

The Living and the Dead

Both to Hear the Gospel

By DR. JAMES E. TALMAGE

Of the Council of the Twelve, Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;
Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the means by which salvation has been placed within the reach of *all mankind*—poor and rich, bond and free, and, be it added, *living or dead*.

We have seen in the light of scriptural demonstration that, except through compliance with the laws and ordinances of the Gospel as enunciated and prescribed by the Lord Jesus Christ, no man can attain a place in the Kingdom of God.

What then of the dead, who have lived and passed without so much as hearing that there is a Gospel of salvation or a Savior of the race? Are they to be hopelessly and forever damned? If so, the phrase "eternal justice" should be stricken from scripture and literature, and "infamous injustice" substituted.

Think of the myriads who died before and at the Deluge, of the hosts of Israel who knew only the Law and died in ignorance of the Gospel, and count in with them the millions of their pagan contemporaries; then think of the gen-

erations who passed away during the long dark night of spiritual apostasy, predicted by prophecy and attested by history; and contemplate the heathen and but partly civilized tribes of the present day. Are these, to whom no knowledge of the Gospel has come, to be under eternal condemnation in consequence?

In the hereafter the saved and the lost are to be segregated. The Scriptures so avouch. Therefore, were there no salvation for these who have died in ignorance of Christ's Atonement and His Gospel, these benighted spirits could never associate with their descendants who have been privileged to live in an age of Gospel enlightenment, and who have made themselves eligible for salvation by faith and its fruitage, obedience.

I have read of a heathen king, who, through the zealous efforts of missionaries whom he had tolerantly admitted to his realm, was inclined to accept what had been presented to him as Christianity and make it the religion of his people. Though he yearned for the blessed state of salvation which the new religion seemed to offer, he was profoundly affected by the thought that his ancestors, the dead chieftains of his tribe, together with all the departed of his people, had gone to their graves unsaved. When he was told that while he and his subjects could reach heaven,

those who had died before had surely gone to hell, he exclaimed with a loud oath "*Then to hell I will go with them.*"

He spoke as a brave man. Though, had he been more fully informed he would have known that the Gospel of Jesus Christ entails no such dire certainty; but that, on the contrary, the spirits of his noble dead would have opportunity of learning, in the world of the disembodied, the saving truth which in the flesh had never saluted their ears.

The Gospel is being preached to the dead. Missionary service in the spirit world has been in progress since its inauguration by the disembodied Christ while His crucified body lay in the tomb. (John 5:25).

Christ's promise from the cross to the penitent thief dying by His side, that the man should that day be in paradise with the Lord, tells us where the Savior's spirit went and ministered during the interval between death and resurrection. Paradise is not heaven, if by that name we mean the abode of God and the place of the supremely blessed; for in the early light of the Resurrection Sunday the Risen Lord decisively affirmed that He had not then ascended to His Father. (See John 20:17).

Peter tells of the Lord's ministry among the disembodied: "*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*

*quicken*ed by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison." (1 Peter 3:18-19).

The terms of salvation are equally binding upon the quick and the dead: "For 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." (1 Peter 4:6).

The Atonement would be shorn of its sublime import and effect were its provisions limited to the relative few who have complied with the ordinances of the Gospel in the body. But the Scriptures abundantly show that the Atonement is of universal effect, reaching every soul, both in the certainty of resurrection from death and in the opportunity for salvation through individual obedience. With particular reference to redemption from death Jacob, a Nephite prophet, thus spake: "Wherefore it must needs be an infinite atonement; save it should be an infinite atonement, this corruption could not put on incorruption." (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 9:7).

Obedience to Gospel requirements is likewise of universal application. It follows that if any man has failed, either through neglect or lack of opportunity to meet the requirement, the obligation is not cancelled by death.