or “being strengthened by the Atonement.” These expressions present a real risk of misdirecting faith by treating the event as if it had living existence and capabilities independent of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Under the Father’s great eternal plan, it is the Savior who suffered. It is the Savior who broke the bands of death. It is the Savior who paid the price for our sins and transgressions and blots them out on condition of our repentance. It is the Savior who delivers us from physical and spiritual death.

There is no amorphous entity called “the Atonement” upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source. Sacred terms such as Atonement and Resurrection describe what the Savior did, according to the Father’s plan, so that we may live with hope in this life and gain eternal life in the world to come. The Savior’s atoning sacrifice—the central act of all human history—is best understood and appreciated when we expressly and clearly connect it to Him. (“Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” Ensign, May 2017, 40; italics added)

Face to Face With President Henry B. Eyring and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

In the “Face to Face with President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, broadcast held on March 7, 2017, among the many questions asked by young members of the church were two questions concerning the Atonement of Jesus Christ:

Question: “What exactly is the Atonement of Jesus Christ and how can I receive its blessings?”

Question: “One thing I have always wondered, and never been able to find my answer to, is how do I access the Atonement? Is all I have to do is just ask God for the Atonement to take place in my life?”

President Eyring responded first:

Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency

There couldn’t be a more important question.

The first thing you need to do is get a few facts straight. The Atonement was something Jesus Christ did. It’s not a thing itself. He atoned for our sins and he paid the price to allow us to be forgiven and resurrected. So its what he did that qualified Him to give us forgiveness, to change our hearts. And it’s the Holy Ghost doing that, it’s not the Atonement as if it’s a thing itself. The Atonement is something the Savior did. Okay? And the Father has given Him, because of that great sacrifice He made for us, the power to forgive us. And so when you feel forgiveness, that is not the Atonement, that’s the Savior giving you a feeling of forgiveness because of the Atonement.”

Then Elder Holland said:

Jeffrey R. Holland Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

That’s a very important distinction to make. Its very common for us to hear the Atonement talked about as an abstraction as if it were free standing out in the middle of the field. It’s always an extension of the Savior. It’s His act.

Could I share a verse?

This is a wonderful question: How do I access the Atonement? What does it mean in my life?

I happened across Moroni 8 one night and I read it differently than I ever had read it. This is Mormon’s stern lesson about the impropriety of infant baptism. It’s a very powerful chapter and it’s all on the Atonement: the reason you don’t have to baptize a child is because the child is already saved by the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the grace and goodness of the Savior. You know the context. But what I hadn’t read, or hadn’t paid enough attention to, is what he went on to say about all the rest of us.

When talks about the blessings of His Atonement in our lives, the fruits of it, as it were—after twenty-five verses, he says: “the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart”–if we understand the Atonement, we will be meek and lowly, and very grateful—“and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost,”—now you start to tie those together—“which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, [and] love endureth by diligence
unto prayer, until the end... when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).

We’ve just been swept right into the celestial kingdom here, on the strength of the Atonement of Christ because it made us meek, it made us lowly, it made us grateful, it made us know somebody help us, and that brings the Holy Ghost. I don’t know that I had ever quite tied the Gift of the Holy Ghost as an extension of the Savior’s Atonement.

You remember in the New Testament He said, unless I go away, the Holy Ghost can’t come [see John16:7]. I’ve wondered about that for thirty years. Well I think what he means is, unless I fulfill my Atonement, that requires my death and resurrection and absence, my ascension, the Holy Ghost can’t come, and that’s what you’re really going to need to get through, once I have provided the Atonement.

She can access that Atonement by being meek and lowly and grateful and feeling the Spirit in her life.

President Eyring followed up Elder Holland’s statement, saying:

And the Holy Ghost is the cleansing agent [Moroni 6:4], you see, that comes, and it can come because of the Atonement. It’s the Lord Jesus Christ who is allowing the Holy Ghost to come. And then when it comes to us, and we feel that, we feel cleansed. Its one of the things that happens because of the Atonement.

Elder Holland emphasized the fact that the atonement has already happened for us:

This triggers in me this desire to reassure you: The Atonement is already been provided. Christ has already done it for every one of us. It is finished. The victory is on the scoreboard; we already know who wins. You don’t have to worry about, “can I get the Atonement to work for me?” At least as far as the Savior is concerned, that part’s done. You do have faith, and repentance, and baptism, and honest living... There are some things we need to do to take advantage of that, to make it fully efficacious in our life. But I wouldn’t have one of you anywhere in this room, or out in that world out there, thinking, “I guess the Savior provided an atonement for everybody but me.” No! He took care of everybody. He took care of every one of us. (see https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/face-to-face/eyring-holland?lang=eng)