

## D&C LESSON 35

# “A MISSION OF SAVING”

By Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** Cain’s query of the Lord has echoed down the corridors of time: “Am I my brother’s ’keeper?” (Moses 5:34) And the answer has followed close at hand. Religious history is filled with tales of sacrifice made by men and women in behalf of their brothers and sisters. We have always considered that the greatest among us have been those willing to enter harm’s way in behalf of others, whether friends or strangers. It is a question answered conclusively by the firefighters and policemen who rushed into the towers of the World Trade Center while everyone else was rushing out.

### **1. PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG GUIDED THE RESCUE OF THE WILLIE AND MARTIN HANDCART COMPANIES.**

As you review the historical setting for the rescue of the handcart companies, you must not miss the spiritual implications. Virtually every act of the prophet and the people and the rescuers has spiritual implications. For example:

T When Brigham Young was informed that Saints were stranded, freezing and dying, on the high plains of Wyoming, how long did he wait to act?

“I shall call upon the Bishops this day. I shall not wait until tomorrow, nor until next day, for 60 good mule teams and 12 or 15 wagons. . . .

“I will tell you all that your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the celestial kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. Go and bring in those people now on the Plains.”  
(LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Haven, *Handcarts to Zion*, pp. 120-121)

When you see people pursuing a course of conduct that might ultimately be fatal in a spiritual way, how long do you wait to react?

T When did the people respond to the prophet's appeal?

"That afternoon food, bedding and clothing in great quantities were assembled, President Hinckley said, and the next morning wagons were repaired and loaded. By the end of October 250 teams were on the road to give relief." (*Church News*: 10/12/96)

How have we responded to the appeal of the Prophet to rescue our new converts, so many of whom are in danger of perishing?

". . .you cannot disregard the converts. Most of them do not need very much. As I have said before, they need a friend. They need something to do, a responsibility. They need nurturing with the good word of God. They come into the Church with enthusiasm for what they have found. We must immediately build on that enthusiasm. You have people in your wards who can be friends to every convert. They can listen to them, guide them, answer their questions, and be there to help in all circumstances and in all conditions. Brethren, this loss must stop. It is unnecessary. I am satisfied the Lord is not pleased with us. I invite you, every one of you, to make this a matter of priority in your administrative work. I invite every member to reach out in friendship and love for those who come into the Church as converts." (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, p. 51)

The caravans of wagons found the beleaguered Saints and most of them were rescued and brought to the valley. The commitment of the rescuers to the welfare of their suffering brothers and sisters must speak to our hearts.

There are people even now perishing in the snow and ice of indifference and faithlessness. There are many, a very great many yet on the earth who are only kept from the safety of the valley because they know not where to find it (see D&C 123:12). They must be rescued. Brigham Young said to the Saints on that October day in 1856,

“I will tell you all that your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the Celestial Kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. Go and bring in those people now on the plains. And attend strictly to those things which we call temporal, or temporal duties. Otherwise, your faith will be in vain. The preaching you have heard will be in vain to you, and you will sink to Hell, unless you attend to the things we tell you.” (James E. Faust, “Go Bring Them In from the Plains,” *Ensign*, July 1997, p. 6)

## **2. THE SAVIOR RESCUES US THROUGH HIS ATONING SACRIFICE.**

Just as the Saints went into harms way to rescue the members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies, so the Savior placed himself in the path of justice to rescue us. Elder M. Russell Ballard related a wonderful story that teaches a sobering lesson about what the Savior did for us.

I remember reading about a fire fighter in the eastern United States who ran into a burning house to rescue several children from an arson-induced fire. While his colleagues battled the blaze to keep it from spreading to other structures in the neighborhood, this man dashed into the building again and again, each time emerging with a child in his arms. After rescuing the fifth child, he started back into the inferno once more. Neighbors shouted that there were no more children in the family. But he insisted that he had seen a baby in a cradle, and he dove into the intensifying heat.

Moments after he disappeared into the fire and smoke, a horrifying explosion shook the building and the entire structure collapsed. It was several hours before fire fighters were able to

locate their colleague's body. They found him in the nursery near the crib, huddled protectively over a life sized—and practically unscratched doll.

As I think about such heroism, however, I'm reminded that the most heroic act of all time ever was performed in behalf of all mankind by the Son of God. In a very real sense, all of humanity—past, present, and future—was trapped behind a wall of flame that was fueled and fanned by our own faithlessness. Sin separated mortals from God (see Romans 6:23), and would do so forever unless a way was found to put out the fires of sin and rescue us from ourselves. (Cited in *Our Search for Happiness*: M. Russell Ballard, p. 11]

The intervention of the Savior in our otherwise hopeless circumstances is the purest and greatest act of rescuing this universe has ever experienced. And it is intensely individual. Note the language used by Alma and Ammon to describe what the Savior did for them: Alma testified:

“Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to *snatch* me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

“My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am *snatched*, and my soul is pained no more.” (Mosiah 27:28,29, *emphasis added*)

Ammon declared:

“Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have *snatched* us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

“Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

“Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

“Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.” (Alma 26:17-20, *emphasis added*)

As the prophet Jacob reflected on the mission of the Savior, he exulted in what the Savior had done for us. Listen to his language:

- ‘ “O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace!” (2 Nephi 9:8)
- ‘ “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell . . .” (2 Nephi 9:10)
- ‘ “O how great the plan of our God!” (2 Nephi 10:13)
- ‘ “O the greatness and the justice of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:17)
- ‘ “O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!” (2 Nephi 9:19)
- ‘ “O how great the holiness of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:20)

I stood one day in the Garden of Gethsemene and felt the very trees testifying of the reality of these things. Like Ammon and Alma, I too have been snatched from the very jaws of hell, rescued from the deepest abyss, delivered from the clutches of an embittered insomniac whose only desire is to make me miserable. (See 2 Nephi 2:18,27)

### **3. AS LATTER-DAY SAINTS, WE ARE TO RESCUE THOSE IN NEED.**

Since it is the objective of Lucifer that “all men might be miserable like unto himself . . .” (2 Nephi 2:27), and the desire of the Savior to “crown the faithful with joy and rejoicing . . .” (D&C 52:43), we must demonstrate our discipleship by our efforts to rescue those who have become or might become a prey to the misery of Satan.

Most of you will remember the story of the efforts of three young men to assist members of the handcart company at the crossing of the Sweetwater.

It was an emotional experience to see the Sweetwater River crossing where most of the five hundred members of the company were carried across the icy river by three brave young men. Later, all three of the boys died from the effects of the terrible strain and great exposure of that crossing. When President Brigham Young heard of this heroic act, he wept like a child and later declared publicly: "That act alone will ensure C. Allen Huntington, George W. Grant and David P. Kimball an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, worlds without end." (Solomon F. Kimball, "Belated Emigrants of 1856," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1914, p. 288; cited by James E. Faust, "A Priceless Heritage," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 84)

We have a great obligation to rescue those who are trapped beyond the filthy waters of sin and sorrow and suffering. The Lord has made it clear that we must act in behalf of those who have become a prey to Satan's misery.

Remember these words?

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it

not to me. (Matthew 25:40-45)

A part of Benjamin's sermon in Mosiah 4 is focused on this matter. We must rescue those in need if we are able. Elder Thomas Monson told a lovely story about this principle:

During the administration of President George Albert Smith, there lived in our ward an impoverished widow who cared for her three daughters, each of whom was an invalid. They were large in size and almost totally helpless. To this dear woman fell the task of bathing, feeding, dressing, and caring for her girls. Means were limited. Outside help was nonexistent. Then came the blow that the house she rented was to be sold. What was she to do? Where would she go? The bishop went to the Church Office Building to inquire if there were some way the house could be purchased. It was so small, the price so reasonable. The request was considered, then denied. A heartsick bishop was leaving the front door of the building when he met President George Albert Smith. After the exchange of greetings, President Smith inquired, "What brings you to the headquarters building?" He listened carefully as the bishop explained, but said nothing. He then excused himself for a few minutes. He returned wearing a smile and directed, "Go upstairs to the fourth floor. A check is waiting there for you. Buy the house."

"But the request was denied."

Again President Smith smiled and said, "It has just been reconsidered and approved." The home was purchased. That dear widow lived there and cared for her daughters until each of them had passed away. Then she, too, went home to God and to her heavenly reward. (Thomas S. Monson, "The Long Line of the Lonely," Ensign, Feb. 1992, 5)

Years ago a friend of mine taught an institute class at a state college. It was called "LDS Doctrine for non-Mormons." The class was well-taught and well attended. After completing the Fall Quarter, my friend went entered the hospital for a serious operation. His doctor, who served in the Stake

Presidency with the Director of the Institute, indicated that in seriousness, this surgery was about the equivalent of the surgeries at the same time. The doctor indicated that the teacher—call him Harold—was not to come to work for at least three weeks. He needed to be off his feet at home for that length of time.

A week later the Director of the Institute ran into Harold at the Institute building. “Harold,” he said, “you shouldn’t be here. Your doctor said you were to spend three weeks in bed. What are you doing?”

Harold answered, “Some of the non-members who the LDS Doctrine class are here to be interviewed. They are considering baptism.”

The Director was firm: “Harold, I just can’t let you do it. It is too dangerous.”

Then Harold said this: “If I was sitting and recuperating in my recliner in the living room of my home and witnessed a terrible automobile accident on the street in front of my house, and if I could see through my window that there were badly injured people, bleeding and perhaps dying, would you expect me to sit and do nothing?”

“No,” came the reply.

“Well, sir, people are dying, and I can’t sit at home and do nothing.”

The concern expressed by this teacher is the concern that brought men and wagons from Salt Lake into the teeth of a bitter Wyoming winter. When people are dying, spiritually or physically, Saints are not able to sit still and do nothing.

Rescuing the children of our Father spiritually is in fact the most important thing we can do. The Lord said in D&C 15 and D&C 16

And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 15:6; 16:6)



**CONCLUSION:** Certain organizations exist which bear the name “Search and Rescue.” What a wonderful idea! No job description could better describe the mission of the Church.

In the past twelve months, for example, the LDS Church participated in more than 350 hunger relief, community development, and in-kind projects in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States and Canada.

Included in the 1992 projects were such diverse activities as shipping more than 7.6 million pounds of sorted, used clothing—more than 190 container loads—to overseas and domestic destinations for distribution to refugees, displaced families, and other needy. Special attention was given to needs in Africa, where clothing, blankets and other supplies, and more than a million pounds of food were authorized for famine relief and community development. Another half-million pounds of food were contributed to food banks and feeding programs for [page 49] the homeless and other needs in the United States and abroad.

Couples are now serving on full-time humanitarian service missions in Europe, Africa, Asia, Mongolia, and Latin America. Individual doctors, nurses, educators, and others have served on short-term consulting assignments with government ministries, hospitals, schools, and other institutions in many countries. Some projects have attacked the causes of poverty and suffering by supporting community development efforts of the local people. (Thomas S. Monson, “Search and Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 48)

We must all be willing to do what the church is committed to doing: We must all be ready to search and rescue.

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