

President Thomas S. Monson

“If a man die, shall he live again?”

Recently I was looking through some family photo albums. Cherished memories flooded my mind as I came across image after image of loved ones gathered at family outings, birthdays, reunions, anniversaries. Since these photographs were taken, some of those beloved family members have departed this life. I thought of the words of the Lord, “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.”¹ I miss each one who has left our family circle.

Though difficult and painful, death is an essential part of our mortal experience. We began our sojourn here by leaving our premortal existence and coming to this earth. The poet Wordsworth captured that journey in his inspired ode to immortality. He wrote:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s
Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!²

Life moves on. Youth follows childhood, and maturity comes ever so imperceptibly. As we search and ponder the purpose and the problems of life, all of us sooner or later face the question of the length of life and of a personal, everlasting life. These questions most insistently assert themselves when loved ones leave us or when we face leaving those we love.

At such times, we ponder the universal question, best phrased by Job of old, who centuries ago asked, “If a man die, shall he live again?”³

Skepticism in the world

Today, as always, the skeptic’s voice challenges the word of God, and each must choose to whom he will listen. Clarence Darrow, the famous lawyer and agnostic, declared, “No life is of much value, and . . . every death is [but a] little loss.”⁴ Schopenhauer, the German philosopher and pessimist, wrote, “To desire immortality is to desire the eternal perpetuation of a great mistake.”⁵ And to their words are added those of new generations, as foolish men crucify the Christ anew—for they modify His miracles, doubt His divinity, and reject His Resurrection.

Robert Blatchford, in his book *God and My Neighbor*, attacked with vigor accepted Christian beliefs, such as God, Christ, prayer, and immortality. He boldly asserted, “I claim to have proved everything I set out to prove so fully and decisively that no Christian, however great or able he may be, can answer my arguments or shake my case.”⁶ He surrounded himself with a wall of skepticism. Then a surprising thing happened. His wall suddenly crumbled to dust. He was left exposed and undefended. Slowly he began to feel his way back to the faith he had scorned and ridiculed. What had caused this profound change in his outlook? *His wife died*. With a broken heart, he went into the room where lay all that was mortal of her. He looked again at the face he loved so well. Coming out, he said to a friend: “It is she, and yet it is not she. Everything is changed. Something that was there before is taken away. She is not the same. What can be gone if it be not the soul?”

Later he wrote: “Death is not what some people imagine. It is only like going into another room. In that other room we shall find . . . the dear women and men and the sweet children we have loved and lost.”⁷

Testimonies of Christ's Resurrection

Against the doubting in today's world concerning Christ's divinity, we seek a point of reference, an unimpeachable source, even a testimony of eyewitnesses. Stephen, from biblical times, doomed to the cruel death of a martyr, looked up to heaven and cried, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."⁸

Who can help but be convinced by the stirring testimony of Paul to the Corinthians? He declared "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and . . . was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: . . . And," said Paul, "last of all he was seen of me."⁹

In our dispensation, this same testimony was spoken boldly by the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he and Sidney Rigdon testified, "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!"¹⁰

This is the knowledge that sustains. This is the truth that comforts. This is the assurance that guides those who are bowed down with grief—out of the shadows and into the light.

A family's testimony of the Resurrection

On Christmas Eve, 1997, I met a remarkable family. Each member of the family had an unshakable testimony of the truth and of the reality of the Resurrection. The family consisted of a mother and father and four children. Each of the children—three sons and a daughter—had been born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, and each was handicapped. Mark, who was then 16 years old, had undergone spinal surgery in an effort to help him move about more freely. The other two boys—Christopher, age 13, and Jason, age 10—were to leave for California in a few days to undergo similar surgery.

The only daughter, Shanna, was then five years old—a beautiful child. All of the children were intelligent and faith-filled, and it was obvious that their parents, Bill and Sherry, were proud of each one. We visited for a while, and the special spirit of that family filled my office and my heart. The father and I gave blessings to the two boys who were facing surgery, and then the parents asked if little Shanna could sing for me. Her father mentioned that she had diminished lung capacity and that it might be difficult for her, but that she wanted to try. To the accompaniment of a recorded cassette, and in a beautiful, clear voice—never missing a note—she sang of a brighter future:

On a beautiful day that I dream about
In a world I would love to see
Is a beautiful place where the sun
comes out
And it shines in the sky for me.
On this beautiful winter's morning,
If my wish could come true somehow,
Then the beautiful day that I dream
about
Would be here and now.¹¹

The emotions of all of us were very near the surface as she finished. The spirituality of this visit set the tone for my Christmas that year.

I kept in touch with the family, and when the oldest son, Mark, turned 19, arrangements were made for him to serve a special mission at Church headquarters. Eventually, the other two brothers also had an opportunity to serve such missions.

Nearly a year ago, Christopher, who was then 22 years old, succumbed to the disease with which each of the children has been afflicted. And then, last September, I received word that little Shanna, now 14 years old, had passed away. At the funeral services, Shanna was honored by beautiful tributes. Leaning on the pulpit for support, each of her surviving brothers, Mark and Jason, shared poignant family experiences. Shanna's mother sang a lovely musical

number as part of a duet. Her father and grandfather gave touching sermons. Though their hearts were broken, each bore powerful and deep-felt testimony of the reality of the Resurrection and of the actuality that Shanna lives still, as does her brother Christopher, each awaiting a glorious reunion with their beloved family.

When it was my time to speak, I recounted that visit the family made to my office nearly nine years earlier and spoke of the lovely song Shanna sang on that occasion. I concluded with the thought: "Because our Savior died at Calvary, death has no hold upon any one of us. Shanna lives, whole and well, and for her that beautiful day she sang about on a special Christmas Eve in 1997, the day she dreamed about, *is* here and now."

The Crucifixion and the Resurrection

My brothers and sisters, we laugh, we cry, we work, we play, we love, we live. And then we die. Death is our universal heritage. All must pass its portals. Death claims the aged, the weary and worn. It visits the youth in the bloom of hope and the glory of expectation. Nor are little children kept beyond its grasp. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "It is appointed unto men once to die."¹²

And dead we would remain but for one Man and His mission, even Jesus of Nazareth. Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, His birth fulfilled the inspired pronouncements of many prophets. He was taught from on high. He provided the life, the light, and the way. Multitudes followed Him. Children adored Him. The haughty rejected Him. He spoke in parables. He taught by example. He lived a perfect life.

Though the King of kings and Lord of lords had come, He was accorded by some the greeting given to an enemy, a traitor. There followed a mockery which some called a trial. Cries of "Crucify him, crucify him"¹³ filled the air. Then commenced the climb to Calvary's hill.

He was ridiculed, reviled, mocked, jeered, and nailed to a cross amidst shouts of "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."¹⁴ "He saved others; himself he cannot save."¹⁵ His response: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹⁶ "Into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."¹⁷ His body was placed by loving hands in a sepulchre hewn of stone.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, along with others, came to the sepulchre. To their astonishment, the body of their Lord was gone. Luke records that two men in shining garments stood by them and said: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."¹⁸

Next week the Christian world will celebrate the most significant event in recorded history. The simple pronouncement, "He is not here, but is risen," was the first confirmation of the literal Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The empty tomb that first Easter morning brought comforting assurance, an affirmative answer to Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"¹⁹

The assurance of everlasting life

To all who have lost loved ones, we would turn Job's question to an answer: If a man die, he *shall* live again. We know, for we have the light of revealed truth. "I am the resurrection, and the life," spoke the Master. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."²⁰

Through tears and trials, through fears and sorrows, through the heartache and loneliness of losing loved ones, there is assurance that life is everlasting. Our Lord and Savior is the living witness that such is so.

With all my heart and the fervency of my soul, I lift up my voice in testimony as a special witness and declare that God does live. Jesus is His Son, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. He is our Redeemer; He is our Mediator with the Father. He it was who died on the cross to atone for our sins. He became the first-fruits of the Resurrection. Because He died, all shall live again. "Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives: 'I know that my Redeemer lives!'"²¹ May the whole world know it and live by that knowledge, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior, amen.

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 42:45.
2. William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250–1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (1939), 628.
3. Job 14:14.
4. *The Story of My Life* (1932), 450.
5. Arthur Schopenhauer, in *The Home Book of Quotations*, sel. Burton Stevenson (1934), 969.

6. *God and My Neighbor* (1914).
7. See *More Things in Heaven and Earth: Adventures in Quest of a Soul* (1925), 11.
8. Acts 7:56.
9. 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, 8.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 76:22.
11. "The Beautiful Day," from the movie *Scrooge* (1970), music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse.
12. Hebrews 9:27.
13. Luke 23:21.
14. Mark 15:32.
15. Mark 15:31.
16. Luke 23:34.
17. Luke 23:46.
18. Luke 24:5–6.
19. Job 14:14.
20. John 11:25–26.
21. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 136; see also Job 19:25.

The choir sang "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

Elder Paul E. Koelliker offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second session of the 177th Annual General Conference convened in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 31, 2007. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst and Richard Elliott were the organists.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this afternoon to the second general session of the 177th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, radio, or the Internet, and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

This session is originating from the historic Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. It has been beautifully refurbished, and we will rededicate it during this session. As we sit here, it brings back a thousand memories as we contemplate the past when we held so many meetings of various kinds in this great hall.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with