

Because I Live, Ye Shall Live Also

EZRA TAFT BENSON

This has been a glorious Easter for us. For three and one-half hours the Council of the Twelve met in the temple this morning in our semiannual testimony meeting. Following that my wife and I went to our ward fast and testimony meeting, then visited Elder Stapley in the hospital. I am happy to report that he looks better and is better. Now we have come here tonight to conclude this glorious Easter day we shall long remember.

It is always a personal thrill and honor for me to be in the presence of you, the youth of Zion—"the rising generation," as the Book of Mormon calls you (see Mosiah 26:1; Alma 5:49). As the ancient apostle declared on the Mount of Transfiguration, "It is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4). I have been uplifted and inspired by the fitting, lovely music provided this Easter evening. Tonight I want to share my love, appreciation, and testimony concerning our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I love the Master, our divine Redeemer.

It is a sacred honor to bear witness to the divine mission of Jesus Christ; to represent His great Church; to be an ambassador of truth to our Father's children; and to be called by a prophet of the Lord to go into the world and proclaim the glad tidings that God has again spoken from the heavens, that He still

communicates with men on the earth, and that the pure gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth in its fullness for the last time. I rejoice in this glorious privilege, thank the Lord for this rich opportunity and blessing, and bear solemn witness to the truth of the message we carry to the world.

We meet here at this great University with a prayer of gratitude in our hearts and on our lips for the privilege of living in this choice period when the light of truth has burst forth. We meet in a great Christian nation—a nation with a solid spiritual foundation—but a nation which has departed in great measure from the basic principles of its founders. May God help us, as His covenant people, "to arise and shine forth" and be a standard for the nations and a light to the world, as the Lord has commanded us (see D&C 115:5).

As a people we have just joined with others of the Christian world in the celebration of Easter. It is therefore most fitting that we

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consider together that most glorious event, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There has been considerable publicity and media coverage recently on the reporting of experiences which seemingly verify that “life after life” is a reality. The ancient prophet’s question, asked centuries ago, has been revived. Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). In other words, what happens to a person once he dies? A definite answer to that question is provided by the Savior’s ministry in the spirit world following his crucifixion, death, and burial.

Even before the fall of Adam, which ushered death into the world, our Heavenly Father had prepared a place for the spirits who would eventually depart this mortal life. At the time of Jesus’ death, the spirit world was occupied by hosts of our Father’s children who had died—Adam’s posterity down to the death of Jesus, both the righteous and the wicked. There were two grand divisions in the world of spirits. Spirits of the righteous (the just) had gone to paradise, a state of happiness and a place of peace and restful work. The spirits of the wicked (the unjust) had gone to prison, a state of darkness and misery (see Alma 40:12–15). Jesus went only to the righteous—to paradise.

What I read to you now is a portion of a glorious vision of the redemption of the dead, given to President Joseph F. Smith and sustained and accepted by the Church as holy scripture in April of 1976.

Gathered together in one place [was] an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality;

. . . Who had . . . suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name.

All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection.

. . . They were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand.

They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death.

. . . While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful;

And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance.

. . . The saints rejoiced in the redemption, and bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell.

Their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the Lord rested upon them, and they sang praises unto his holy name. [JFS Vision 12–16, 18–19, 23–24]

Jesus did not go to the wicked, nor to prison. They were those who were unrepentant and “who had defiled themselves while in the flesh.” Again I quote:

From among the righteous, [the Lord] organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness. . . .

These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands,

And all other principles of the gospel that were necessary for them to know in order to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. [JFS Vision 20, 30, 33–34]

The spirit world is not far away. Our work is all one great program on both sides of the veil. Sometimes the veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. This I know! Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us. One Church president asked the

question, “But where is the spirit world?” and then answered his own question. “It is right here. . . . Do [spirits] go beyond the boundaries of this organized earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this earth, for the express purpose of inhabiting it to all eternity” (Brigham Young et al., *Journal of Discourses* 3:369; hereinafter cited as *JD*). He said also,

When the spirits leave their bodies they are in the presence of our Father and God, they are prepared then to see, hear and understand spiritual things. . . . If the Lord would permit it, and it was His will that it should be done, you could see the spirits that have departed from this world, as plainly as you now see bodies with your natural eyes. [JD 3:368]

What, then, is death like? Here is a simple incident as told by my friend, Dr. Peter Marshall, the late chaplain of the United States Senate:

In a certain home, a little boy, the only son, was ill with an incurable disease. Month after month the mother had tenderly nursed him, but as the weeks went by and he grew no better, the little fellow gradually began to understand the meaning of death and he, too, realized that soon he was to die. One day his mother had been reading the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and as she closed the book the boy lay silent for a moment, then asked the question that had been laying on his heart. “Mother, what is it like to die? Mother, does it hurt?” Quick tears filled her eyes. She sprang to her feet and fled to the kitchen, supposedly to go get something. She prayed on the way a silent prayer that the Lord would tell her what to say, and the Lord did tell her. Immediately she knew how to explain it to him. She said, as she returned from the kitchen, “Kenneth, you will remember when you were a little boy, you would play so hard you were too tired to undress and you tumbled into your mother’s bed and fell asleep. In the morning you would wake up and much to your surprise, you would find yourself in your own bed. In the night

*your father would pick you up in his big, strong arms and carry you to your own bedroom. Kenneth, death is like that; we just wake up one morning to find ourselves in the room where we belong because the Lord Jesus loves us.” The lad’s shining face looked up and told her there would be no more fear, only love and trust in his heart as he went to meet the Father in heaven. He never questioned again and several weeks later he fell asleep, just as she had said. This is what death is like. [Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter*, pp. 260–61]*

Yes, indisputably there is life after death. Mortality is a place of temporary duration—and so is the spirit world. As inevitable as death is to mortals, so also is an eventual resurrection to those in the spirit world.

On the third day following Jesus’ crucifixion, there was a great earthquake. The stone was rolled back from the door of the tomb. Some of the women among the most devoted of his followers came to the place with spices “and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.” Luke said that angels appeared and said simply, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:5, 6).

There is nothing in history to equal that dramatic announcement: “He is not here, but is risen.”

The greatest events of history are those which affect the greatest number for the longest periods. By this standard, no event could be more important to individuals or nations than the resurrection of the Master. The eventual resurrection of every soul who has lived and died on earth is a scriptural certainty, and surely there is no event for which one should make more careful preparation. A glorious resurrection should be the goal of every man and woman, for it is a reality; nothing is more absolutely universal than the resurrection. Every living being will be resurrected. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Almost

immediately after the glorious resurrection of the Lord, Matthew records:

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. [Matthew 27:52–53]

Yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was and is a glorious reality. He became “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). He truly rose from the tomb the third day, as he and his prophets foretold, and became in very deed “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25). He broke the bands of death for all of us. We, too, will be resurrected. Our spirits will be reunited with our bodies, never to be separated.

There is abundant testimony and verification to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Few principles of the gospel, if any, have greater scriptural support, than the resurrection. The witnesses are many. The risen Lord appeared to several women, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to Peter, to the Apostles, and “after that,” as reported by Paul, “he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. . . . And last of all,” continued Paul, “he was seen of me also” (1 Corinthians 15:6, 8).

Throughout the forty days following his resurrection the Lord manifested himself at intervals and gave instructions in things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Much that he said and did is not written, but such things as are recorded, John assures us, “are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

He had told his followers that he must soon ascend to his Father in heaven. And as the time of his ascension drew nigh, the Lord in that last solemn interview gave his parting instructions to his disciples. And when Christ and the disciples had gone “as far as to Bethany,” where

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived, the Lord “lifted up his hands, and blessed them.” And while he yet spoke he rose from their midst until “a cloud received him out of their sight.” As the apostles stood gazing steadfastly upward, two personages clothed in white apparel appeared by them. They spoke unto the eleven saying, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (see Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9–11).

Worshipfully and with great joy the apostles returned to Jerusalem. The Lord’s ascension was accomplished. It was truly a literal departure of a material being, as his resurrection had been an actual return of his spirit to his own physical body. Now the disciples began to comprehend more fully some of his last words: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Because of Christ, the grave has no permanent victory. Death has been overcome.

He lives today; of that I bear solemn witness. This same Jesus has already come to earth in our day. The resurrected Christ—glorified, exalted, the God of this world under the Father—appeared to the boy Joseph Smith in 1820. This same Jesus—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses, the Creator of this earth—has come in our day. He was introduced by the Father to Joseph Smith with these words: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith 2:17). There are some in our midst who sponsor the sophistry that this appearance of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, was not literal, that it was probably a product of the Prophet’s imaginings. That is an absolute falsehood. It is not only an attempt to discredit the testimony of Joseph Smith; it would discredit the testimony of Jesus himself who literally appeared to the Prophet as a witness of His own resurrection.

The appearance of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ to the boy prophet is the greatest event that has occurred in this world since the resurrection of the Master. As the restored Church of Jesus Christ, we humbly and gratefully bear witness to all men. This message is a world message. It is the truth, intended for all our Father's children. Hear now the further testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, who received this glorious vision in February 1832:

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!

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. [D&C 76:22–24]

Yes, my friends, beloved youth, and faithful teachers. Jesus is the Christ! He broke the bands of death. He is our Savior and Redeemer, the very Son of God. He will come again, as the scriptures proclaim. And that day is not far distant.

It is evident to all who accept the Savior's literal resurrection that life does not end in death. Our Lord promised, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). But there is additional significance of his resurrection to those of us who believe and accept latter-day revelation. I quote from the Prophet Joseph Smith, who describes in vision how the resurrection affects the family unit.

Would you think it strange if I relate what I have seen in vision in relation to this interesting theme [the resurrection]? Those who have died in Jesus Christ may expect to enter into all that fruition of joy when they come forth, which they possessed or anticipated here.

So plain was the vision, [he continues,] that I actually saw men, before they had ascended from the tomb, as though they were getting up slowly. They took each other by the hand and said to each other, "My father, my son, my mother, my daughter, my brother, my sister." And when the voice calls for the dead to arise, suppose I am laid by the side of my father, what would be the first joy of my heart? To meet my father, my mother, my brother, my sister; and when they are by my side, I embrace them and they me. . . .

*God has revealed His Son from the heavens and the doctrine of the resurrection also; and have a knowledge that those we bury here God will bring up again, clothed upon and quickened by the Spirit of the great God; and what mattereth it whether we lay them down, or we lay down with them when we can keep them no longer? Let these truths sink down in our hearts, that we may even here begin to enjoy that which shall be in full hereafter. [Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 295–96]*

Yes, it was through the Prophet Joseph Smith that the God of heaven revealed the truth that the family may endure beyond the grave—that our sympathies, affections, and love for each other may exist forever. One of the early apostles of this dispensation, Elder Parley P. Pratt, wrote of this as follows:

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the foundation of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity. . . .

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal

priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his [family]. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband. . . .

*I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this groveling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also. [Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, pp. 297–98]*

You, my beloved young people, qualify for these blessings as you go with a companion to the house of the Lord and receive the sealing ordinances which bind the family unit beyond the grave. These blessings are received in no other way; for, as the Lord has decreed, “Except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory” (D&C 132:19).

But there is another responsibility you have in binding your family unit together; this, too, revealed through the Prophet of this dispensation. Jesus had said to his apostles, “The works I do shall [ye] do also; and greater works than these shall [ye] do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). One of the works he has commissioned in these latter days is that we, who have renewed the covenants of exaltation,

do the ordinance and sealing work for our progenitors who have not had the opportunity to receive the gospel while in mortality. Ours is the privilege of opening the doors of salvation to these souls who may be imprisoned in darkness in the world of spirits, that they may receive the light of the gospel and be judged the same as us.

“The works I do [proffering the saving ordinances of the gospel to others] shall [ye] do also.” How many thousands of your kindred yet await these sealing ordinances? Have you done all you can as a family on this side of the veil? Will you be a savior to them—your own progenitors? Without them, you cannot be made perfect; exaltation is a family affair. May God bless you, the youth of Israel, to go forward in this great work of your Heavenly Father’s kingdom.

Tonight I gratefully bear my testimony to our risen Redeemer. I assure you that he lives—today—and is governing the affairs of his Church. Because he lives, we shall also. Because he lives, the love and family association we cherish on this side of the veil may be perpetuated into the eternities. Because he lives, we may share in the glory which is enjoyed by the holiest of all: our Father in heaven. May God bless us to do all that he has required so that we may merit all the blessings that come through his resurrection and atonement—even that of exaltation and eternal lives—in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.