

PRIESTHOOD POWER



UNLOCKED



DAVID J. RIDGES

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CHAPTER 1

THE PRIESTHOOD

THE PRIESTHOOD IS the power of God delegated to man. Worthy priesthood bearers, directed by the Holy Ghost, carry on their part of the Father's work among His children. His tender mercies and strengthening love are felt through the ministering of faithful holders of the priesthood. In the April 2015 priesthood session of general conference, President Henry B. Eyring taught,

With your acceptance of the priesthood, you have received the right to speak and to act in the name of God. That right will become a reality only as you receive inspiration from God. Only then will you be able to speak in His name. And only then can you act in His name. ("Priesthood and Personal Prayer," *Ensign*, May 2015)

Healings Are One of Many Ways Priesthood Power Is Made Manifest

It was July 22, 1839, on the western side of the Mississippi River across from Nauvoo. By the time Joseph Smith arrived at the side of Elijah Fordham's deathbed, it was too late. At least, it was in Brother Fordham's mind. This fortyone-year-old convert, baptized about five or six years earlier, was gray-faced and had a look of death upon him. He had contracted the dreaded malaria that was spreading like wildfire among the Saints in Commerce (Nauvoo, Illinois), as well as those who had settled across the river in Montrose, Iowa. He was in the final stages of the disease and was expected to die within minutes. Parley P. Pratt recorded,

He was now in the last stage of a deadly fever. He lay prostrate and nearly speechless, with his feet poulticed [wrapped in a soft, moist concoction of meal or ground grains that was warmed and applied to sores or inflamed parts of the body]; his eyes were sunk in their sockets; his flesh was gone; the paleness of death was upon him; and he was hardly to be distinguished from a corpse. His wife was weeping over him, and preparing clothes for his burial. (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 293)

According to Wilford Woodruff's eyewitness account,

While I was living in this cabin in the old barracks, we experienced a day of God's power with the Prophet Joseph. It was a very sickly time and Joseph had given up his home in Commerce [Nauvoo] to the sick, and had a tent pitched in his dooryard and was living in that himself. The large number of Saints who had been driven out of Missouri, were flocking into Commerce but had no homes to go into, and were living in wagons, in tents, and on the ground. Many, therefore, were sick through the exposure they were subjected to. Brother Joseph had waited on the sick, until he was worn out and nearly sick himself.

On the morning of the 22nd of July, 1839, he arose, reflecting upon the situation of the Saints of God in their persecutions and afflictions, and he called upon the Lord in prayer, and the power of God rested upon him mightily, and as Jesus healed all the sick around Him in His day, so Joseph, the Prophet of God, healed all around on this occasion. He healed all in his house and dooryard, then, in company with Sidney Rigdon and several of the Twelve, he went through among the sick lying on the bank of the river, and he commanded them in a loud voice, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come up and be made whole, and they were all healed. When he healed all that were sick on the east side of the river, they crossed the Mississippi River in a ferryboat to the west side, to Montrose, where we were. The first house they went into was President Brigham Young's. He was sick on his bed at the time. The Prophet went into his house and healed him, and they all came out together. As they were passing by my door, Brother Joseph said: "Brother Woodruff, follow me." These were the only words spoken by any of the company from the time they left Brother Brigham's house till we crossed the public square, and entered Brother Fordham's

house. Brother Fordham had been dying for an hour, and we expected each minute would be his last.

I felt the power of God that was overwhelming His Prophet. When we entered the house, Brother Joseph walked up to Brother Fordham, and took him by the right hand; in his left hand he held his hat. He saw that Brother Fordham's eyes were glazed, and that he was speechless and unconscious. After taking hold of his hand, he looked down into the dying man's face and said:

“Brother Fordham, do you not know me?”

At first he made no reply; but we could all see the effect of the Spirit of God resting upon him.

He again said: “Elijah, do you not know me?”

With a low whisper, Brother Fordham answered, “Yes!”

The Prophet then said, “Have you not faith to be healed?”

The answer, which was a little plainer than before, was: “I am afraid it is too late. If you had come sooner, I think I might have been.”

He had the appearance of a man waking from sleep. It was the sleep of death. Joseph then said: “Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?”

“I do, Brother Joseph,” was the response.

Then the Prophet of God spoke with a loud voice, as in the majesty of the Godhead: “Elijah, I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to arise and be made whole!”

The words of the Prophet were not like the words of man, but like the voice of God. It seemed to me that the house shook from its foundation.

Elijah Fordham leaped from his bed like a man raised from the dead. A healthy color came to his face, and life was manifested in every act.

His feet were done up in Indian meal poultices. He kicked them off his feet, scattered the contents, and then called for his clothes and put them on. He asked for a bowl of bread and milk,

and ate it; then put on his hat and followed us into the street, to visit others who were sick.

The unbeliever may ask: “Was there not deception in this?”

If there is any deception in the mind of the unbeliever, there was certainly none with Elijah Fordham, the dying man, nor with those who were present with him, for in a few minutes more he would have been in the spirit world, had he not been rescued. Through the blessing of God, he lived up till 1880, in which year he died in Utah [died September 9, 1879, in Wellsville, Cache County, Utah, age eighty-one], while all who were with him on that occasion, with the exception of one, are in the spirit world. (*Leaves from My Journal* [Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882], 62–65)

The Scriptures Instruct Elders to Use the Priesthood to Bless the Sick

In the book of James, in the New Testament, clear instruction is given for Melchizedek Priesthood holders to anoint those who are sick with consecrated oil and then give them a blessing. We will add a few explanatory notes to these verses, along with bolding some of the text for emphasis.

James 5:14–15

14 **Is any sick among you?** let him **call for the elders** of the church [*Melchizedek Priesthood holders*]; and let them pray over him [*administer to him*], anointing him with oil [*pure, consecrated olive oil*] in the name of the Lord [*in the name of Jesus Christ*]:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up [*either literally heal him here on earth or bring him to celestial glory eventually, if he has lived righteously*]; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Just a quick comment about the phrase “if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him,” in verse 15. Obviously, this needs to be handled with great care. It is comforting and truly significant just as it stands when applied to the lives of righteous and faithful members. However, in the Father’s plan, there is no such thing as “automatic salvation” or “automatic forgiveness of sins” through simply performing a particular ordinance or having one performed for you. If a member who is administered to is healed but has not repented of sins nor is trying to do so, he or she would still need to go through the repentance process to be forgiven.

Clearly, Melchizedek Priesthood holders are expected to use their authority to bless people. The account of the healing of Elijah Fordham is a straightforward example of the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood in action. This sacred power resides in each worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holder today, and it is manifested in many ways and under many circumstances.

As we proceed to discuss some ways of unlocking the power of the priesthood, we will consider several aspects of this vital topic—factors that can be of great value in helping sincere and faithful men be more effective in having *power* in their priesthood after having the *authority* of the priesthood conferred upon them.

“A Royal Priesthood”

The Apostle Peter spoke of the priesthood as being “a royal priesthood.”

1 Peter 2:9

9 But ye are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

“Royal” implies “royalty,” which, in this context, implies that the end result of righteously bearing the Melchizedek Priesthood and having

the associated saving ordinances as an integral part of our lives is that of becoming gods; in other words, receiving exaltation, often referred to as becoming “kings” and “queens” in the scriptures. This is taught in the Doctrine and Covenants, together with the book of Revelation. Referring to righteous, worthy men and women who have been sealed in celestial marriage (D&C 132:19) we read,

D&C 132:20

20 **Then shall they be gods**, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. **Then shall they be gods, because they have all power**, and the angels are subject unto them.

Bruce R. McConkie explained two verses in Revelation that contain the phrase “kings and priests.” We will read the verses and follow them with his explanation. First, the verses:

Revelation 1:6

6 And hath made us **kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:10

10 And hast made us unto our God **kings and priests**: and we shall reign on the earth.

Now his explanation (bold added for emphasis):

If righteous men have power through the gospel and its crowning ordinance of celestial marriage to become **kings and priests** to rule in exaltation forever, it follows that the women by their side (without whom they cannot attain exaltation) will be **queens and priestesses**. (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). Exaltation grows out of the eternal union of a man and his wife. Of those whose marriage endures in eternity, the Lord says, “Then shall they be gods” (D&C 132:20); that is, each of them, the man and the woman, will be a god. As such they will rule over their dominions forever. (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1966], 613)

And so we see that Peter’s use of the term “royal priesthood” implies that men who honorably hold and exercise the Melchizedek Priesthood are in training to become gods. As priesthood bearers, we have the *authority* of the priesthood, but—as the Brethren have been emphasizing today—we need to do better at having the *power* of our priesthood, which is God’s power, literally delegated to us from Him.

Look again at 1 Peter 2:9 (on page 6). As you can see, this “royal priesthood” goes hand in hand with being a “chosen generation” (chosen to carry the gospel and the blessings of the priesthood to all who come under our influence; see Abraham 2:9–11), being a “holy nation” (a worldwide “nation” of God’s people), and being a “peculiar people” (people who set themselves apart from the ways of the world, particularly those ways that are incompatible with being true followers of Christ). We will say more about worthiness later.

The Priesthood Is God’s Power Delegated to Man

That the priesthood is literally the power of God delegated to the faithful men in the Church, both ancient and modern, is quite clear. Consider the following statements:

- Priesthood is “the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth” (Joseph Fielding Smith, “Eternal Keys and the Right to Preside,” *Ensign*, July 1972).
- “You have the power of the priesthood directly from the Lord” (Boyd K. Packer, “The Power of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2010).
- President Joseph F. Smith described the priesthood as “the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939], 139).

Despite these and scores of other clear doctrinal statements from the Lord’s authorized servants, I have seen some confusion on the definition of priesthood among a few members of the Church.

Several years ago, while I was serving as a stake president, a faithful mother in our stake, who was homeschooling her children, called me with concern in her voice. In her attempts to broaden the curriculum for her children, she would often invite outside individuals who had expertise in various topics to come and teach their specialty to her children.

On this particular occasion, she had chosen to invite a man who was an active member of the Church to come teach some aspects of the Church as part of the religion unit in her home curriculum. Among other things, he adamantly taught the children that God does not share His priesthood power with mortals, and thus, whenever they heard anyone in the Church claim that the priesthood is the power of God delegated to man on earth, they could rest assured that it was false doctrine.

After he finished his teaching and had left her home, she was quite shaken. He had strong credibility in her eyes or she would not have invited him to come teach in the first place, but now she was confused and worried.

She called me as soon as she could and told me what had been taught to them, expressing concern and confusion because what had been taught did not feel right, and she thought she remembered hearing often that the priesthood is God's power delegated to man. She had tried with her limited resources around her home to find that definition of the priesthood but was unsuccessful.

I thanked her for calling me and immediately assured her that the priesthood is indeed the power of God delegated to man on earth. I provided some quotations and references from Church manuals and documents, and I complimented her for being sensitive to the Spirit, which had made her feel uncomfortable with what had been taught. With great relief, she thanked me and told me she would never have that man come teach her children again!

The priesthood is the power of God delegated to man on earth, through which the eternal saving ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ are made available to all who will avail themselves of the opportunity.

In Effect, Priesthood Bearers Stand in for God When Laying Hands on People's Heads

Ministering by worthy priesthood bearers is one of the ways that the Lord gives personal attention to His children who are here on earth. Priesthood is the power of God conferred upon worthy men, through which blessings of healing, comfort, counsel, encouragement, and so forth are provided directly to His children through physical contact by the hands of priesthood holders, which, symbolically, represent the hands of God.

Speaking to Edward Partridge, the Lord said,

D&C 36:2

2 And I will lay my hand upon you by the hand of my servant **Sidney Rigdon**, and you shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which shall teach you the peaceable things of the kingdom.

I am deeply struck by the simplicity of how the Lord gives individual attention to His children, including, as it were, physical contact by the laying on of hands of faithful priesthood holders. It is such a common occurrence in the Church that it seems undernoticed and perhaps undervalued in our culture.

In the April 2010 general conference, Boyd K. Packer taught,

Priesthood is the authority and the power which God has granted to men on earth to act for Him. When priesthood authority is exercised properly, **priesthood bearers do what He would do if He were present.** (“The Power of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2010)

Thus, as worthy priesthood bearers represent God through the laying on of hands, their hands are, in effect, His hands as they're placed upon the heads of His children in the process of ministering with the priesthood.

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