

Death

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"Stand Forever" Episode 8

Without God, death prevails. My name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 8 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In the last two episodes, we considered chaos and darkness as two dimensions of the natural state of things which exist/prevail without God, without His greatest gifts, His Son, His Spirit, and His Life. Today we consider the third dimension, death.

Life as we know it begins with God and without God, death prevails. **Whether we believe or not, whether we acknowledge Him or not, we live and breathe by the grace of God with each beat of our heart.**

God put into man his spirit, which is the breath of life. "And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also; nevertheless, all things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word. And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul ... yea, even all things which I prepared for the use of man."¹

When Paul revealed "the Unknown God" on Mars' Hill, he said, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing **he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ... for in him we live, and move, and have our being**; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."²

King Benjamin similarly spoke of "Him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another."³

¹ Moses 3:7, 9

² Acts 17:24, 25, 28, *emphasis added*

³ Mosiah 2:21

Much the same can be said of spiritual life. Speaking of Christ, John said, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. **In him was life**; and the life was the light of men."⁴

Of all the problems we encounter in this life, there is one that towers above them all and is the least understood. The worst of all human conditions in this life is not poverty, sickness, loneliness, abuse, war, or cruelty in all its diabolic variations, as awful as those conditions are. Rather, the worst of all human conditions is also the most common; it is to die. It is to die spiritually. It is to be separated from the presence of God and in this life, His presence is His Spirit or power.

The plan of salvation is premised on very harsh realities. Whenever we sin, whether grave or small, we become impure, and no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God.⁵ God cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.⁶ In this condition, we can neither dwell in His presence after this life nor can His presence, or power, dwell with us in this life.

As with Adam and Eve, our eyes are opened because of our transgressions, and because of our experience we learn something about choices; to some extent we gain the knowledge of good and evil. That is a positive thing, but it comes at a very high price. The experience by which we are educated, we are also condemned, both blessed and cursed because we have transgressed the commandments of God in the process, and we fall, unworthy to remain in God's presence and are cast out. We suffer "spiritual death."

By the time we are educated we are also lost. The price of the tuition is far more than what we can pay. By the time we learn to choose well, by the time we begin to figure things out, it is too late. We experience the darkness, confusion, misery, pain, and turmoil associated with our mistakes and sins, and we want out. We want light, clarity, joy, peace, confidence, pleasure, sweetness, love, and truth. We want rest. We want what we can never have through our merits and works alone, no matter how well we choose ever after.

The best of all human conditions is not wealth, fame, prestige, good health, the honors of men, or security as wonderful as some of those things are, the best of all human conditions in this life, is life; it is to be born again, endowed with heavenly power, to

⁴ John 1:3, 4, *emphasis added*

⁵ See 1 Nephi 10:21

⁶ See Doctrine and Covenants 1:31

“receive the Holy Ghost” which is life,⁷ and the source of knowledge, revelation, strength, clarity, love, joy, peace, hope, confidence, faith and almost every other good thing. King Benjamin said that the “Spirit of the Lord” is how we are “blessed, prospered, and preserved.”⁸

Our absolute dependence on God for life, as well as every other good thing, is true spiritually as well as physically. Life is precarious and fragile in both realms. We live in a universe which is hostile to life. That we live at all, is beyond human explanation. Even on earth, in a solar system and in a corner of our galaxy that is incomprehensibly fine-tuned to sustain life, we are extremely vulnerable to death. Death is always just a heartbeat away.

Our world is also hostile to spiritual life. That we live at all in the spiritual sense is also beyond human explanation. Even on earth, with a few pockets of safety compatible with the Spirit of God, we are extremely vulnerable to spiritual death. Spiritual death is always just a misstep away.

We all die spiritually and, standing alone, our only and inevitable conclusion is ever increasing chaos, darkness, and irredeemable death. That universal condition is what King Benjamin called our “awful situation.”⁹ It is awful because spiritual death, to be cut off from the presence of God, is both the worst and most common of all human conditions, and there is no way out on our own.

In our day, the Lord says, whenever “we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness ... the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved: and ... **ere he is aware, he is left unto himself.**”¹⁰

Those may be the most chilling words in all of scripture, “ere he is aware, he is left unto himself.” Before you know it, you are left alone. You don’t want to be alone, cut off from the presence of God. Loneliness is awful, but never so awful as to be cut off from the presence of the Lord. That is abject loneliness.

A man who renounced his membership in the Church said, “When the Spirit of the Lord leaves your soul it’s the most empty, sad, and depressing feeling a person can ever

⁷ Romans 8:10

⁸ Mosiah 2:36

⁹ Mosiah 2:40

¹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 121:36-38, *emphasis added*

go through.” Another who lost his membership in the Church adds, “I felt the immediate withdrawal of what little I had left of the Spirit. I will never forget the void.” A woman observed, “I don’t think I truly understood or appreciated the blessings I had until they were gone, but when they were gone there was an emptiness I had never known before.”

The most devastating consequence suffered by Adam and Eve and by all of us is not physical death nor the suffering, disease, injury, and decay that often attends it. No, the worst by far is being cast out of the presence of God which is “spiritual death” because no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God.¹¹

They were cut off, separated physically and spiritually, and as far as they knew then, they were lost and alone with no way back. We are punished for our own sins and not for Adam’s transgression,¹² and “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.”¹³ We have all sinned. We all fall short and “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance,”¹⁴ and we are cut off from the presence of the Lord.

In Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ begins by succinctly framing the essential problem, “blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵ The beginning of the process of becoming “converted unto the Lord” is the recognition of our need for a Savior, to recognize that on our own (in our natural state) we are “poor in spirit” and on our own we can do nothing to remedy that awful condition.

Without God and His Son, without His Spirit and Life, chaos, darkness, and death prevail. **The essential problem in life is separation from God our Father.** Gratefully, we will now turn our attention to the solution of our “awful situation” in the next several episodes.

¹¹ 1 Nephi 10:21

¹² Pearl of Great Price, *The Articles of Faith* No. 2

¹³ Isaiah 53:6

¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 1:31; See also Alma 45:16

¹⁵ Matthew 5:3