

To those in the Assembly Hall, we note that Elders Neal A. Maxwell, Douglas J. Martin, and Albert Choules, Jr., are seated on the stand.

We send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, directed by Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger and accompanied by John Longhurst, will provide the music for this session.

The choir will begin this service by singing "Great Is the Lord." The invocation will then be offered by Elder J. Richard Clarke of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Great Is the Lord."

Elder J. Richard Clarke offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Brother Clarke. The choir will now sing "Let the Mountains Shout for Joy." Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will then speak to us.

The choir sang "Let the Mountains Shout for Joy."

Elder Russell M. Nelson

This morning Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke of the "fountains of life." This afternoon I should like to speak of the "doors of death." Both are crucial components of life.

Recently at the funeral of a friend, I visited with two distinguished brothers—former surgical colleagues of mine—whose lovely companions had both passed away. They said they were going through the most difficult period of their lives, adjusting to the almost unbearable loss of their partners. These wonderful men then told of their cooking breakfast for each other once a week, sharing that rotation with their sister, trying to lessen their loneliness imposed by the doors of death.

Death separates "the spirit and the body [which] are the soul of man" (D&C 88:15). That separation evokes pangs of sorrow and shock among those left behind. The hurt is real. Only its intensity varies. Some doors are heavier than others. The sense of tragedy may be related to age. Generally the younger the victim, the greater the grief. Yet even when the elderly or

infirm have been afforded merciful relief, their loved ones are rarely ready to let go. The only length of life that seems to satisfy the longings of the human heart is life everlasting.

Mourning

Irrespective of age, we mourn for those loved and lost. Mourning is one of the deepest expressions of pure love. It is a natural response in complete accord with divine commandment: "Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die" (D&C 42:45).

Moreover, we can't fully appreciate joyful reunions later without tearful separations now. The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life.

Eternal perspective

Eternal perspective provides peace "which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). In speaking at a funeral of a loved one, the Prophet

Joseph Smith offered this admonition: "When we lose a near and dear friend, upon whom we have set our hearts, it should be a caution unto us. . . . Our affections should be placed upon God and His work, more intensely than upon our fellow beings" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 216).

Life does not begin with birth, nor does it end with death. Prior to our birth, we dwelled as spirit children with our Father in Heaven. There we eagerly anticipated the possibility of coming to earth and obtaining a physical body. Knowingly we wanted the risks of mortality, which would allow the exercise of agency and accountability. "This life [was to become] a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God" (Alma 12:24). But we regarded the returning home as the best part of that long-awaited trip, just as we do now. Before embarking on any journey, we like to have some assurance of a round-trip ticket. Returning from earth to life in our heavenly home requires passage through—and not around—the doors of death. We were born to die, and we die to live (see 2 Corinthians 6:9). As seedlings of God, we barely blossom on earth; we fully flower in heaven.

Physical death

The writer of Ecclesiastes said, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2; see also Alma 12:27).

Think of the alternative. If all 69 billion people who have ever lived on earth were still here, imagine the traffic jam! And we could own virtually nothing and scarcely make any responsible decisions.

Plan of happiness

Scriptures teach that death is *essential* to happiness: "Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would *destroy* the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8; italics added; see also 2 Nephi 9:6).

Our limited perspective would be enlarged if we could witness the reunion on the other side of the veil, when doors of death open to those returning home. Such was the vision of the psalmist who wrote, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Spiritual death

But there is another type of separation known in scripture as spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 9:12; Alma 12:16; 42:9; Helaman 14:16, 18). It "is defined as a *state of spiritual alienation from God*" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 2:217). Thus, one can be very much alive physically but dead spiritually.

Spiritual death is more likely when goals are unbalanced toward things physical. Paul explained this concept to the Romans: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13).

If physical death should strike before moral wrongs have been made right, opportunity for repentance will have been forfeited. Thus, "the [real] sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56).

Even the Savior cannot save us in our sins. He will redeem us from our sins, but only upon condition of our repentance. We are responsible for our own spiritual survival or death (see Romans 8:13–14; Helaman 14:18; D&C 29:41–45).

Coping with trials

Physical and spiritual trials provide continuing challenges in life. Each of you could provide illustrations from personal experience. Many of you, for instance, are at the twilight of life and endure long and difficult days. You know well the meaning of that divine injunction to endure to the end (see Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13; 1 Nephi 13:37; 22:31; 2 Nephi 31:16; 33:4; Omni 1:26; 3 Nephi 15:9; D&C 14:7; 18:22; 24:8).

The Savior of the world repeatedly asked that we pattern our lives after His (see John 13:15; 14:6; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Nephi 31:9, 16; 3 Nephi 18:16; 27:27). So we must endure trials—as did He. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

When hardship heaps its heavy load upon us, good may yet be gleaned. Shakespeare so wrote:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
[*As You Like It*, act 2, scene 1, lines 12–14]

The Lord’s expression is even more explicit: “After much tribulation come the blessings” (D&C 58:4).

Postmortal life

Mortality, temporary as it is, is terminated by the doors of death. Questions then come to searching minds of those left behind: “Where is my loved one now?” “What happens after death?” While many questions cannot be fully answered with available knowledge, much is known.

Paradise

The first station in postmortal life is named paradise. Alma wrote:

“Concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me . . . that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, . . . are taken home to that God who gave them life.

“ . . . The spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace” (Alma 40:11–12).

Resurrection and immortality

Some facetiously state that nothing is as permanent as death. Not so! The grip of physical death is temporary. It began with the fall of Adam; it ended with the atonement of Jesus the Christ. The waiting period in paradise is temporary too. It ends with the Resurrection. From the Book of Mormon we learn that the “paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls” (2 Nephi 9:13).

A few years ago our stake president and his wife had a wonderful son taken in his youthful prime because of an automobile accident. We are consoled by the knowledge that the very laws that could not allow his broken body to survive here are the same eternal laws which the Lord will employ at the time of the Resurrection, when that body “shall be restored to [its] proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23; see also 11:42–45).

The Lord who created us in the first place surely has power to do it again. The same necessary elements

now in our bodies will still be available—at His command. The same unique genetic code now embedded in each of our living cells will still be available to format new ones then. The miracle of the Resurrection, wondrous as it will be, is marvelously matched by the miracle of our creation in the first place.

Judgment

Our resurrection will not be an end but a new beginning. It will prepare us for judgment by the Lord, who said, "As I have been lifted up [upon the cross] by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works" (3 Nephi 27:14).

Even before we approach that threshold of the eternal court of justice, we know who will personally preside:

"The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

"And whoso knocketh, to him will he open" (2 Nephi 9:41–42).

Family ties

Loving relationships continue beyond the doors of death and judgment. Family ties endure because of sealings in the temple. Their importance cannot be overstated.

I remember vividly an experience I had as a passenger in a small two-propeller airplane. One of its engines suddenly burst open and caught on fire. The propeller of the flaming engine was starkly stilled. As we plummeted in a steep spiral dive toward the earth, I expected to die. Some of the passengers screamed in hysterical panic. Miraculously, the precipitous dive extinguished the flames. Then, by starting up the other engine, the pilot was

able to stabilize the plane and bring us down safely.

Throughout that ordeal, though I "knew" death was coming, my paramount feeling was that I was not afraid to die. I remember a sense of returning home to meet ancestors for whom I had done temple work. I remember my deep sense of gratitude that my sweetheart and I had been sealed eternally to each other and to our children, born and reared in the covenant. I realized that our marriage in the temple was my most important accomplishment. Honors bestowed upon me by men could not approach the inner peace provided by sealings performed in the house of the Lord.

That harrowing experience consumed but a few minutes, yet my entire life flashed before my mind. Having had such rapid recall when facing death, I do not doubt the scriptural promise of "perfect remembrance" when facing judgment (Alma 5:18; see also Alma 11:43).

Eternal life

After judgment comes the possibility of eternal life—the kind of life that our Heavenly Father lives. His celestial realm has been compared with the glory of the sun (see 1 Corinthians 15:41; D&C 76:96). It is available to all who prepare for it, the requirements of which have been clearly revealed: "Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20; see also John 17:3).

Time to prepare

Meanwhile, we who tarry here have a few precious moments remaining "to prepare to meet God" (Alma

34:32). Unfinished business is our worst business. Perpetual procrastination must yield to perceptive preparation. Today we have a little more time to bless others—time to be kinder, more compassionate, quicker to thank and slower to scold, more generous in sharing, more gracious in caring.

Then when our turn comes to pass through the doors of death, we can say as did Paul: "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:6-7).

We need not look upon death as an enemy. With our full understanding and preparation, faith supplants fear. Hope displaces despair. The Lord said, "Fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full" (D&C 101:36). He bestowed this gift: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

As a special witness of Jesus Christ, I testify that He lives! I also testify that the veil of death is very thin. I know by experiences too sacred to

relate that those who have gone before are not strangers to leaders of this Church. To us and to you, our loved ones may be just as close as the next room—separated only by the doors of death.

With that assurance, brothers and sisters, love life! Cherish each moment as a blessing from God (see Mosiah 2:21). Live it well—even to your loftiest potential. Then the anticipation of death shall not hold you hostage. With the help of the Lord, your deeds and desires will qualify you to receive everlasting joy, glory, immortality, and eternal lives. For this I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard, also a member of the Council of the Twelve. He will be followed by Sister Ardeth G. Kapp, released yesterday as General President of the Young Women.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Sacrifices of pioneers

Last October we listened to many inspired conference messages. In his Sunday morning address, President Gordon B. Hinckley called to our attention some of the poignant experiences of our pioneer forefathers whose sacrifices helped them lay the foundation of the restored Church. Our hearts were softened and our spirits grew tender with emotion as we listened to him recount experiences of some of those hardy handcart pioneers.

The images engendered in my mind and heart have not left me. Again and again, I find my thoughts returning

to the high, snow-covered, windswept plains of Wyoming. In my mind's eye, I see the suffering of those faithful Saints and know that in their extremity, under circumstances hard for us today to conceive, many of them came to know God in a way that few people will ever understand.

Margaret McNeil Ballard

Many of us are descendants of hardy pioneers, and we feel grateful and inspired by their faith-promoting examples of sacrifice. My great-grandmother Margaret McNeil Ballard recorded in her journal a pioneer expe-