

President Thomas S. Monson

This has been a remarkable session. In behalf of all who participated thus far in word or music, as the President of the Church, I have chosen simply to say to you at this moment just two words, known as the two most important words in the English language. To Sister Cheryl Lant and her counselors, the choir, the musicians, the speakers, those words are “Thank you.”

A painting of a tragic story

Many years ago, while in London, England, I visited the famed Tate art gallery. Works by Gainsborough, Rembrandt, Constable, and other renowned artists were displayed in room after room. I admired their beauty and recognized the skill which had been required to create these masterpieces. Tucked away in a quiet corner of the third floor, however, was a painting which not only caught my attention but also captured my heart. The artist, Frank Bramley, had painted a humble cottage facing a windswept sea. Two women, the mother and the wife of an absent fisherman, had watched and waited the night through for his return. Now the night had passed, and the realization had set in that he had been lost at sea and would not return. Kneeling at the side of her mother-in-law, her head buried in the lap of the older woman, the young wife wept in despair. The spent candle on the window ledge told of the fruitless vigil.

I sensed the young woman’s heartache; I felt her grief. The hauntingly vivid inscription which the artist gave to his work told the tragic story. It read, *A Hopeless Dawn*.

Oh, how the young woman longed for the comfort, even the reality, of Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Requiem”:

Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.¹

“If a man die, shall he live again?”

Among all the facts of mortality, none is so certain as its end. Death comes to all; it is our “universal heritage; it may claim its victim[s] in infancy or youth, [it may visit] in the period of life’s prime, or its summons may be deferred until the snows of age have gathered upon the . . . head; it may befall as the result of accident or disease, . . . or . . . through natural causes; but come it must.”² It inevitably represents a painful loss of association and, particularly in the young, a crushing blow to dreams unrealized, ambitions unfulfilled, and hopes vanquished.

What mortal being, faced with the loss of a loved one or, indeed, standing himself or herself on the threshold of infinity, has not pondered what lies beyond the veil which separates the seen from the unseen?

Centuries ago the man Job—so long blessed with every material gift, only to find himself sorely afflicted by all that can befall a human being—sat with his companions and uttered the timeless, ageless question, “If a man die, shall he live again?”³ Job spoke what every other living man or woman has pondered.

This glorious Easter morning I’d like to consider Job’s question—“If a man die, shall he live again?”—and provide the answer which comes not only from thoughtful consideration but also from the revealed word of God. I begin with the essentials.

The Creation

If there is a design in this world in which we live, there must be a Designer. Who can behold the many wonders of the universe without believing that there is a design for all mankind? Who can doubt that there is a Designer?

In the book of Genesis we learn that the Grand Designer created the heaven and the

earth: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

“Let there be light,” said the Grand Designer, “and there was light.” He created a firmament. He separated the land from the waters and said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, . . . the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself.”

Two lights He created—the sun and the moon. Came the stars by His design. He called for living creatures in the water and fowls to fly above the earth. And it was so. He made cattle, beasts, and creeping things. The design was nearly complete.

Last of all, He created man in His own image—male and female—with dominion over all other living things.⁴

Man alone received intelligence—a brain, a mind, and a soul. Man alone, with these attributes, had the capacity for faith and hope, for inspiration and ambition.

Who could persuasively argue that man—the noblest work of the Great Designer, with dominion over all living things, with a brain and a will, with a mind and a soul, with intelligence and divinity—should come to an end when the spirit forsakes its earthly temple?

The Savior’s mission

To understand the meaning of death, we must appreciate the purpose of life. The dim light of belief must yield to the noonday sun of revelation, by which we know that we lived before our birth into mortality. In our premortal state, we were doubtless among the sons and daughters of God who shouted for joy because of the opportunity to come to this challenging yet necessary mortal existence.⁵ We knew that our purpose was to gain a physical body, to overcome trials, and to prove that we would keep the commandments of God. Our Father knew that because of the nature of mortality, we would be tempted, would sin, and would fall short. So that we might have every chance of success, He provided a Savior, who would suffer and die for us.

Not only would He atone for our sins, but as a part of that Atonement, He would also overcome the physical death to which we would be subject because of the Fall of Adam.

Thus, more than 2,000 years ago, Christ, our Savior, was born to mortal life in a stable in Bethlehem. The long-foretold Messiah had come.

There was very little written of the boyhood of Jesus. I love the passage from Luke: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”⁶ And from the book of Acts, there is a short phrase concerning the Savior which has a world of meaning: “[He] went about doing good.”⁷

He was baptized by John in the river Jordan. He called the Twelve Apostles. He blessed the sick. He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life. He taught, He testified, and He provided a perfect example for us to follow.

Gethsemane and Calvary

And then the mortal mission of the Savior of the world drew to its close. A last supper with His Apostles took place in an upper room. Ahead lay Gethsemane and Calvary’s cross.

No mere mortal can conceive the full import of what Christ did for us in Gethsemane. He Himself later described the experience: “[The] suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit.”⁸

Following the agony of Gethsemane, now drained of strength, He was seized by rough, crude hands and taken before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. He was accused and cursed. Vicious blows further weakened His pain-racked body. Blood ran down His face as a cruel crown fashioned of sharp thorns was forced onto His head, piercing His brow. And then once again He was taken to Pilate, who

gave in to the cries of the angry mob: “Crucify him, crucify him.”⁹

He was scourged with a whip into whose multiple leather strands sharp metals and bones were woven. Rising from the cruelty of the scourge, with stumbling steps He carried His own cross until He could go no farther and another shouldered the burden for Him.

Finally, on a hill called Calvary, while helpless followers looked on, His wounded body was nailed to a cross. Mercilessly He was mocked and cursed and derided. And yet He cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹⁰

The agonizing hours passed as His life ebbed. From His parched lips came the words, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”¹¹

As the serenity and solace of a merciful death freed Him from the sorrows of mortality, He returned to the presence of His Father.

At the last moment, the Master could have turned back. But He did not. He passed beneath all things that He might save all things. His lifeless body was hurriedly but gently placed in a borrowed tomb.

“He is not here, but is risen”

No words in Christendom mean more to me than those spoken by the angel to the weeping Mary Magdalene and the other Mary when, on the first day of the week, they approached the tomb to care for the body of their Lord. Spoke the angel:

“Why seek ye the living among the dead?

“He is not here, but is risen.”¹²

Our Savior lived again. The most glorious, comforting, and reassuring of all events of human history had taken place—the victory over death. The pain and agony of Gethsemane and Calvary had been wiped away. The salvation of mankind had been secured. The Fall of Adam had been reclaimed.

The empty tomb that first Easter morning was the answer to Job’s question, “If a man die, shall he live again?” To all within the sound of my voice, I declare, If a man die, he shall live again. We know, for we have the light of revealed truth.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹³

I have read—and I believe—the testimonies of those who experienced the grief of Christ’s Crucifixion and the joy of His Resurrection. I have read—and I believe—the testimonies of those in the New World who were visited by the same risen Lord.

I believe the testimony of one who, in this dispensation, spoke with the Father and the Son in a grove now called sacred and who gave his life, sealing that testimony with his blood. Declared he:

“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.”¹⁴

The darkness of death can always be dispelled by the light of revealed truth. “I am the resurrection, and the life,” spoke the Master.¹⁵ “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”¹⁶

A boy’s powerful testimony

Over the years I have heard and read testimonies too numerous to count, shared with me by individuals who testify of the reality of the Resurrection and who have received, in their hours of greatest need, the peace and comfort promised by the Savior.

I will mention just part of one such account. Two weeks ago I received a touching letter from a father of seven who wrote about his family and, in particular, his son Jason, who had become ill when 11 years

of age. Over the next few years, Jason's illness recurred several times. This father told of Jason's positive attitude and sunny disposition, despite his health challenges. Jason received the Aaronic Priesthood at age 12 and "always willingly magnified his responsibilities with excellence, whether he felt well or not." He received his Eagle Scout Award when he was 14 years old.

Last summer, not long after Jason's 15th birthday, he was once again admitted to the hospital. On one of his visits to see Jason, his father found him with his eyes closed. Not knowing whether Jason was asleep or awake, he began talking softly to him. "Jason," he said, "I know you have been through a lot in your short life and that your current condition is difficult. Even though you have a giant battle ahead, I don't ever want you to lose your faith in Jesus Christ." He said he was startled as Jason immediately opened his eyes and said, "Never!" in a clear, resolute voice. Jason then closed his eyes and said no more.

His father wrote: "In this simple declaration, Jason expressed one of the most powerful, pure testimonies of Jesus Christ that I have ever heard. . . . As his declaration of 'Never!' became imprinted on my soul that day, my heart filled with joy that my Heavenly Father had blessed me to be the father of such a tremendous and noble boy. . . . [It] was the last time I heard him declare his testimony of Christ."

Although his family was expecting this to be just another routine hospitalization, Jason passed away less than two weeks later. An older brother and sister were serving missions at the time. Another brother, Kyle, had just received his mission call. In fact, the call had come earlier than expected, and on August 5, just a week before Jason's passing, the family gathered in his hospital room so that Kyle's mission call could be opened there and shared with the entire family.

In his letter to me, this father included a photograph of Jason in his hospital bed, with his big brother Kyle standing beside the bed, holding his mission call. This caption was written beneath the photograph: "Called to serve their missions together—on both sides of the veil."

Jason's brother and sister already serving missions sent beautiful, comforting letters home to be shared at Jason's funeral. His sister, serving in the Argentina Buenos Aires West Mission, as part of her letter, wrote: "I know that Jesus Christ lives, and because He lives, all of us, including our beloved Jason, will live again too. . . . We can take comfort in the sure knowledge we have that we have been sealed together as an eternal family. . . . If we do our very best to obey and do better in this life, we will see [him again]." She continued: "[A] scripture that I have long loved now takes on new significance and importance at this time. . . . [From] Revelation chapter 21, verse 4: 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.'"

My beloved brothers and sisters, in our hour of deepest sorrow, we can receive profound peace from the words of the angel that first Easter morning: "He is not here: for he is risen."¹⁷

He is risen! He is risen!
Tell it out with joyful voice.
He has burst his three days' prison;
Let the whole wide earth rejoice.
Death is conquered; man is free.
Christ has won the victory!¹⁸

As one of His special witnesses on earth today, this glorious Easter Sunday, I declare that this is true, in His sacred name—even the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior—amen.