

The Gospel and the Latter Day Saints

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[0:00] Well, good evening. My name's Elder Brown. I'm from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on Collington Road. Well, actually, you'll be glad to know that's not the case. I'm just checking you're awake on a Sunday afternoon.

I'm Andrew Brown. I have the privilege to attend a Charlotte Chapel church plant, Christ Church Queensferry in Queensferry. And I've been asked to come and share with you a little about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

And I'd like to start out by admitting I'm not an expert in Mormon theology, but I do have a little experience in the area. I once attended the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Edinburgh. And after God opened my eyes to that false teaching, he gave me a real heart to reach out to those who would profess belief in Jesus, but also deny what God has revealed about himself in the scripture.

So, before we dive into their beliefs, let's turn to God once more in prayer. Lord, as we examine false teaching about who you are and what you've done, may it drive us ever closer to you.

[1:10] God, help us to be like those Bereans in Acts 17, who were searching the scriptures daily to find out if what Paul taught them was true.

Lord, help us to accept that even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags before you, a perfectly holy God.

But despite our condition, we thank you that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Father, help us to have right motives when we engage those of a different faith.

Help us to view them like Jesus, a sheep without a shepherd, and have compassion on them. God, drive out that desire to win arguments. Help us to remember that there's a soul at stake.

Lord, give us energy and attentiveness this evening. Help me accurately represent the beliefs and teachings of the LDS Church. And I ask that our time together would bring you glory.

[2:18] And that in coming days and years, there will be conversations that would lead to salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, to put you at ease after telling you I was from the LDS Church, maybe I'll put your minds at rest by reading a Spurgeon quote.

This is what he said. If a crooked stick is before you, you need not explain how crooked it is. Lay a straight one down beside it, and the work is well done.

Preach the truth, and error will stand abashed in its presence. That kind of, I think, illustrates my attitude to dealing with those of a different faith.

You don't need to know exactly what they believe to share the truth with them. That being said, I think sessions like this are useful. Because if you know some of the preconceptions that are in their mind when you use certain terms, it will help you share the truth with them.

You'll probably have bumped into young missionaries like the ones on the screen. Though, maybe not recently because of COVID. I've found how they're getting their message out as offering you free books of Mormon on social media.

[3:27] But, if you did meet them, or bump into them in person, they'll be wearing those little black badges, and they'll say, Elder, or Sister, so and so. The male missionaries are here for about two years, and the female missionaries come for about 18 months.

So, why bother sharing the gospel with them? Because if you chat to them, they'll say, Of course, I'm a Christian just like you. I believe in Jesus. Jesus, I've accepted the gospel. Well, I hope by the time we're finished this evening, you'll have some idea why I believe they really need the gospel. To set the scene with me, imagine I come and tell you, I really know Graham Shanks. We agree, of course, he's the pastor of this church. Absolutely.

No argument there. No disagreement. If I can be so bold, I know I'm better than you do. He's got fiery ginger hair.

He's seven foot tall. Lives in Holyrood Palace. And he even keeps a pet tiger. Well, do I really know Graham?

[4 : 40] I'm saying I know him. We've both already agreed he's the pastor. But does the way I'm describing to you show I really know him? Or am I describing something that's based kind of in reality, but let's face it, that's not Graham, is it?

So, I'd like to bring you to the words that Jesus said in John 8, 24. He said this, Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sin.

What we believe about Jesus really matters. It's the difference between life and death. These folks, they're putting their trust in Jesus. A Jesus that I would argue does not exist.

And personally, that breaks my heart. For me, and don't get, all of us need salvation. But these people will go to eternity.

And I believe they will be the ones that may hear, Lord, Lord, did we not in your name do many marvelous works? And they'll say, I never knew. Because they're not putting their trust in the Jesus that is revealed in Scripture.

[5 : 50] A Jesus that is invented in a human's mind cannot save you. Now, please don't mishear me when I say that.

It is not having a perfect theological understanding of Jesus or who God is that will save you. That's impossible with our human minds. We're talking about an infinite God.

But if we're denying truth that he has revealed to us, how can we really be saying we're worshiping? Jesus said also in John, we must worship God in spirit and in truth.

As I understand it, that's saying we must worship God for who he has revealed himself to be. We cannot, as I said earlier, worship God and reject what he has revealed about himself to us.

So where does that leave us here in Edinburgh? There's lots of people who have lots of opinions about who Jesus is. You'll be hearing about some of them as you go through your series. We have Islam that teaches Jesus is only a prophet.

[7 : 00] He's not the son of God. He didn't die on a cross. Likewise, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus isn't God. Rather, they teach he's the Archangel Michael in human form.

Which brings us to what the focus of our topic is tonight. What is the LDS view of God? There are many things we could discuss.

You'll see some of them on the slide just there. We could talk about Joseph Smith's history. We could talk about the polygamy in the church. That might be quite interesting. We could even talk about the odd underwear they choose to wear.

Or the secret handshakes that they've nicked from the Freemasons. While all these might be very interesting topics, and I'd enjoy chatting to you about them, these are not the heart of the issue. I believe the main focus of any evangelism encounter, in fact, any gospel-centered conversation you have, should have these two things involved.

[8 : 05] Who is God? And what is the gospel? Due to our limited time, I'll really only have time to unpack the first of these questions. But I'd like to give you a little flavor of how they view the gospel.

I don't think I'm being unfair if I describe what they believe as works-based righteousness. The Book of Mormon said God saves you after all you can do.

And just a little plug for a YouTube site I really like, Lutheran Satire, you should check out their video on the Mormon gospel. I think you'll get a little laugh. But ultimately, there is a really serious message there.

Salvation after all we can do is no gospel at all. Joseph Smith, when he translated Romans 4 or 5, turned it totally on its head. He said, God does not justify the ungodly.

We're doomed if that's the case. We have no hope if that's the case. But before we understand how we approach God, we probably need to know who he is.

[9 : 19] So what I'd like to focus on tonight is what is the LDS view, or the Latter-day Saint view, of God? You'll see their own website on the screen behind me.

I'd just like to read it to you. Latter-day Saints view members of the Godhead in a manner that corresponds in a number of ways with the views of others in the Christian world. Both significant differences.

Latter-day Saints pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. They acknowledge the Father as the ultimate object of their worship, the Son as Lord and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the messenger and revelator of the Father and the Son.

But where the Latter-day Saints differ from other Christian religions is in their belief that God and Jesus Christ are glorified physical beings, and that each member of the Godhead is a separate being.

I've highlighted some words from what I've just read, because I want you to pay particular attention, because probably quite a lot of you thought, even me at first reading went, fair enough, nothing overly controversial there, right?

[10:28] Sounds pretty legitimate. But what I want you to notice is, and I'll stop at this several times, if you don't get, if you don't define your terms, you can find yourself agreeing to a lot that you don't actually agree to.

So how would an LDS person define being here? Well, quite straightforward, they mean God. So the LDS view of the Godhead is there are three separate gods, all who have their own physical bodies, who are part of the Godhead because they work together.

So, how does that differ from what we believe? Forgive me for taking the time to clarify it, but I think it is important. Because rather than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit being all distinct persons, but by one nature God, they believe they're all separate gods.

I know I've probably dived in quite deep, quite quickly. So please, allow me to conduct this little thought experiment, and hopefully the slide behind us will keep us where we need to be.

If you are up for it, you can close your eyes, that might help, but that's your choice. Imagine with me if I threw a rock at your head.

[11:50] I won't, I promise, don't even have a rock on me, but imagine with me for a moment if I did. Smack. Hits you in the side of the head.

Why does it hurt? Well, it has being, it exists, it's a rock, it's hard, it's harder than your head, it's going to hurt. It has being, it exists.

Imagine with me, instead of you complaining to me, hey, hold on a second, why did you throw that rock at me? Instead you turned to the rock and went, oh, you nasty rock, how dare you hit me in the side of the head?

Will it care? Not in the slightest, because it's not a person. So, when we say we believe that there is one being of God, but three persons, we're talking about two different categories.

We're talking about what God is, and then we're talking about who God is. We relate to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They're all individual persons.

[12:52] We can clearly see this at Jesus' baptism. There's the Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit descending like the dove, Jesus in the water. Three separate persons. All one God.

One of my favorite passages in scripture is Philippians 2, because it tells us just how amazing Jesus is. Though being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something he held onto.

But he emptied himself, taken on the form of a servant, and humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Jesus, in very nature God.

We read from Isaiah. There is only one. From everlasting to everlasting, but we'll come on to that more shortly. One of the really interesting things I find when I've been chatting to the Mormon missionaries or the Latter-day Saints, as they prefer now it is, is that when they talk about God, they're actually one of the most polytheistic religions on the planet.

And that just means they have an endless number of gods. To them, God the Father once lived on a planet as a man and had a God who had a God who had a God who had a God.

[14:10] I'm guessing you get the idea. They believe in what's called the law of eternal regression. Gods that have gods that have gods. you can probably see why I'd argue Islam is even closer to Christianity than Mormonism is.

They believe that God the Father has not always been God. I don't know how you can read the passage that we looked at tonight and think that God became God.

I'll give you Joseph Smith's own words. After the death of one of the elders in the early Mormon church called Elder King Follett, Joseph Smith gave a speech to commemorate the elder's life. And I'd like to read you some of the words. Again, you can follow along with me. God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man.

He sits enthroned in yonder heavens. That is the great secret. I'm going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity.

[15 : 26] I will refute that idea and take away the veil so that you may see. He was once a man like us. Yeah, that God himself, the Father of us, all dwelt on an earth.

It wasn't just Joseph Smith. The fifth president of the Mormon church, Lorenzo Snow, he came up with this little couplet to summarize their belief, if you like. As man is now, God once was.

As God is now, man may become. Incredible if you're familiar with standard Christian historic teaching, right?

But that is what they believe. What do they believe about Jesus? Well, they identify Jesus as Jehovah of the Old Testament.

You might be wondering, hold on a second, I thought you said they didn't identify God the Father and Jesus as the one God. Well, they don't. They believe that the name Jehovah exclusively refers to Jesus and they believe the term Elohim or the Hebrew word for God refers to God the Father.

[16 : 45] This brings us back to something I mentioned earlier. Anytime you're talking to someone from the LDS church, anytime they use a term or word, pause for a second and just say, how do you understand that?

What do you mean when you say that? You'll find it really is very, very necessary. Otherwise, you could be agreeing with them for hours and in the end realize, well, you don't believe the same thing at all.

And probably a really quite easy example of this is the virgin birth. We'll both go, yeah, of course we believe in the virgin birth. Mormons will go, yeah, believe in the virgin birth, sure. But, the Mormon means Mary was a virgin because she had intercourse with God rather than with a man.

Not really what we believe, is it? Brigham Young put it this way, the birth of the saviour was as natural as births of our children. It was the result of a natural action.

He, particularly flesh and blood, was begotten of his father as we were of our fathers. We could also agree Jesus is the only begotten son, right?

[18 : 02] That's a term we're familiar with, I would hope. What does the LDS person mean by that? Well, Mormons believe we're all spirit children, they actually believe we existed before our physical birth, and we're all spirit children of heavenly father and mother.

Yeah, you heard me correctly. They do believe God the Father has a wife, at least one. I'd like to read you again an LDS publication.

This is from Messages of the First Presidency. Jesus, however, is the firstborn among all the sons of God, the first begotten in the spirit and the only begotten in the flesh.

He is our elder brother, and we, like him, are in the image of God. All men and women are in the similitude of the universal father and mother, and are literally sons and daughters of deity.

What more is needed to convince us that both man, sorry, that man, both in spirit and body, is in the image and likeness of God, and that God himself is in the form of a man?

[19 : 16] I hope by this point you get why I strongly believe they need the gospel. They need to hear the truth, so how might we share it with them?

Well, to be honest, although I started, I asked one of my favorite passages to read to the Mormon missionaries to be read at the start, very, very often, if you do read them a verse that goes directly against the teachings of their church, they'll just say, hold on a second though, we only believe the Bible as far as it's been translated correctly.

So, how do we get around that? Well, hands up, I don't speak Hebrew or Greek, so I can't really say if something's been translated correctly, but thankfully, we have wonderful things called interlinear translations, so they can be helpful.

However, they don't have any concerns about the translation of the Book of Mormon. So, actually, that's the approach I use when I'm talking with the Mormon missionaries.

It's not because I believe the Book of Mormon is true, it's because they do. So, we can ask several questions of the Book of Mormon. You see, the LDS missionaries are coming to you, and they're asking you to pray about whether their church is true based on the Book of Mormon, and they're asking you to judge whether Joseph Smith is a prophet based on the Book of Mormon.

[20 : 54] So, we can ask those questions. For example, what does the Book of Mormon teach about God? Who is God? I think that's a fair question to ask the Mormon missionaries.

I've already read to you what their church teaches about God. But is that what the Book of Mormon says? Well, I'd argue no. No, it isn't. I think the Book of Mormon is very clear.

There's only one God, and that that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I'd like to read to you from the Book of Mormon, and I hope you won't get your pitchforks and chase me out.

This is 2 Nephi 31, 21. And now behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way, and there is none other way, nor name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.

And now behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God without end. Amen. Confused you?

[21 : 54] That's not what their church teaches, right? Just in case you think it's a one-off verse that slipped in there from somewhere. I'd like to read you another one.

Alma 11, 44. Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous, and even there shall not be so much as a hair of their heads be lost.

But everything shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be reassigned before the bar of Christ, the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

I can't reiterate enough, or you must ask them, please explain to me what you mean by the terms you use. We could also ask them, what sort of being is God?

I hope I've already shown that their church teaches that God was once a man on their planet, but is that what the Book of Mormon says? Forgive me again for turning there, but Alma 18, 24-28.

[23 : 17] And Ammon began to speak unto them with boldness, and said unto him, Believest thou that there is a God? And he answered, and said unto him, I do not know what that meaneth. And Ammon said, Believest thou there is a great spirit?

And he said, Yea. And Ammon said, This is God. And Ammon said unto him again, Believest thou that this great spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth? And just a few chapters later, and the king said, God is that great spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem.

Sorry. Is God that great spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem? And Aaron said unto him, Yea, he is that great spirit, and he created all things both in heaven and in earth.

Believest thou this? And he said, Yea, I believe that the great spirit created all things, and I desire that you should tell me concerning all these things, and I will believe thy words. Just go into the LDS website, you'll find clearly under the definition of God the Father, he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's.

Bizarre. But it is what they believe. There are many, many articulate Mormons who will give you explanations for these things.

[24 : 39] But what if we just ask the Book of Mormon, was God once a man on another planet? Again, the Book of Mormon says no. The first verse I'd like to read you is a direct quotation of Malachi 3.6 For I am the Lord, I change not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Or how about this, which is a combination of two verses, you're probably familiar with, Hebrews 13.8 and James 1.17 For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever?

And in him there is no variableness, neither shadow of changing. God is God. And what I particularly like, given that they believe that God was once a man on their planet, Moroni 8.18 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being, but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.

And just to remind you of what the church teaches, this is Brigham Young, who was one of the followers of Joseph Smith, and his writings said this, The doctrine that God was once a man and has progressed to become a God is unique to this church.

How do you feel knowing that God, through his own experience, knows all that we know regarding the toils and sufferings of mortality? So much contradiction.

[26 : 18] So much confusion. Why? Well, I don't think I'm being unfair to them to say that the current prophet of the LDS church can reinterpret scripture to their own view.

They can add to revelation. They can change revelation. They even have a little phrase that says, a live prophet trumps a dead one.

So forget about the one said before, if it doesn't agree with what the current one believes. In fact, sometimes the prophet's own views change with time.

I would strongly argue that this was the case with Joseph Smith. It's why we can have such seemingly clear Trinitarian statements in the Book of Mormon, but yet later in his life when he's talking at the funeral of Elder King Follett, he's telling you God was once a man on the planet. In conclusion, I'd like to re-emphasize what I mentioned earlier. What I've given you tonight is hopefully just a starting point to delving into what does the Bible really teach about God?

[27 : 40] Because like I started off with that Spurgeon quote, you need to know the truth so you can lay it beside false teachings. You don't have to memorize any of the verses I've mentioned to start a conversation.

But please, please, please, if you're starting conversations with folks of other faith, let your elders know. The reality is we are in a spiritual battle.

Our warfare is not against flesh and bone. I believe there's demonic forces behind the teachings of the LDS church and many of the other groups you will come to hear about.

It's a serious issue. It shouldn't be taken lightly. It shouldn't just be engaged in because you want to win an argument. These are people's souls that are at stake. It's not to be taken lightly.

Please, please involve your elders if you're meeting with missionaries, Jehovah's witnesses, anyone of a different faith. Once again, when you talk to them, ask them what they believe.

[28 : 48] Give them time. One of the most fruitful conversations I had with LDS missionaries was over pizza. Sit with them. Get to know them.

If it may be so, be like Jesus. Eat with the tax collectors and sinners of which, believe it or not, you're one. I am a sinner. Bond with them.

Be a friend. You never know where it might lead. I pray it leads to their salvation. As I mentioned, only faith in the true Jesus, the living Jesus, the one who took on flesh, came to this earth, is the resurrected one.

He's the only one who can save you. We need to be putting our faith and our trust in him. Amen. Amen. He's the only one that can save us from our sin.

Before I leave you tonight, I have a few books I'd like to recommend. Two of the ones that I find most helpful myself are written by a Baptist preacher in the States by the name of James White.

[30 : 01] He's written letters to a Mormon elder and also Is the Mormon my brother? If you're going to get any book on their faith, that would be the one I'd recommend.

Another one that I find very useful is questions to ask your Mormon friend. This is really just to get them to critically analyze what they do believe. Bizarrely, I'd recommend this.

It's the Book of Mormon. I will leave this copy here. You'll notice it's got a lot of little colored tags.

This is literally because I've done a lot of asking the Book of Mormon what it teaches.

I shared some topics with you tonight. Well, I shared two. So I'll leave this. I hope you find it a useful resource for the church. Because what this teaches is not what the Mormon missions will be teaching you.

It's what they're asking you to pray about, but it's not what they believe. So it could just be a door, a foot in the door, to sharing the gospel. But I'd like to close with that quote that I read at the start.

[31 : 10] If a crooked stick is before you, you need not explain how crooked it is. Lay a straight one down beside it, and the work is well done. Preach the truth, and error will stand abashed in its presence.

Amen.