

# “Choosing Christ”

Stake Conference Talk  
January 27, 2019  
President Joseph A. Staples

I'd like to introduce you to a theme that you will hear a lot about in Willow Creek stake meetings – including ward conferences, stake conferences, and when members of our stake high council speak in your wards.

But before I share the theme, maybe I can share with you how we decided on this theme.

My understanding is that professional writers – of which I am not one – define a theme and a purpose to what they are about to write. A warning... by the time I sit down, you may know more about the tactical nature of theme and purpose that you want to know!

As I understand it, the **theme** is the message the author is trying to get across to the reader throughout the text. The **purpose** is the reason for creating the text in the first place. So following this logic, our purpose follows what Elder Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated is the purpose for the historic announcements made over the last several months – that is “to strengthen faith in Heavenly Father and His plan and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Atonement.” So that is our purpose, not only in the messages that come from general conference, but also the purpose of what we will talk about today AND what you'll hear about throughout the year.

Now the theme...as a stake presidency we knew it needed to center on the Savior. We've heard it taught that “If we don't choose Christ, it doesn't really matter what we choose in its place.” Or as Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “whatever we embrace instead of Jesus and His work will keep us from qualifying to enter His kingdom and therefore from being embraced by Him.”

So as a stake presidency, we then considered what else needed to be a part of this stake theme. A conclusion we drew is that it needed to result in action. It needs to invite us to do something. If you're 9 years old, or 90 years old, I don't believe Heavenly Father wants us to simply stay the course. He wants us to progress... continually. For example, endure to the end, doesn't mean to sit in a beach chair somewhere and be sure you don't do anything wrong. We need to progress. If you want an example of that point, look no further than our 94-year-old prophet President Nelson!

So the action word we selected as part of our theme (I warned you you'd know more about theme and purpose than you ever wanted to know), our action word is “choosing.” Not “choose,” but “choosing” – denoting a constant action, not something that is one-and-done. The theme? Choosing Christ!

Both words are important – the action word choosing AND who we are choosing -- Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is our advocate with the Father. He is the one who atoned for us!

My wife Robyn and I had a conversation with a man not that long ago who had abandoned Christianity for another religion. His argument in making the change was around the wonderful things his new religion teaches; the connections it allows him to make with his thoughts; and how these teachings had all been formulated over thousands of years. There was no argument with his points. But the fundamental item he was missing was the need we all have... you, me, him, our neighbor... our need for a Savior to redeem us!

I have a print on the wall of my home office of Daniel and the Lion's Den. You remember the story, where Darius the king is coerced by his advisors to pass a law that anyone who is caught praying to God must be thrown into the Lion's den. And they did this because they were jealous and envious of Daniel. Yet, you'll remember Daniel's reaction to this newly law passed... In verse 10 of chapter 6 it reads:

**10** ¶ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Daniel was undeterred. He'd prayed before and he wasn't going to stop now! Consequently, Daniel was cast into the Lion's den. And you'll remember the result, starting in verse 19...

**19** Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

**20** And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

**21** Then said Daniel unto the king, ...

**22** My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: ...

There are a number of great lessons in this chapter, but what an example Daniel was for us as we work at choosing Christ. Daniel knew the opposition that the world was putting in his path. He even knew the consequences of what going against the world would produce – and they weren't very good. Yet, he was undeterred!

Daniel didn't let the world, or those around him, deter him from what God had asked him to do. So it is with us. The world will give us all kinds of reasons why choosing Christ shouldn't be our priority. But in most cases, today's reasons won't be quite so direct in how they try to distract us, will they? President Nelson, in October's General Conference said, "The adversary is

increasing his attacks on faith and upon us and our families at an exponential rate. To survive spiritually, we need counterstrategies and proactive plans.”

So “Choosing Christ” – What does that mean in practical terms. It’s not just a nice phrase that would look good stuck to the front of our refrigerator. In choosing Christ, I’d like you to consider five things:

1. If we are choosing Christ, we study and learn who he is, how he acts, how he thinks. Early in my business career I decided I was going to work on my presentation skills. I picked one guy. A consultant and author named Tom Peters. I studied everything about his presentation style. How he moved; his enthusiasm; where he paused. I even borrowed his jokes! That is how we should be with our desire to emulate the Savior, but to do that we have to come to know him. And a footnote...this isn’t so much memorizing history, chronology, facts, and stories...this is about understanding the how and why behind His actions...who he really is.
2. We keep his commandments... no exceptions. Jesus counseled His disciples, “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.” You’ve all seen the overhead signs on Utah freeways that read, “Zero fatalities. The only acceptable goal.” Will motorists accomplish that goal? Not likely. But it sends a very clear message. Similarly, we shouldn’t be picking and choosing which commandments we plan to keep. We’re going to keep them all... and then we’ll make mistakes. We’ll come up short. We’ll sin. And a loving Savior will help us do better the next time as we strive to keep all the commandments.
3. We go about doing His work daily. Have we made time to be anxiously engaged in His work? Do we love serving in the church and outside the church. Do we actively share the gospel with others? This is part of choosing Christ.
4. We help others choose Christ. That means we actively share this joyful gospel message with others. The gospel of Jesus Christ isn’t a gospel of every man and woman for themselves. That’s not how it works. That’s not why we’re here. We’re here to perfect ourselves AND to help others make it through that perfection process. That includes helping the Bishop as well as the neighbor or co-worker who hasn’t yet gained a testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
5. This last one was interesting. I knew there was one more item missing in my list. I’d come up with the first four, call them methods for choosing Christ, but I couldn’t come up with this last one that I knew was missing. So I did what many of you do, I asked my children. My question to them, “what actions do those that are choosing Christ do?” My youngest daughter gave the perfect answer. She said, those who are choosing Christ treat God’s children the way Christ would treat them.

So that’s the invitation; let us all live a life where you are constantly, and consistently, choosing Christ; living a life where you are choosing Christ by (list) learning who He is, keeping His commandments, being about His work, helping others choose Him, and treating God’s children the way He, the Savior, would treat them.

We live in a revelatory season. It is a wonderful time to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are such amazing people. You do so much good. We've outlined several important stake priorities over the last ten months and you've focused on those so faithfully. And the stories of how you've embraced the new home-centered gospel study have been inspiring! Thank you for all you do and the contribution you make to our little stake of Zion.

Close with my testimony. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.