

Date: Monday, December 1, 1997 12:52:04 AM
From: HTHALLJR
Subj: (1) thoughts on a "family tree" (2) proof that the LDS are going to Hell!

Dear family and friends,

Tonight I helped my sister, Sherlene Bartholomew, decorate my parents' Christmas tree with family photos. (The tree was grown by my father on his tree farm in Payson. He's out of the Christmas tree business, having discovered that live trees are much more valuable than dead ones, but he will still occasionally kill one for a special occasion. Reminds me of the comment my daughter Mary made while observing the abundant greenery in the foyer of a vegetarian restaurant: "Oh, do we get to kill our own dinner?").

Sherlene arranged with a manufacturer of key-chain photo holders to make special 3x5 holders for photos with holes for hanging photos on the tree, both in vertical and horizontal configuration, and she photocopied dozens of old family photos of many ancestors. On the back of each photo she has printed a brief biography of the people portrayed. It really makes for a wonderful tree which helps generate an interest in the children and grandchildren in their heritage, and which I myself will spend a lot of time studying.

The balance of the decorations were crocheted bells and snowflakes from LDS women in Zimbabwe -- products of a cottage industry which my parents helped to establish when they served an LDS mission there. Sherlene also placed some crocheted doves, which she said symbolized the peace that would begin to be restored to the earth as it caught the spirit of Elijah, as the hearts of the children turned to their fathers, and vice-versa (Malachi 4:5-6 -- a scripture from the Old Testament which is so significant that it is repeated verbatim in each of our LDS scriptures).

Sherlene wrote an article about her "family tree" and submitted it to Better Homes and Gardens --

they were excited about it, but they missed this years' production deadline. There's a good chance she'll have it published in their Christmas edition next year, however. In the meantime, "This People", a magazine specializing in the LDS market, has published her article in its December edition.

Sherlene and I sang a number of old Christmas carols together, from a wonderful collection she and her husband Dan have, while Dan accompanied us. It was a really a lovely evening. One of my favorites was Coventry Carol (Lulu Lulay). One of my friends will be singing this carol as a solo in her church this season and has been looking for a 4th verse that had less fatalistic or tragic sounding lyrics -- I'm afraid this version had the same old lyrics! We also sang what I think must truly be my favorite of all hymns and carols: "He Shall Feed His Flock", from Handel's Messiah. (Because it wasn't in this particular collection, we didn't sing its companion piece, though that is one of the reasons this is my favorite: "Come unto Him.")

I have often said that I believe that the reason there is such an abundance of wonderful Christmas music, and why Christmas music is so beloved by so many, is because so many of us, and perhaps all, must have been part of the great heavenly choir that sang at the birth of Christ. I certainly believe strongly that I was there -- the thought just thrills me!

This evening's activities provided a beautiful culmination to our Sunday School lesson today, which was taken from Doctrine & Covenants Section 138, the vision of the Spirit World which was received by Church President Joseph F. Smith (Son of Hyrum, who was martyred together with his brother Joseph). Although there are many wonderful teachings in this section, I was most struck by the attitude of those who were gathered in the spirit world at the moment of Christ's crucifixion and death.

"And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality. And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in

their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death." (D&C 138: 12-16).

Surely these saints who gathered at the death of Christ were also part of that joyful, glorious choir who sang at Jesus' birth! So on an occasion when Jesus' mortal apostles, disciples, family, and friends were in great darkness, confusion, fear, and mourning, as He was taken from them by an unimaginably horrible death, a host of spirits on the other side of the veil waited in joyful anticipation of His arrival into their world. Our perspective on death surely depends on which side of the veil we are on! His death, to the Saints in the spirit world, signalled a joyful "birth" to them. All of these, of course, were soon to be resurrected, following Him who was the first fruits of the resurrection, and the scriptures testify that many of them appeared to mortal witnesses -- Paul undoubtedly being one of them.

Think of that! An INNUMERABLE company of Saints, faithful followers of Jesus Christ, most of whom (excepting a few, such as John the Baptist) died BEFORE the birth of Christ. Paul names a few of these Saints in his powerful sermon on faith in Hebrews 11, testifying specifically of Moses that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt."

He concludes thus: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder [traditionally the way Isaiah was martyred], were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 11: 32-40: 12:1)

Fascinating -- these Saints, already resurrected in glory by the time Paul was writing, could not be made perfect without us! Why?

What was that "better thing" given by Christ to his apostles, and restored in the latter days, without which these Saints could not be made perfect? What more perfection could these ask than a glorious resurrection?

The key is provided by the Lord's words to Moses: "For behold, this is my work and my glory -- to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39). Until that work is complete, nobody can truly rest, nor can anyone be truly perfected. The remainder of Section 128 makes this clear. The Saints who preceded Christ in death would now anxiously embark upon a mission to redeem the countless souls lost in darkness, in ignorance, and in fear, in the spirit prison. Their joy in their labors of redemption could not be perfect unless the souls to whom they taught faith in Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost, could receive those essential ordinances, which must be performed in the flesh, with physical water, with mortal hands upon mortal heads.

So that "better thing" is nothing other than Baptism for the Dead! Without it, the labors of all the Saints of all ages would be completely frustrated, for countless legions of their beloved brothers and sisters who had not received the privilege of hearing the gospel during their mortal probation could not join them in fellowship with Christ.

Paul, appealing to this principle in defending the doctrine of physical resurrection, said "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:29) (Joseph Smith expands enthusiastically on this wonderful doctrine in D&C 128: see especially v. 15.)

In our class today someone posed the question, "what fraction of those who ever came to earth will be heirs of Celestial Glory?" Another answered from the scriptures that ALL who die before reaching accountability (the "years of accountability" begin at age 8) are redeemed by Christ's atonement. A good statistician might give us a better figure, but surely it numbers more than half of all who have ever lived. If life and death has always been like the numbers I saw while searching for my ancestors in English parish registers, the fraction would be much larger than half. So Heaven surely will teem with an innumerable host!

The other thing I particularly enjoyed about D&C 138 is finding proof, from our own scriptures, that the LDS, as our enemies have often charged, are indeed going to hell! "I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from this mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead." (v. 57)

My mother's annual family Christmas party is on the 13th this year, which happens to coincide with the Messiah sing in the Provo Tabernacle -- something I've almost always participated in with my children. Too many conflicting choices this season! I'll go to the family party, of course, but I'll be