

Episode 39

Stories from General Conference

RESURRECTION

NARRATION: Aging is part of mortality. We lose our hair, wrinkles form, and our joints and muscles get weaker. We find comfort about this aging process through the thought of a glorious resurrection, when every limb and joint will be restored. Not a hair of our head will be lost. Today's collection of *Stories from General Conference* is on the topic of the resurrection.

God told Adam and Eve, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). In the April 1987 general conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson told us about a little boy's impression of what this phrase meant.

(Russell M. Nelson, 1987 April General Conference, Saturday morning)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most carefully documented events in history...

Even more remarkable is the fact that his mission among men—the Atonement, the Resurrection—extends privileges of redemption from sin and a glorious resurrection to each and every one of us! In some marvelous way, fully comprehended only by Deity, this is his work and his glory—“to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Teachers in the Church so instruct the old and the young. Sometimes the results are humorous. One leader shared this story with me:

As a little boy came home from Primary one day, his mother asked him what he had learned, and he said, “My teacher told me that I used to be dust and I would be dust again once more. Is that true, Mommy?”

“Yes,” the mother replied. “A scripture tells us so: ‘For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’ (Genesis 3:19).”

The little boy was amazed at this! The next morning, he was scurrying around getting ready for school, looking for his shoes. He crawled under the bed. Lo and behold, there he saw balls of dust. He ran to his mother in wonder, saying, “Oh, Mommy, somebody's under my bed, and they're either coming or going.”

Yes, compounds derived from dust—elements of the earth—are combined to make each living cell in our bodies. The miracle of the Resurrection is matched only by the miracle of our creation in the first place.

NARRATION: Our mortal bodies will wear down, and eventually we will all die. But because Jesus Christ was resurrected, all of us will be resurrected to a perfect state. At the April 1985 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley related the events leading to the First Resurrection.

(Gordon B. Hinckley, April 1985 General Conference, Sunday morning)

During the three years of His earthly ministry, He did what none other had ever done before, He taught as none other had previously taught.

Then came His time to be offered. There was the supper in the Upper Room, His last with the Twelve in mortality. As He washed their feet, He taught a lesson in humility and service they would never forget. There followed the suffering of Gethsemane, “which suffering,” He said, “caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18).

He was taken by rough and crude hands, and in the night, contrary to the law, was brought before Annas, and then Caiaphas, the wily and evil officer of the Sanhedrin. There followed early the next morning the second appearance before this scheming, vicious man. Then He was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, to whom his wife said in warning, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man” (Matthew 27:19). The Roman, thinking to evade responsibility, sent Him to Herod, the corrupt, debauched, and evil tetrarch of Galilee. Christ was abused and beaten. His head was crowned with sharp and platted thorns, a mocking robe of purple was thrown upon His bleeding back. Again he was taken before Pilate, to whom the mob cried, “Crucify him, Crucify him” (Luke 23:21).

With stumbling steps He walked the way to Golgotha, where His wounded body was nailed to the cross in the most inhumane and pain-ridden method of execution that sadistic minds could conjure.

Yet He cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The hours passed as His life ebbed in pain. The earth shook, the veil of the temple was rent. From His parched lips came the words, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46).

It was over. His mortal life was finished. He had offered it as a ransom for all.

Gone were the hopes of those who loved Him. Forgotten were the promises He had made. His body was hurriedly but tenderly placed in a borrowed tomb on the eve of the Jewish Sabbath. That Sabbath came and went. Then, early in the morning of Sunday, Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb. They wondered as they hurried how the stone might be rolled from the door of the sepulchre. Arriving, they saw an angel who spoke to them: “I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:5–6).

It had never before happened. The empty tomb was the answer to the question of the ages. Well did Paul say: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The miracle of that resurrection morning, that first Easter Sunday, is a miracle for all mankind. It is the miracle of the power of God, whose Beloved Son gave His life to atone for the sins of all, a sacrifice of love for every son and daughter of God. In so doing He broke the seals of death.

All of us will die. But that will not be the end. Just as He in the spirit world taught those who once had been disobedient in the days of Noah and were capable of being taught, even so shall each of us continue as individual personalities capable of learning and teaching and other activities.

And just as He took up His body and came forth from the tomb, even so shall all of us enjoy a reunion of body and spirit to become living souls in the day of our own resurrection.

We rejoice, therefore, as do many, and as should all mankind, when we remember the most glorious, the most comforting, the most reassuring of all events of human history—the victory over death.

NARRATION: Old Testament prophets looked forward to the Resurrection long before it happened. Job pondered it with this question: “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14).

This question was definitively answered in the events from the New Testament, as retold by Elder David B. Haight in the April 1985 general conference.

(David B. Haight, April 1985 General Conference, Sunday morning)

Many of the heavenly directed events leading up to and following the crucifixion of our Lord have been narrated by the early Apostles and other witnesses.

According to these accounts, Joseph, a rich man from the village of Arimathaea and one of the Sanhedrin, did not openly declare his belief in Jesus, as he feared the Jewish authorities. But now sorrow, as well as indignation, aroused his courage. He asked Pilate if he could take away Jesus’ body. Pilate gave permission.

Nicodemus—a noble disciple who had visited Jesus at night lest someone might see them together—assisted Joseph. They wrapped Jesus’ body in fine linen, together with spices, according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. They laid the body reverently in the rocky niche of a tomb in a garden that belonged to Joseph. The tomb had never been used. It was the day before the Jewish Sabbath. (See John 19:38–42.)

The next day Pilate gave permission for the tomb to be carefully guarded until the third day, so the disciples could not steal the body and then tell the people that Jesus had risen from the dead, as had been prophesied. The chief priests and Pharisees made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and leaving a guard on watch. (See Matthew 27:62–66.)

Before daylight the next morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, having prepared fresh spices and ointments, went to the tomb of Jesus and found that the stone had been rolled away. Looking in and not finding the body, they hurried to find Peter and the Apostles and told them what they had found. Peter and John hastened at once to the tomb. John outran his older companion. Stooping down, he gazed in silent wonder into the empty tomb. Entering, Peter saw the burial clothes lying where the body of Jesus once lay. And then John followed him. And in spite of fear, there dawned upon them the hope, which later would become an absolute knowledge, that Christ had indeed risen, but as yet no one had seen him. The two wondering Apostles returned to their brethren.

Mary stayed at the tomb and was grieving at the entrance when someone approached. Thinking it was the keeper of the garden, she asked where he had laid her Lord. Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

Jesus himself was standing before her, but he did not appear as she had known him; he was now risen and glorified. She then recognized our Lord and must have attempted to embrace him, for he said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”

Filled with amazement, she hastened to obey and repeated that glorious message which would give hope through all future ages and to which she added her personal declaration that she had seen the Lord. (See John 20:1–18.)

Later, women carrying spices for the final preparation of the body for burial looked in the tomb and witnessed angels, who said, “Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6).

The angels told the women to go and notify the disciples, but the men believed them not. (See Mark 16:7; Luke 24:9–11.)

The Gospel according to Luke relates that on that same day two of Jesus' followers were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about eight miles from Jerusalem, and they were discussing with sad and anxious hearts the things that had happened in the past two days.

As they walked and conversed, a stranger joined them and walked along with them. Even though this stranger was indeed the resurrected Christ, they did not recognize him.

Gospel writers indicate their conversation went something like this:

Jesus asked them, "What are you talking about, as you walk along?"

They were surprised and said, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem that does not know what has been happening here these last few days?"

"What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth. This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free.

"And besides, today is the third day since it happened. Some of our women went to the tomb," they continued, "but could not find his body. They came to us saying they had seen a vision of angels, who told them that he is risen. So some of us went to the tomb and found it even as the women said, but we did not see him."

Then the stranger said to them, "How foolish you are, to be so slow to believe all that the prophets have said. Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?" And Jesus explained, as they walked, what was said about himself in the scriptures, beginning with Moses and the writings of all of the prophets.

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further, but they persuaded him to stay, saying, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

So he stayed with them. As he ate the simple meal with them, he took the bread and blessed it; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. As he did this, their eyes were opened, and they recognized the Lord; and then he vanished from their sight.

They said in amazement to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us when he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?"

They hurried back to Jerusalem, where they found ten of the Apostles and other disciples gathered together, with the doors closed for fear of the Jews (See John 20:19.) They declared, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

The two men then explained what had happened on the road and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

While the two men were telling them this, suddenly the Lord himself stood in the midst of them and said, “Peace be unto you.”

They were terrified and supposed that they were seeing a spirit, but he said to them, “Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?”

“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”

He showed them his hands and his feet. They still could not believe as they were so full of joy and wonderment, so he asked them, “Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and . . . honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.”

Then he said to them, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” And then he reminded them, “Ye are witnesses of these things.” (See Luke 24:13–48.)

One of the Twelve, named Thomas, was not with them when Jesus came, so the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas said to them, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

A week later the disciples were again gathered together indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be unto you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach thither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”

I have often pictured in my own mind the skeptical Thomas’ depth of remorse that must have been burning within his soul as his doubting heart, now purified, attempted a reply to his Lord.

Thomas’ only answer unto him was, “My Lord and my God.”

And Jesus said unto him, “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (See John 20:25–29.)

NARRATION: You’re listening to *Stories from General Conference on the Mormon Channel*. The topic of this collection is the Resurrection.

After the Resurrection, Christ appeared to many people. However, even after His physical appearance, some would still not believe. In the October 1988 general conference, President James E. Faust related how difficult it could be to comprehend a resurrection without faith.

(James E. Faust, 1988 October General Conference, Saturday morning)

The testimony of those faithful followers who saw, heard, and touched the resurrected Lord stand uncontroverted to this day. After the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had bought sweet spices to anoint his body (see Mark 16:1).

But the devoted women were concerned as to who would roll away the great stone in front of the sepulchre. When they arrived, they found that the stone had been rolled away (see Mark 16:3–4). A great earthquake had intervened, and an angel had rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it, causing the keepers to shake with fear and become as dead men (see Matthew 28:2–4). The angel instructed the women to tell the disciples quickly of the Lord’s resurrection, assuring them that “he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him” (Matthew 28:7). As they went to tell the disciples, “Jesus met them, saying, ‘All hail’. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him” (Matthew 28:9).

During the forty days that the Savior spent with the Apostles and others, they heard and saw many unspeakable things. This special ministry changed the Apostles from an uncertain, confused, divided, and weak group into powerful witnesses of the Lord. Mark records that the Savior upbraided the eleven “because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen” (Mark 16:14).

Perhaps the Apostles should not be unduly criticized for not believing that Jesus, having been crucified and buried in a tomb, had come back to earth as a glorified being. In all human experience, this had never happened before. It was completely unprecedented. This was a different experience than the raising of Jairus’ daughter (see Mark 5:22, 24, 35–43), the young man of Nain (see Luke 7:11–15), or Lazarus (see John 11:1–44). They all died again. Jesus, however, became a resurrected being. He would never die again. So it was that to the Apostles the story of Mary Magdalene and the other women who witnessed the Resurrection “seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11).

NARRATION: None of us living today witnessed Christ’s Resurrection firsthand, but all of the prophets have testified of it. In April 1988, President Gordon B. Hinckley added his witness.

(Gordon B. Hinckley, 1988 April General Conference, Sunday morning)

I have spoken at three different funerals of old friends in the past three weeks. I have had occasion to reflect on the fact and miracle of life, and the wonder and miracle of death. Returning from a memorial service for a high school friend of long ago, I took from a shelf in my study the yearbook for the class of 1928. I spent an hour quietly thumbing through the pages of photographs of my associates in our graduating class of sixty years ago.

All of those faces were then young and bright and full of promise. I do not know what has become of all of them, but I know what has become of many of them. We have followed a myriad of interests in pursuit of our dreams. Some perished with honor in the terrible wars that have scourged the earth during these threescore years. Most of us have married, happily I am glad to say, and have already become the forebears of three generations of posterity. I know of no divorces among that large number.

Once as lively students we shouted for victory for our basketball and football teams. Now, somewhat bent, we prefer to read and ponder and reflect. Once we danced and sang with noisy delight. We now enjoy peace and quiet and a comfortable chair. These of my peers have become educators, scientists, doctors, lawyers, civil servants, and have done well in many other honorable vocations. As I thumbed through the pages of that old book, I could not think of one who had been convicted of a serious crime. I think that remarkable. All who are alive are now in their late seventies. Many are gone, and we remember them with affection and appreciation.

In each case their passing has brought sorrow over the separation of friends. But in every case there have also been comfort and reassurance and certainty that death, though bitter to observe, is not the end, but is, rather, only another graduation from which we go on to a better life. For all of my classmates were of my faith, who believed as I believe. Along with English and chemistry, history and math, we were taught the things of God, just as hundreds of thousands of our youth today are taught through the great programs of the Church.

The other day as I stood at the bier of my classmate and reflected on the things of eternity, I had peace in my heart and gratitude. There were tears, yes, properly so. The Lord said: “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection.

“And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them” (D&C 42:45–46).

I am confident that for the friend of my high school days, death was a sweet experience with the assurance of a glorious resurrection.

Now absent is the pain of mortal life. Gone is the suffering of long sickness and much of loneliness. She is again in the association of loved ones, the parents who gave her mortal life and others of her family who loved her while they lived. Her spirit has gone to join theirs, and there will come that promised morning of the first resurrection, when they shall again take up their bodies and live in that sociality which bound them with the bonds of love while they were mortal beings.

This is the great promise of Easter. How wonderful it is that this is a day of celebration throughout the Christian world. Of all the events of human history, none is so significant as the resurrection of the Son of God.

Since the creation of man, no fact of life has been so certain as death with the close of mortality. When the last of life’s breath is drawn, there is a finality comparable to no other finality. When a father and mother lay the remains of a beloved child in the cold of the grave, there is grief almost inconsolable. When a husband buries the companion of his life, there is a loneliness that is poignant and unrelieved. When a wife closes the casket on the remains of her beloved husband, there are wounds that seem never to heal. When children are bereft of parents who loved and nurtured them, there is an abject destitution comparable to none other. Life is sacred, and death is somber. Life is buoyant and hopeful. Death is solemn and dark. It is awesome in its silence and certainty. Appropriately did Sir Walter Raleigh cry out, “O eloquent, just and mighty death” (in Alfred Noyes, *Heath Readings in the Literature of England*, 1927, p. 1132).

But death is not final. Though it seems so when its dark shroud overshadows mortal life, to those who accept the Christ and His eternal mission there is light and comfort, there is assurance, there is certainty.

NARRATION: We are all assured of our own resurrection, a glorious gift promised to all mankind. This has been another episode of *Stories from General Conference*. This is the Mormon Channel. Tell your friends about us!