

Our Father's Glorious Plan

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Early in my training as a physician, I had the privilege of helping a young mother deliver her first child. She was calm, focused, and happy. When the baby was delivered, I handed the precious newborn to her. With tears of happiness streaming down her face, she took that brand-new baby into her arms and examined him from head to toe. She held him close and loved him as only a mother can. It was a privilege to be in that room with her.

Such was the beginning of life for each of us. Yet was our birth truly the beginning? The world sees birth and death as the beginning and the end. But because of God's holy plan, we know that birth and death are actually just milestones on our journey to eternal life with our Heavenly Father.¹ They are essential parts of our Father's plan—sacred moments when mortality and heaven intersect. Today, reflecting on what I have learned from observing birth and death through my years of medical practice and Church service, I want to testify of our Father's glorious plan.

"Before we were born, we lived with God, the Father of our spirits. All [of us] on earth are literally brothers and sisters" in His family,² and each of us is precious to Him. We lived with Him for eons of time before our mortal birth—learning, choosing, and preparing.

Because Heavenly Father loves us, He wants us to have the greatest gift He can give, the gift of eternal life.³ He could not simply give us this gift; we had to receive it by choosing Him and His ways. This required that we leave His presence and begin a wonderful and challenging journey of faith, growth, and becoming. The journey our Father prepared for us is called the plan of salvation or the plan of happiness.⁴

In a grand premortal council, our Father told us about His plan.⁵ When we understood it, we were so happy that we shouted for joy, and "the morning stars sang together."⁶

That plan is built upon three grand pillars: the pillars of eternity.⁷

The first pillar is the Creation of the earth, the setting for our mortal journey.⁸

The second pillar is the Fall of our first earthly parents, Adam and Eve. Because of the Fall, some marvelous things were given to us. We were able to be born and receive a physical body.⁹ I will be forever grateful to my mother for bringing my brothers and me into the world and teaching us about God.

God also gave us moral agency—the ability and privilege of choosing and acting for ourselves.¹⁰ To help us choose well, Heavenly Father gave us commandments. Each day, as we keep His commandments, we show God that we love Him, and He blesses our lives.¹¹

Knowing that we would not always choose well—or in other words, sin—Father gave us the third pillar: the Savior Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Through His suffering, Christ paid the price for both physical death and sin.¹² He taught, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”¹³

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, always keeping His Father's commandments. “He walked the roads of Palestine,” teaching the truths of eternity, “healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead.”¹⁴ He “went about doing good”¹⁵ and “entreated all to follow His example.”¹⁶

At the end of His mortal life, He knelt down and prayed, saying:

“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. ...

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”¹⁷

Christ helped us better understand the magnitude of His suffering when He told the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

“Which 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.”¹⁸

There in the Garden of Gethsemane, He began to pay the price for our sins and our sicknesses, our pains and our infirmities.¹⁹ Because He did, we will never be alone in those infirmities if we choose to walk with Him. “He was arrested and condemned on spurious charges, convicted to satisfy a mob, and sentenced to die on Calvary's cross.” On the cross “He gave [up] His life to atone for the sins of all mankind [in] a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.”²⁰

He declared:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

"And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world."²¹

Then, on the first day of the week,²² He rose from the tomb with a perfect resurrected body, never to die again. And because He did, so will we.

I testify that Christ did indeed rise from the tomb. But to rise from that tomb, He first had to die. And so must we.

Another of the great blessings of my life has been to feel the closeness of heaven during those moments when I sit at the bedside of people as they pass away. Early one morning some years ago, I entered the hospital room of a faithful Latter-day Saint widow who had cancer. Two of her daughters were sitting with her. As I went to her bedside, I quickly discovered that she was no longer suffering, because she had just died.

In that moment of death, the room was filled with peace. Her daughters had a sweet sadness, but their hearts were filled with faith. They knew that their mother was not gone but had returned home.²³ Even in our moments of deepest grief, in the moments when time stands still and life seems so unfair, we can find comfort in our Savior because He suffered as well.²⁴ It was a privilege for me to be in that room.

When we die, our spirits leave our bodies, and we go to the next stage of our journey, the spirit world. It is a place of learning, repentance, forgiveness, and becoming²⁵ where we await the Resurrection.²⁶

On some future great day, everyone who has ever been born will rise from the tomb. Our spirits and our physical bodies will be reunited in their perfect form. Everyone will be resurrected, "both old and young, ... both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous," and "every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame."²⁷

After the Resurrection we will have the supreme blessing of being judged by our Savior, who said:

"I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

"And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world."²⁸

And then, through Christ and His Atonement, all who choose to follow Him through faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end²⁹ will find that their journey's end is to receive "their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life."³⁰

They will return to their Father's presence to live with Him forever. May we choose well.

There is so much more to our existence than just what happens between birth and death. I invite you to come and follow Christ.³¹

I invite all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to, each day, "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, ... [that] through the shedding of the blood of Christ, ... ye [may] become holy, without spot."³²

I invite those who are not yet members of this Church to come and read the Book of Mormon and listen to the missionaries. Come and have faith and repent of your sins. Come and be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost. Come and live a happy, Christ-filled life. As you come to Him and keep His commandments, I promise that you can find peace and purpose in this often tumultuous mortal experience and "eternal life in the world to come."³³

For those who have experienced these truths and for whatever reason have wandered away, I invite you to come back. Come back today. Our Father and the Savior love you. I testify that Christ has the power to answer your questions, heal your pains and sorrows, and forgive your sins. I know this is true. I know that all these things are true. Christ lives! This is His Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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