

Some Observations on the Law of the Harvest

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I would like to share, for your prayerful consideration, some observations on the purpose of our mortal existence—on the point of our coming here to earth. According to scripture, that purpose is to permit us to pass through the death introduced by Adam unto fullness of life everlasting made possible by Jesus Christ. About this purpose, scripture is abundantly clear. Adam fell and introduced death into the world. In doing this he fulfilled the purpose of God in our creation. He “fell that men might be”—that humankind might realize their divine potential. We could not realize that potential if we did not first experience death. Jesus Christ came into the world that all might pass through the experience of death to life and full and everlasting. As he himself said, “He that hearth my word, and believeth on him that sent me . . . is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). “I have come,” he said, “that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness” (New English Bible, John 10:10).

So I repeat: to pass from death unto fullness of life everlasting—that is the purpose of our mortal existence, why we came to earth. Without this mortal experience, without Adam’s bringing death into the world, and

without the saving works of Jesus Christ, we could not attain the very purpose of our being—everlasting fullness of life.

Thus my aim is to share some observations about the purpose of mortal existence. My desire is that our understanding, our awareness, of our purpose for coming to earth might be renewed or enlarged. To make it easier to follow what I say, I will number each observation I make. Needless to say, there is much that could be said that will not be.

First Observation

Consider first the significance of life and death when these terms are used to express our purpose for coming to earth. When Jesus says that whoever receives his word and believes on him who sent him is “pass from death unto life,” the term “life”—the Greek term *zoe*—means everlasting fullness of life. Life in this sense—everlasting fullness of life—constitutes humankind’s Highest Possibility, our Ultimate Good, the overall End of our existence. The whole purpose of God in making

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possible our eternal existence is to bring to pass our never-ending fullness of life (Moses 1:39). That is what God is all about. And what we are all about.

Death is defined and explained in terms of life as life's opposition—as life's absolute negation. So death means the entire "corruption" (Galatians 6:8) and "destruction" (Matthew 7:13) of all that makes life full and everlasting. Death refers to human existence that is not full. It refers in the final analysis to human existence that is void and empty; existence that is dark, spiritless, and miserable; existence without continuation of lives (2 Nephi 32:4; Alma 12:6; Mosiah 3:25; and D&C 132:22). Scripture teaches that death in this sense is human existence contrary to the nature of a God, existence cut off from his presence (Alma 41:11, 40:26).

Thus defined, life and death constitute the grand alternatives, the overall possibilities of human existence. Life everlasting and full is our highest possibility; and death is the corruption and destruction of that possibility. Life and death thus defined are our ultimate options, in terms of which all other choices, all other options, are finally to be understood. As Lehi saw, in the final analysis our freedom as human beings has to do with whether we "choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or . . . choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:27).

Second Observation

Everlasting fullness of life and its opposite, death, are universal categories, the ultimate possibilities of persons everywhere. Whatever their way of living, whatever their time, place, or culture, all persons finally stand before these grand alternatives—fullness of life or death.

We do not face these great alternatives from a position outside them—from a neutral position. Because of Adam's fall and the workings of sin in the world, we all face the possibilities of life and death from a place in the world

already marked by death. In other words, we stand before our highest possibility and its negation "in a lost and in a fallen state" (1 Nephi 10:6). In brief, all of us face the great alternatives of life and death already in the grip of death, in a mode of existence contrary to the nature of happiness (Alma 41:11)—a mode that, as Lehi told his son Jacob, would naturally result in our perishing from that which is good and in our becoming miserable forever (2 Nephi 2:5).

In our fallen state, living in the unredeemed world marked by death, we all at some time hunger and thirst for life. Scripture sometimes represents this hunger and thirst for life as a desire to partake of the fruit of the tree of life that stands opposite the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden (2 Nephi 2:15). This fruit alone can everlastingly satisfy our hunger and thirst for life—our desire to realize our highest possibility as human beings. As Alma said of those who reach that tree and eat of its fruit and never become ashamed and depart from it: "And ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst" (Alma 32:42).

Third Observation

Our passing from death unto life is something of profound seriousness. Of this the prophets and the heavens are keenly aware. Of course, all of us may recognize intellectually that whether or not we reach our highest possibility is pretty important. But this sort of recognition is not the same thing as the moving awareness that God's prophets and the heavens have of what is ultimately at stake in our passing through death to life full and never ending. For them—both the prophets and the heavens—our purpose for being here truly is a matter of life and death, whereas for many of us the tragedy of eternal death has not yet really dawned on us, and the possibility of our own

everlasting fullness of life seems beyond our grasp.

On this point recall the experience of Enoch. He witnessed the mighty God of the whole universe weeping over those who had embraced the ways of death, and at first Enoch seemingly could not comprehend what he was witnessing. In Moses we read:

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept, and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains?

And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? [Moses 7:28–29]

The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood. [Moses 7:32–33]

Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of mine hands.

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Enoch, and told Enoch all the doings of the children of men; wherefore Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their misery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook. [Moses 7:40–41]

What makes spiritual death particularly dreadful in the eyes of the prophets and the heavens is that our time for passing from death into life is limited. The time for escaping death is called our probationary period. For those who choose not to take the path from death to life, the time will come when, in the words of Samuel the prophet, the “days of probation are

past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure” (Helaman 13:38).

Because our probationary period is limited, those in the work of the Lord who are aware of what is at stake in our being here on earth become consumed with the urgent desire to assist their fellow beings in embracing the word of life—the gospel of Christ. The sons of Mosiah, you may recall, experience personally the awful state of those who persist in the ways of death until it is everlastingly too late (Mosiah 27). Accordingly,

they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble. [Mosiah 28:3]

But we—all humankind—can escape death. None need perish. God offers to all through his son Jesus Christ the way to life everlasting and full. Consider once more the experience of Enoch. After Enoch became profoundly aware of the fate of those who suffer spiritual death, his mind was opened so that he comprehended how all can escape death through Jesus Christ. And his soul rejoiced. Let me read from the text.

And as Enoch saw this [the fate of those who had not escaped sin and death], he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: I will refuse to be comforted; but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your heart and be glad; and look.

And it came to pass the Enoch looked; and from Noah, he beheld all the families of the earth; and he cried unto the Lord, saying: When shall the day of the Lord come? When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified and have eternal life?

And the Lord said: It shall be in the meridian of time, in the days of wickedness and vengeance.

And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world; and through faith I am in the bosom of the Father, and behold, Zion is with me. [Moses 7:44–47]

Lehi underwent an experience similar to Enoch's. He was deeply troubled by the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem, and so he "prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people" (1 Nephi 1:5). Then he saw in vision the pathway by which all humankind could escape death and enjoy eternal life. And

he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him. [1 Nephi 1:14–15]

Fourth Observation

The Passing from death unto life entails an awakening and flowering of our vitality as living beings that result in a fullness of life, which is desirable above all that is desirable. Alma uses an analogy to describe this coming to life (see Alma 32). He likens the word of life to a seed (Philippians 2:16; Alma 32:28) that we can, if we choose, plant in our hearts. The word of life is actually the seed of the tree of life that stood in the Garden of Eden (Alma 32:40–41). Alma says that if we nourish the seed, and do not cast it out by our unbelief, it will begin to grow within us. This growth Alma describes as

a very literal, actual, special flourishing of our vitality as living beings. To use Alma's terms, the "word" of life begins to "swell within" our "breasts," begins to "enlarge" the "soul," and "expand" the "mind" until our life as a living being becomes everlastingly full (Alma 32:28, 30, 34, 41). The experience we have of our life enlarging and expanding as we pass from death unto life, Alma says, will be very "delicious" and "desirable" to us. And fullness of life itself he describes as "most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure" (Alma 32:42).

Fifth Observation

What is contained in the word of life, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that gives it alone such power to enlarge and expand us until our life is everlastingly full? Much could be said about that. But one thing seems basic to all else that might be said about the power of the word of life literally to give life. It is revealed by the fact that the tree of life symbolizes two things. It symbolizes, of course, everlasting fullness of life. But it also symbolizes, as Nephi tells us, the love of God. Let me quote Nephi's words:

And the angel said unto me: . . . Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul. [1 Nephi 11:21–23]

When we combine what Alma tells us about the tree of life with what Nephi says, we get the following picture. On the one hand, according to Alma, the tree of life represents life full and never ending. The fruit of that tree is "sweet above all that is sweet" and most delicious (Alma 32:42). Since every seed, Alma says, produces after its own likeness

(Alma 32:31), we may describe, as Paul does, the word that grows up in us until our life is full and without end, the “word of life” (Philippians 2:16; Alma 32:28). On the other hand, according to Nephi, the tree of life represents that love of God. This love “sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” and is “most joyous to the soul” and “most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:22, 23). Again, since every seed produces after its own kind, the seed that grows into the tree of life, which represents, the love of God, must be the word of love. So the word of life is essentially the word of love. In the final analysis, it is the growth of divine love within us that enlarges and expands us until our life is full without end. Fullness of life consists of life full of divine love. Love, in the special divine sense, is the fundamental source of a fullness of living existence that never ends, a fullness that is “sweet above all that is sweet” (Alma 32:42) and “most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:23).

Sixth Observation

To pass from death unto life we must keep the commandments of God. Jesus said that “If thou wilt enter into life, keep my commandments” (Matthew 19:17). As Paul insisted,

[God] will render to every man according to his deeds:

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life. [Romans 2:6–7]

So Paul tells us “not [to] be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

But in seeking one’s life, there is an important lesson to learn about keeping the commandments just *in order to enter into life*. Consider the experience of King Benjamin’s people. Recall that King Benjamin, from the time he was a young man until he was very

old, labored unceasingly to assist his people in passing from death unto life. In his old age, just a few days before he was to deliver his last address to his people as their prophet-king, he said of them that “they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (Mosiah 1:11). Please keep in mind this description of King Benjamin’s people before he addressed them for the last time: “They have been,” he said, “a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.” In a moment I will contrast this description of them with another one that brings out the important lesson to which I just alluded.

Despite the fact that his people were a diligent people in keeping the Lord’s commandments, Benjamin knew that his labors as their prophet and king were not yet finished. He knew, as the record tells us, that his people had not yet become a pure-in-heart people—they had not yet passed through death unto life. So with this in mind, and with the instructions from an angel of the Lord, Benjamin prepared and delivered his final teachings to the people he loved. Let me read now from Mosiah the impact Benjamin’s address had on his people.

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. [Mosiah 4:1–2]

Think of it! Before he gave his last address, King Benjamin described his people as a diligent people in keeping the commandments. But by the end of his address the people themselves could see that they in fact were still in a “carnal state,” and they pleaded with the Lord to purify their hearts (Mosiah 4:2).

As we know, their prayers were answered. Their hearts were purified by the Spirit of the Lord. The record says that they all “cried with one voice saying: . . . the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). And Benjamin, his lifetime desire as a prophet for his people finally fulfilled, said: “Behold, this day he [the Lord] hath spiritually begotten you; . . . ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7). King Benjamin’s people had passed from death unto life. For, you see, to pass from death unto life means being born of Christ, being purified, becoming his sons and daughters.

Why were King Benjamin’s people still in a “carnal state” despite the fact that they were a diligent people in keeping the commandments? The carnal mind is one that seeks its own life. So I suspect that part of the answer is that King Benjamin’s people diligently kept the commandments *in order to* save their own lives. Before purification his people were seeking each his own life through good works. But keeping the commandments cannot help save us unless we keep them diligently in a life-losing way. Each must lose his life to find it.

That is what the law of the harvest means. Each must plant the seed of divine love in his or her heart and nourish it by faith and good works. Only then can the “Spirit of the Lord” (Mosiah 5:2; Alma 32:28) enlarge our souls and expand our minds until fullness of life never ending is ours.

Closing Observation

All of us hunger and thirst for life and want to escape from death. Some of us, for a time, may seek—through fame or fortune, through power or wealth, through education or scholarship, through material and physical satisfactions—the life we do not yet have. But these ways of pursuing life will all fail. The promises of life these ways offer are false promises. To gain life—life full and without end—we must fully embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ and be reborn and become people of pure love. There is no other way. Unless we do this we cannot pass from death unto life, we cannot satisfy our hunger and thirst for life—not fully, not lastingly. Each must come as a little child unto God through Jesus Christ and plant the word of life in his heart and nourish it until it becomes within him the tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and sweet above all that is sweet, and pure above all that is pure.

My prayer is that the love of God might grow up among us until we enjoy a fullness of life together in the everlasting kingdom of our Father. For this I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.