

The Mystery of Life

Boyd K. Packer

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I want to tell you of an incident that happened many years ago. Two of our sons, then little boys, were wrestling on the rug, and they had reached that line which separates laughter from tears. So I worked my foot carefully between them and lifted the older one back to a sitting position on the rug. As I did so, I said, "Hey there, you little monkeys. You'd better settle down."

To my surprise he folded his little arms, his eyes swimming with deep hurt, and protested, "I *not* a monkey, Daddy, I a *person!*"

The years have not erased the overwhelming feeling of love I felt for my little sons. I was taught a profound lesson by my little boys. Many times over the years his words have slipped back into my mind, "I *not* a monkey, Daddy, I a *person!*" I was taught a profound lesson by my little boy.

Now the cycle of life has moved swiftly on, and both of those sons have little boys of their own, who teach their fathers lessons. They now watch their children grow as we watched them. They are coming to know something as fathers that they could not be taught as sons. Perhaps now they know how much their father loves them. Hopefully, they know as well why prayers begin "Our *Father* who art in heaven."

All too soon their children will be grown with little "persons" of their own, repeating the endless cycle of life.

There is on the West Coast a statue by Ernesto Gaggeri which depicts in marble that cycle of life. There are toddlers and children, teenagers, young lovers, the mature and the aged, gazing at a newborn baby. Two figures to the back, however, face away from the group. An aged couple, supporting one another, haltingly moves away from the family circle.

Persons enter life through mortal birth and, in due time, disappear through the veil of death. Most of them never sense why we are here.

Nothing is more obvious than what the statue represents, but the sculptor entitled it *The Mystery of Life*.

Occasionally, as at the time of birth, we pause in awe of what nature has to say. We see patterns of creation, so ordered and so beautiful as to sponsor deep feelings of reverence and humility. Then, just when we might discover the meaning of life, we are jerked back by the wild, uncontrolled things that humanity is doing to itself.

There are so many unanswered questions. Why the inequities in life?

Some are so rich.

Some so wretchedly poor.

Some so beautifully formed, and others with pitiful handicaps.

Some are gifted and others retarded.

Why the injustice, the untimely death? Why the neglect, the sorrow, the pain?

Why divorce, incest, perversion, abuse, and cruelty?

If there be order and meaning to life, they are hardly visible in what mortals do to one another and to themselves.

In counterpoint, we see love and devotion, sacrifice, faith, and humility; we see humanity in exalted expression of courage and heroism.

When at last the mystery of life is unraveled, what will be revealed?

I know a man who studied for the ministry. Then just before his ordination he dropped out because there were so many unanswered questions. He still regarded himself as a devout, if somewhat disillusioned, Christian. He found another profession, married, and was raising a family when our missionaries found him.

He made a very superficial study of the doctrines of the Church and found them tolerable enough. The fundamentals of Christianity were visible. But he was most interested in programs and activities that would benefit his family.

It was *after* he was baptized that he made the discovery of his life. To his surprise he found, underlying the programs of the Church, a solid foundation of doctrine. He had no idea of the depth and breadth and height of our theology. When once he moved from interest in the programs to a study of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he found answers which explained to his full satisfaction the deep questions that had left him unable to accept ordination as a clergyman.

One doctrine was completely new to him. Although he was a student of the Bible, he had not found it there until he read the other revelations. Then the Bible was clear to him and he understood.

The doctrine is so logical, so reasonable, and explains so many things, that it is a wonder that the Christian world rejected it. It is so essential a part of the equation of life that, left out, life just cannot add up, it remains a mystery.

The doctrine is simply this: life did not begin with mortal birth. We lived in spirit form before we entered mortality. We are spiritually the children of God.

This doctrine of premortal life was known to ancient Christians. For nearly five hundred years the doctrine was taught, but it was then rejected as a heresy by a clergy that had slipped into the Dark Ages of apostasy.

Once they rejected this doctrine, the doctrine of premortal life, and the doctrine of redemption for the dead, they could never unravel the mystery of life. They became like a man trying to assemble a strand of pearls on a string that was too short. There is no way they can put them all together.

Why is it so strange a thought that we lived as spirits before entering mortality? Christian doctrine proclaims the Resurrection, meaning that we will live after

mortal death. If we live beyond death, why should it be strange that we lived before birth?

The Christian world in general accepts the idea that our condition in the Resurrection will be determined by our actions in this life. Why can they not believe that some circumstances in this life were determined by our actions before coming into mortality?

The scriptures teach this doctrine, the doctrine of premortal life. For His own reasons, the Lord provides answers to some questions, with pieces placed here and there throughout the scriptures. We are to find them; we are to *earn* them. In that way sacred things are hidden from the insincere.

Of the many verses revealing this doctrine, I will quote two short phrases from the testimony of John in the ninety-third section of the Doctrine and Covenants. The first, speaking of Christ, says plainly, "He was in the beginning, before the world was." (D&C 93:7.)

And the other, referring to us, says with equal clarity, "Ye were also in the beginning with the Father." (D&C 93:23.)

Essential facts about our premortal life have been revealed. Although they are sketchy, they unravel the mystery of life.

When we comprehend the doctrine of premortal life, we know that we are the children of God, that we lived with him in spirit form before entering mortality.

We know that this life is a test, that life did not begin with birth, nor will it end with death.

Then life begins to make sense, with meaning and purpose even in all of the chaotic mischief that mankind creates for itself.

Imagine that you are attending a football game. The teams seem evenly matched. One team has been trained to follow the rules; the other, to do just the opposite. They are committed to cheat and disobey every rule of sportsmanlike conduct.

While the game ends in a tie, it is determined that it must continue until one side wins decisively.

Soon the field is a quagmire.

Players on both sides are being ground into the mud. The cheating of the opposing team turns to brutality.

Players are carried off the field. Some have been injured critically; others, it is whispered, fatally. It ceases to be a game and becomes a battle.

You become very frustrated and upset. "Why let this go on? Neither team can win. It must be stopped."

Imagine that you confront the sponsor of the game and demand that he stop this useless, futile battle. You say it is senseless and without purpose. Has he no regard at all for the players?

He calmly replies that he will not call the game. You are mistaken. There is a great purpose in it. You have not understood.

He tells you that this is not a spectator sport—it is for the participants. It is for their sake that he permits the game to continue. Great benefit may come to them because of the challenges they face.

He points to players sitting on the bench, suited up, eager to enter the game. “When each one of them has been in, when each has met the day for which he has prepared so long and trained so hard, then, and only then, will I call the game.”

Until then, it may not matter which team seems to be ahead. The present score is really not crucial. There are games within games, you know. Whatever is happening to the team, each player will have his day.

Those players on the team that keeps the rules will not be eternally disadvantaged by the appearance that their team somehow always seems to be losing.

In the field of destiny, no team or player will be eternally disadvantaged because they keep the rules. They may be cornered or misused, even defeated for a time. But individual players on that team, regardless of what appears on the scoreboard, may already be victorious.

Each player will have a test sufficient to his needs; how each responds is the test.

When the game is finally over, you and they will see purpose in it all, may even express gratitude for having been on the field during the darkest part of the contest.

I do not think the Lord is quite so hopeless about what’s going on in the world as we are. He could put a stop to all of it any moment. But He will not! Not until every player has a chance to meet the test for which we were preparing before the world was, before we came into mortality.

The same testing in troubled times can have quite opposite effects on individuals. Three verses from the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Christ, teach us that “they had wars, and bloodsheds, and famine, and affliction, for the space of many years.

“And there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi; nevertheless for the righteous’ sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared.

“But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become *hardened*, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were *softened* because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility.” (Alma 62:39–41; italics added.)

Surely you know some whose lives have been filled with adversity who have been mellowed and strengthened and refined by it, while others have come away from the same test bitter and blistered and unhappy.

There is no way to make sense out of life without a knowledge of the doctrine of premortal life.

The idea that mortal birth is the beginning is preposterous. There is no way to explain life if you believe that.

The notion that life ends with mortal death is ridiculous. There is no way to face life if you believe that.

When we understand the doctrine of premortal life, then things fit together and make sense. We then know that little boys and little girls are not monkeys, nor are their parents, nor were theirs, to the very beginning generation.

We are the children of God, created in his image.

Our child-parent relationship to God is clear.

The purpose for the creation of this earth is clear.

The testing that comes in mortality is clear.

The need for a redeemer is clear.

When we do understand that principle of the gospel, we see a Heavenly Father and a Son; we see an atonement and a redemption.

We understand why ordinances and covenants are necessary.

We understand the necessity for baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

We understand why we renew that covenant by partaking of the sacrament.

I have but touched upon the doctrine of premortal life. We cannot, in these brief conference talks, do more than that. Oh, if we but had a day, or even an hour, to speak of it.

I assure you there is, underlying the programs and activities of this church, a depth and breadth and height of doctrine that answers the questions of life.

When one knows the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is cause to rejoice. The words *joy* and *rejoice* appear through the scriptures repetitively. Latter-day Saints are happy people. When one knows the doctrine, parenthood becomes a sacred obligation, the begetting of life a sacred privilege. Abortion would be unthinkable. No one would think of suicide. And all the frailties and problems of men would fade away.

We have cause to rejoice and we do rejoice, even celebrate.

“The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.” (D&C 93:36.)

God bless us that we and all who will hear His message can celebrate the Light! Of him I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.