**The Gathering**

Over the years I have had a lingering question that I never seemed to get a satisfactory answer to. That question is this, if everyone who comes to this earth will eventually have the opportunity to hear and either accept or reject the gospel, either in mortality or in the Spirit World, why is there such a sense of urgency to spread the gospel throughout the world costing millions of dollars and people dedicating millions of hours toward this work? Sooner or later they get to hear the message anyway.

Through my study of the scriptures, prayer and listening to modern-day living prophets and apostles, I believe I have received an answer to my question.

In the Book of Moses, the Lord proclaims, “For this is my work and my glory - to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39) The Lord loves each and everyone of his children. His focus is on helping all of us to return and to live with our Heavenly Parents. This salvation comes through the [Atonement](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note3a) of Christ, and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel (AoF 3). Reaching our eternal goal of having eternal life and becoming like our Heavenly Father requires us to have the gospel and receive the ordinances of salvation.

It stands to reason that our earthly and eternal happiness hinges on having the gospel in our lives. Because of the Lord’s unconditional love for us, he wants all of his children to enjoy the blessings of the gospel. So, I believe the answer to my question has three major parts. First is the principle of joy. Secondly, knowing and understanding that we do not comprehend all the details and designs of our Heavenly Father’s plan. Thirdly, the gathering is a vital part of the latter-day restoration.

**Joy**

King Benjamin reminds us that “…men are that they might have joy.” That is a primary objective of our mortal existence. But, where does that joy come from? How do we get it? Here are some examples:

We read in King Benjamin’s address to his people, “that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a [remission](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note3a) of their sins, and having peace of [conscience](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note3b), because of the exceeding [faith](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note3c) which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the [words](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note3d) which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.” The joy his people felt came from faith in Jesus Christ and repentance.

Alma the younger bears witness of the joy he received when he repented and called upon the Lord for forgiveness of his sins:

“And it came to pass that as I was thus [racked](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note17a) with torment, while I was [harrowed up](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note17b) by the [memory](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note17c) of my many sins, behold, I [remembered](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note17d) also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, [have](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note18a) mercy on me, who am [in](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note18b) the [gall of bitterness](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note18c), and am encircled about by the everlasting [chains](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note18d) of [death](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note18e).

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my [pains](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19a) [no more](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19b); yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what [joy](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20a), and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:17-20)

The scriptures and living prophets and apostles attest to the fact that true joy, enduring joy, comes from accepting and having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting, being baptized by one having authority, receiving the Holy Ghost and staying on the covenant path all our life. This is the course that leads to eternal life – Then “…saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.” (2 Nephi 31:20)

So, joy comes from our acceptance and living the gospel. But joy also comes from sharing the gospel.

Joseph Smith taught, “A man filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race.”

Alma exclaimed, “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the [trump](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note1a) of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!” We learn that the reason for this desire was, “that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.” (Alma 29:1, 9)

We read in the Doctrine and Covenants, “And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the [kingdom](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note16a) of my Father, how great will be your [joy](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note16b) if you should bring many [souls](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note16c) unto me!”

When we read of Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life, he partakes of the fruit and then, we see the immediate interest he has in sharing the sweetness of the fruit with his family. The Lord wants this for each and everyone of his children as soon as they are ready to have it.

The Lord is invested in our happiness. I believe he wants this joy for his children to come to them at precisely the right time for them to recognize it and accept it. And, those who have received the truth are asked to help in taking the gospel, that brings such great joy, to his other children throughout the world. The urgency we see in missionary work is in part due to this great joy His children can receive by accepting the gospel message and sharing the gospel message.

**The Father’s Plan**

We have been blessed with an abundance of knowledge regarding the plan of salvation. We know we had a pre-earth life. We know that in the heavenly councils before the foundations of the world that the Lord said, “And we will [prove](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note25a) them herewith, to see if they will [do](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note25b) all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them…”(Abraham 3:25) We know from D&C 76 the glorious destinations for those that pass through mortality and are “added upon.” But we do not know everything.

For example, could it be that many of our spirit brothers and sisters were so valiant in the pre-earth life that living a full life in mortality was not so necessary for them to “prove themselves?” We do not know. But the Lord knows. Could it be that those who lived in the world when the gospel was not available to them are the ones who will readily accept the gospel in the Spirit World? We do not know. But the Lord knows. The point is that we do not know all the details of the Lord’s design when it comes to the salvation of mankind.

However, we do know that the gathering of Israel, the taking of the gospel to the world, is absolutely paramount in these last days. The Savior instructed his apostles, “Go ye therefore, and [teach](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19a) all [nations](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19b), [baptizing](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19c) them in the name of the [Father](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note19d), and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

[Teaching](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20a) them to [observe](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20b) all things whatsoever I have [commanded](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20c) you: and, lo, [I](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20d) am with you alway, eve*n* unto the [end](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note20e) of the world.” (Matt. 28:19-20) That injunction to his servants has never been removed.

In the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “For verily the [voice](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note2a) of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to [escape](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note2b); and there is no eye that shall not see, neither [ear](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note2c) that shall not hear, neither [heart](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note2d) that shall not be penetrated.

And the [voice](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note4a) of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have [chosen](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note4b) in these [last days](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note4c).” (D&C 1:2,4)

Even though we do not understand why so many will not hear the word of the Lord in this lifetime, what we do know is that the Lord has unequivocally made missionary work an indisputable priority in these last days. The Lord has declared, “Behold, I sent you out to [testify](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note81a) and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to [warn](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/#note81b) his neighbor.” (D&C 88:81)

I have come to believe that in the Lord’s all-wise plan for his children, there are many who are suppose to hear the message of the gospel in this life. Why? We do not know. But the Lord knows. For some reason, it is vitally important for these children to hear the message while yet in mortality. I am sure the time will come when we will know the details. However, for right now, we have our orders and it is our privilege and high honor to take the world his truth.

I think Elder Bruce R. McConkie says it succinctly:

“Though the gospel is for all men, in due course﻿—‘For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated’ ([D&C 1:2](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/1.2?lang=eng#p2))﻿—yet some are entitled to receive it before it is presented to others. The Lord sends forth his word on a priority basis. It goes to all men eventually, but some are entitled to hear the voice before others” (Bruce R. McConkie, The Promised Messiah, 507).

It should not be any surprise when President Nelson says, “There is nothing happening on this earth right now that is more important than that (the gathering of Israel). There is nothing of greater consequence. Absolutely nothing. This gathering should mean everything to you. This is the mission for which you were sent to earth.”

Delivering the message of the restoration to those the Lord has designated to hear the gospel in mortality is yet another reason for the urgency of missionary work.

**The Restitution of All Things**

A third reason for the gathering has to do with this dispensation being the dispensation of the fullness of times. The Lord has declared that all things from previous dispensations must be restored. Hence, the promise the Lord made to restore the House of Israel from its scattered condition must be accomplished.

We learn in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon that the House of Israel would be scattered throughout the world due to disobedience, for ignoring the word of the Lord (1 Nephi 19:13-14). We also learn that eventually, after “many generations,” The lord in his infinite mercy, will gather the House of Israel (3 Nephi 21:1, 26-28)

I like to make the comparison of the restoration to a contractor who has been given the charge to build a house exactly to the specifications instructed by the owner to replicate a house he once had before. At some point, the owner will return and will want to occupy the house exactly as he has designed. He fully expects his house to be complete and ready for him to occupy. If not, all things must be restored as he had with his previous house before he can come and occupy it.

One of the things the Lord expects prior to his return is the fulfillment of the covenant he made with Abraham that he would bless his seed with the great blessings of the gospel. The remnants of the House of Israel must have the gospel brought to them, restored to them, as the Lord promised his servant, Abraham.

Hence the great need for missionary work, the gathering of Israel. And so, Joseph Smith was given the keys of the gathering of Israel by Moses in the Kirtland Temple (D&C 110:11).

The Lord declared that He had committed unto Joseph Smith “the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” ([D&C 27:13](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/27.13?lang=eng#p13)).

Joseph Smith said,

“Truly this is a day long to be remembered by the Saints of the last days,﻿—a day in which the God of heaven has begun to restore the ancient order of His kingdom unto His servants and His people,﻿—a day in which all things are concurring to bring about the completion of the fullness of the Gospel, a fullness of the dispensation of dispensations, even the fullness of times; a day in which God has begun to make manifest and set in order in His Church those things which have been, and those things which the ancient prophets and wise men desired to see but died without beholding them; a day in which those things begin to be made manifest, which have been hid from before the foundation of the world, and which Jehovah has promised should be made known in His own due time unto His servants, **to prepare the earth for the return of His glory**, even a celestial glory, and a kingdom of Priests and kings to God and the Lamb, forever, on Mount Zion.”

Additionally, President Nelson has said, “(The gathering) is a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord.” The urgency associated with the gathering has much to do with restoring things as in days past and preparing the earth for the return of the Savior.

So, in answer to my initial question at the beginning of this epistle, I do not know exactly why it is so important and urgent to get the gospel spread throughout the world. I do not need to know all the divine details right now. What I do know is this:

* The blessings of the gospel bring about great joy to those who receive it and to those who share it – We should be anxiously and urgently engaged in blessing our fellow brothers and sisters
* As part of his plan, certain children of our Heavenly Father need the message of the gospel now and we have the special responsibility and errand from the Lord to help in this most important work
* Gathering is a crucial element to the restoration of all things, i.e., restoring the House of Israel to the truths of the gospel, prior to and in preparation for the second coming of the Lord