

WHAT LATTER DAY SAINTS BELIEVE  
ABOUT PROBATION AFTER DEATH

Reorganized CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST  
of Latter Day Saints  
East Bay, California

Sunday, Aug. 20, 1944  
8:45 p.m. KRE, 1400 KC  
Berkeley, California

Most orthodox theology in the past has taught that once a man dies, his history is closed; he will never again have the chance of accepting Christ, or achieving salvation. The rule which is laid down is that any man who dies without accepting Christ is forever lost. This is the motive force or driving power behind much of our foreign mission program. This school of theology has always taught us that even the heathen who die without accepting Christ will be forever condemned to hell. Some churches in the past, and some even now, have gone so far as to say that an infant which dies without baptism is forever lost. In the days of Jonathan Edwards, good, devout Christian people used to sing with perfect faith,

"Hell is crammed with infants damned,  
And not a day of grace."

What does the Bible teach about probation after death? If a man dies without ever having heard of Christ, is he forever lost? Will there be no chance in the beyond, or must he perish and suffer forever in the fires of hell? First of all, let us approach this question from the standpoint of reason. Our Bible tells us that God made all races, and appointed them the bounds of their habitations. Who, then, is to blame, if a savage in darkest Africa, or a yellow man in Asia never hears of Christ? Either God, who put the heathen where he is, or else the Christian people of the world who have failed to take Christ to him. If there is any justice in God, he will not punish the heathen for something which is His own doing. Neither will He give the Christian heavenly bliss for failing in his duty of proclaiming Christ, while damning the heathen who by the Christian's negligence failed to hear. That would be getting the punishment all mixed up.

Let us approach it from another angle of logic. Christ came to redeem all men. His mission of salvation was universal. It included all the people who had lived before his time, and all who were to come after his time. No one who believes in him, who has studied his life and his message, can believe that he came to save only a small fraction of the people of the world. Think of all the billions of people who have lived and died since the world began. How many of them do you think ever heard the name of Christ? Just what the figures would be, we have no way of knowing, but there would be an astronomical number who according to the doctrine that all who have not accepted Christ are lost, would be forever and irretrievably doomed. Take our present enlightened day, for example, after nearly two thousand years of proclaiming Christianity to the world. Roughly, only one man in four in today's world even lives in a Christian country. And in a Christian country like the United States, the 1936 figures showed only about 56 million church members, or not quite half the total population. What is to become of all these people, many of whom have lived up to the best light and instruction they have had? Are they to be lost, simply because God put them in the wrong place in the world, or because we failed to take the gospel of Jesus to them? Reason and justice tell us, "NO."

But if these who have died without hearing or accepting the gospel of Christ are to be saved, HOW, and WHEN, and WHERE are they to be saved? The Bible is quite explicit on one point. 1st Timothy, chapter 2, verse 5, reads: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ...." If men are to be saved, in this life or any other; if they are to be brought back into the presence of God, it must be through the mediation of Jesus, for his is the only name given whereby men may be saved; he is the one Mediator between God and man.

Logically, then, and inevitably, we are led to the belief that there must be some sort of opportunity to hear of Christ and his gospel after death. Death does not end existence. It does not blot out consciousness. The spirit, which is the conscious personality of each one of us, is indestructible. In Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man, both were conscious, and each recognized the other. Paul's second Corinthian letter, chapter 5, speaks of being "absent from the body, and present with the Lord," not as if we should be asleep or unconscious, but as if we should be able to know of, and enjoy, our presence with him. Jesus, speaking to the repentant thief on the cross, told him, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." What good would it have been to tell this man where he was going, if he were not going to be conscious enough to recognize the place, and Jesus his companion, when he got there?

Many people believe that they will be saved by conscience, that is, by living up to the best they knew. If that be true, then it was not necessary for Jesus to die for any of us; we might all have been saved by conscience. Latter Day Saints confidently assert that God has provided a plan of salvation for those who never know Christ here; that the gospel will be preached in the spirit world; that even the spirits who are in hell, or the prison house, or in purgatory, if you prefer the Catholic term for it, will have an opportunity to accept Christ, lay hold of his pardoning and redeeming grace that forgives and washes away their sin, and gives them a right to salvation from the second death.

We do not hold this belief, or state it so boldly, without what we believe to be adequate scriptural proof, as well as the proof of reason which we have already presented to you. Bear in mind as we proceed, that probably 150 BILLION people have lived on this old earth since the day of Creation. Out of all that number, not more than a billion, or a billion and a half at most, ever heard the name of Christ. Only one person in four, approximately, lives in a Christian nation today, as we have already stated.

I Peter 3:18,20 states: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited ~~waited~~ in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." Here is a clear, if rather fragmentary account, of a visitation of Christ to the spirits in hell or in the prison house ... spirits which were sinful and disobedient in the days of Noah. He went to them in spirit form; he was quickened by the Spirit. Why should he preach, if there was no chance for them even if they heard and were converted? Let us read on into the next chapter, and stop at the sixth verse.... "For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are

dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit." They were to be judged, then, according to the works done in the flesh, with due consideration being given to their opportunity to know right from wrong, but they were to live according to God, by the plan of salvation he had laid down for all men ....acceptance of his Son Jesus Christ as savior and Redeemer.

Who is stronger, Christ, or Satan? Is Satan to have his hundred or hundred and fifty billion, and Christ forced to be satisfied with a paltry hundred and forty-four thousand, as some believe? No, that would make Christ a weak, ineffectual, beaten sort of Savior. He is going to triumph over Satan, entering the very gates of hell to proclaim deliverance to the spirits there; allowing them a chance to claim the power and the redeeming grace of their Savior. In John's vision on Patmos, Jesus is represented as saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,..and have the keys of hell and of death." Jesus could not be the "savior of the world" while the majority of the people of the world were still subject to the powers of death and hell and the Devil himself.

Isaiah 45:22,23, and Philipians 2:9,11 predict that the day shall come when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord. These predictions could not be fulfilled if the devil continued to hold dominion over most of the billions who have dwelt on the earth. There is forgiveness for every sin save one -- the sin against the Holy Ghost. God does not want to see one soul lost. His love follows us even into hell, and offers us even there a means of escape through the name of Jesus. Revelation chapter 20 and verse 14 indicates quite clearly that when hell shall have served its purpose in bringing men to repentance, it, too, will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, together with those few who still refuse to repent of their sins, who had once known him and then forsaken him and denied the Holy Ghost that witnessed his divinity.

We shall be judged according to our works, taking into consideration our degree of knowledge of God and his laws. We shall be rewarded for our good deeds, but punished for our bad ones, until we see the error of them, and are willing to repent of them; He that knew his Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes, but he who knew not his Lord's will, and did it not, but did the best he knew how, shall be beaten with few stripes...not for vengeance, but for correction.

May we sum it up this way. Men will be saved by just one thing, and one thing only -- by acceptance of Christ as their savior. They will be lost in just one way -- by rejecting him, willfully, voluntarily, after having had an opportunity to know him and to accept him. We cannot willfully reject some one of whom we have never heard. Therefore, those who have not heard of Christ in this life will have a chance to hear him preached in the spirit world that lies beyond this world. Even there, men may be saved from eternal death through belief on him.

Does this mean that we may do as we please here, have our fun, and then accept Christ and repent of our sins after we are dead? Not at all. We shall suffer to the uttermost farthing for every sin that we willingly and knowingly commit. Once any man knows within his heart that Jesus is his Savior, it is a sin to reject that testimony and continue in sinful living. Unless our names are written in the Book of Life, we shall be cast into the lake of fire, into the second death, when the first or physical death, and hell, are cast therein to be destroyed. Unless we have accepted Christ, either here or hereafter, we shall have no part with him; we shall not live with him.