

D&C LESSON #34

FAITH IN EVERY FOOTSTEP

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: That the Saints would ultimately settle in the Rocky Mountains was of course foreknown by the Lord. In fact he seems to have alluded to that settlement in a revelation given in 1831—15 years before the Saints crossed the Mississippi and started west. He said, speaking of the Second Coming:

But before the great day of the Lord shall come, Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose.

Zion shall flourish upon the hills and rejoice upon the mountains, and shall be assembled together unto the place which I have appointed. (D&C 49:24,25)

That appointed place “upon the mountains” to which Zion would assemble was the Salt Lake Valley and surrounding areas. Isaiah must have known of this when he prophesied that

. . . the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. (Isaiah 2:2)

Lesson 34 focuses on that journey to the mountains, and the lessons that we ought to learn from it.

1. THE LORD INSTRUCTED THE SAINTS REGARDING THEIR PHYSICAL PREPARATION FOR THEIR JOURNEY.

On June 7, 2001 I visited the Winter Quarters Temple. My brother-in-law who lives nearby had made a reservation and we spent some time in a session and then took a look around.

Northwest of the temple is some of the old Mormon Cemeteries in the area. Estimates are that between 500 and 600 saints were buried in this area,

almost all of them during that first terrible winter. The well-known Winter Quarters statue of parents laying a baby in the grave is located there. A plaque at the foot of the statue says "THIS MONUMENT IS PLACED DIRECTLY OVER THE GRAVE OF AN UNKNOWN CHILD AND SEVEN OTHER PIONEERS."

We went across the street to the Mormon Trails Visitor Center. We viewed exhibits and a movie which can only be seen in that place. I was deeply moved by the entire afternoon. As we drove away, I wrote in my journal, "I felt a great sense of place, purpose, sacrifice, and dedication here. I was in a sacred, holy place this afternoon."

The area was sanctified by the sacrifice and suffering and devotion of servants of God huddling against the cold in small cabins in hundreds of small settlements on both banks of the Missouri: settlements with names like Big Pigeon and Cutler's Park and Elkhorn Camp and Studyville and Green Hollow and Dawsonburg and Magnolia and Preparation Canyon. Here they lived and prepared and waited for Spring and another journey. Here they demonstrated their determination to follow the prophet anywhere the Lord asked him to lead. I was and am in awe of them.

Without training, often without sufficient preparation, when it was time, they turned west and followed their prophet-leader into the sunset. Before they left the Lord gave them instructions in D&C 136. These instructions constituted "The Word and the Will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the West." (D&C 136:1) Read the first 10 verses.

2 Let all the people of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and those who journey with them, be organized into companies, with a covenant and promise to keep all the commandments and statutes of the Lord our God.

3 Let the companies be organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens, with a president and his two counselors at their head, under the direction of the Twelve Apostles.

4 And this shall be our covenant--that we will walk in all the

ordinances of the Lord.

5 Let each company provide themselves with all the teams, wagons, provisions, clothing, and other necessities for the journey, that they can.

6 When the companies are organized let them go to with their might, to prepare for those who are to tarry.

7 Let each company, with their captains and presidents, decide how many can go next spring; then choose out a sufficient number of able-bodied and expert men, to take teams, seeds, and farming utensils, to go as pioneers to prepare for putting in spring crops.

8 Let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people.

9 Let each company prepare houses, and fields for raising grain, for those who are to remain behind this season; and this is the will of the Lord concerning his people.

10 Let every man use all his influence and property to remove this people to the place where the Lord shall locate a stake of Zion.

The basic message of these verses is twofold: Get organized and get ready. How useful would the organization in verse 3 be for these Latter-day Saints? What covenants were the Saints encouraged to make (136:2,4)? What does it mean to walk in the ordinances of the Lord? Jethro gave these instructions to Moses at Mount Sinai:

And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. (Ex. 18:20)

What kind of preparation did the Lord expect (136:6)? What materials was the original pioneer company to take with them (136:7)? What preparations were they to make for those who remained behind (136:9)? Other than their might (136:6) what were these Saints to use to assist in preparations (136:10)

2. THE LORD INSTRUCTED THE SAINTS REGARDING THEIR CONDUCT.

Take a moment to read D&C 136:17-33.

17 Go thy way and do as I have told you, and fear not thine enemies; for they shall not have power to stop my work.

18 Zion shall be redeemed in mine own due time.

19 And if any man shall seek to build up himself, and seeketh not my counsel, he shall have no power, and his folly shall be made manifest.

20 Seek ye; and keep all your pledges one with another; and covet not that which is thy brother's.

21 Keep yourselves from evil to take the name of the Lord in vain, for I am the Lord your God, even the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.

22 I am he who led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; and my arm is stretched out in the last days, to save my people Israel.

23 Cease to contend one with another; cease to speak evil one of another.

24 Cease drunkenness; and let your words tend to edifying one another.

25 If thou borrowest of thy neighbor, thou shalt restore that which thou hast borrowed; and if thou canst not repay then go

straightway and tell thy neighbor, lest he condemn thee.

26 If thou shalt find that which thy neighbor has lost, thou shalt make diligent search till thou shalt deliver it to him again.

27 Thou shalt be diligent in preserving what thou hast, that thou mayest be a wise steward; for it is the free gift of the Lord thy God, and thou art his steward.

28 If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

29 If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful.

30 Fear not thine enemies, for they are in mine hands and I will do my pleasure with them.

31 My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.

32 Let him that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord his God, that his eyes may be opened that he may see, and his ears opened that he may hear;

33 For my Spirit is sent forth into the world to enlighten the humble and contrite, and to the condemnation of the ungodly.

In nearly every endeavor undertaken by the Saints of the Most High, rigorous requirements for conduct have been imposed, with at least these three purposes: 1—So that harmony could be maintained; 2—So that participants could worthily petition the blessings and help of the almighty; and 3—So that observers would recognize the innate goodness of participants.

For example, when the Mormon Battalion departed from the encampment of the Saints, Brigham spoke to them about their conduct:

“I instructed the captains to be fathers to their companies, and manage their affairs by the power and influence of their priesthood, then they would have power to preserve their lives and the lives of their companies and escape difficulties. I told them I would not be afraid to pledge my right hand that every man will return alive, if they will perform their duties faithfully, without murmuring, and go in the name of the Lord. . . . Let no man be without his undergarment, and always wear a coat or vest; keep neat and clean, teach chastity, gentility, and civility; swearing must not be admitted, insult no man; have no contentious conversation with any [type] of people. . . . Should the battalion engage with the enemy and be successful, treat prisoners with the greatest civility, and never take life, if it can be avoided.” (*Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, July 7, 1846, pp. 86,87)

Notice the divine requirements in the passages from D&C 136 above:

- G Don't build yourself up (19)
- G Keep all your pledges one with another (20)
- G Covet not that which is thy brother's. (20)
- G Keep yourselves from evil to take the name of the Lord in vain . . . (21)
- G Cease to contend one with another (23)
- G Cease to speak evil one of another (23)
- G Cease drunkenness (24)
- G Let your words tend to edifying one another (24)
- G If thou borrowest of thy neighbor, thou shalt restore . . . (25)
- G If thou canst not repay then go straightway and tell thy neighbor, lest he condemn thee (25)
- G If thou shalt find that which thy neighbor has lost, thou shalt make diligent search till thou shalt deliver it to him (26)
- G Be diligent in preserving what thou hast (27)
- G Engage in appropriate recreation. Praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer (28)
- G Call on the Lord thy God with supplication (29)
- G Fear not thine enemies (30)
- G Let him that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord (32)

3. UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG, THE SAINTS JOURNEYED TO THE SALT LAKE VALLEY.

In D&C 121:9, the Lord made promise to those who believed in the words of this Prophets. He said:

For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall believe on his words . . .

I love this language! The inclination to believe the prophet comes as we labor beside him in the vineyard, and that inclination is a “mighty blessing.”

I wonder how the sacrifices we are invited to make today compare to those made by the suffering saints who followed Brigham West to Winter Quarters and then West again to the Salt Lake Valley. We would do well to remember their commitment during General Conference in October. What will we do when the Prophets show us a direction and invite us to follow? Will we load our spiritual wagons and get on the road or will we wait hopefully for a time when the sacrifices required will be smaller and the expenditure of effort less strenuous?

The teacher’s manual contains a wonderful quote on this matter from Elder M. Russell Ballard:

Life isn’t always easy. At some point in our journey we may feel much as the pioneers did as they crossed Iowa—up to our knees in mud, forced to bury some of our dreams along the way. We all face rocky ridges, with the wind in our face and winter coming on too soon. Sometimes it seems as though there is no end to the dust that stings our eyes and clouds our vision. Sharp edges of despair and discouragement jut out of the terrain to slow our passage. Always, there is a Devil’s Gate, which will swing wide open to lure us in. Those who are wise and faithful will steer a course as far from such temptation as possible, while others—sometimes those who are nearest and dearest to us—succumb to the attraction of ease, comfort, convenience, and rest. Occasionally we reach the top of one summit in life, as the pioneers did, only to see more mountain peaks ahead, higher and more challenging than the one we have just

traversed. Tapping unseen reservoirs of faith and endurance, we, as did our forebears, inch ever forward toward that day when our voices can join with those of all pioneers who have endured in faith, singing: "All is well! All is well!" (*Ensign*, May 1997, p. 61)

CONCLUSION: On day last summer I drove my Motor Home over the hill from East Canyon to Emigration Canyon. The vehicle was large and the curves in the road were sharp. I was miffed at the lack of acceleration on the steep hills from my huge Dodge engine, and perturbed at my inability to find a decent radio station to listen to as I drove. But I had a bottle of iced water at my side and a bag of trail mix close at hand, and the miles passed quickly enough.

I wonder if those early pioneers who traveled those same rugged hills and precipitous descents could foresee any of the luxuries of this modern age. That day I covered a distance that took them days. It took me less than an hour. How would they have used the time they saved? What would they expect of me. When we meet at the bar of God and I place my commitment and sacrifice next to theirs, what will the Lord learn of me?

Author's note: I have wondered how many of you are seeing these lessons. If you have a moment and the inclination, drop a note to tedgibbons@yahoo.com and tell me where and who you are. I would be delighted to receive any suggestions. Thanks. TLG

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