

We acknowledge the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle and in the overflow gathering in the nearby Assembly Hall, where Elders Richard G. Scott, Marion D. Hanks, and Lynn A. Mickelsen are seated on the stand. We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations who are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders, and members of the Church who have assembled to worship together.

The Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Brother Jerold Ottley, with Brothers Robert Cundick and John

Longhurst at the organ, will provide the music for this session. The choir opened these services by singing "Truth Eternal" and will now sing "O Thou Kind and Gracious Father," following which Elder Eduardo Ayala of the Seventy will offer the invocation.

The choir sang "O Thou Kind and Gracious Father."

Elder Eduardo Ayala offered the invocation.

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our first speaker this morning.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Call to help handcart companies

My beloved brethren and sisters, how blessed we are to meet together in peace in these comfortable and happy circumstances. As I have thought of this October general conference and of the inspired talks we have heard and will hear, my mind has gone back to the events of this same first Sunday of October 135 years ago when a similar meeting was convened here on Temple Square.

We did not have this great Tabernacle at that time. Our people then met in the Old Tabernacle, which stood just to the south of us. It was Sunday, October 5, 1856. On Saturday, the day before, a small group of missionaries returning from England arrived in the valley. They had been able to make relatively good time because their teams were strong and their wagons light. Franklin D. Richards was their leader. They immediately sought out President Brigham Young. They told him that hundreds of men,

women, and children were scattered along the trail that led from the Missouri River to the Salt Lake Valley. Most of them were pulling handcarts, two companies of these, with two smaller companies following behind with ox teams and wagons. The first group was probably at this time in the area of Scotts Bluff, more than four hundred miles from their destination, with the others behind them. It was October, and they would be trapped in the snows of winter and perish unless help was sent.

Brigham Young had known nothing of this. There was, of course, at that time no rapid means of communication—no radio, no telegraph, no fast mail. He was then fifty-five years of age. The next morning, the Sabbath, he stood before the people in the Tabernacle and said:

"I will now give this people the subject and the text for the Elders who may speak. . . . It is this. On the 5th day of October, 1856, many of our brethren

and sisters are on the plains with handcarts, and probably many are now seven hundred miles from this place, and they must be brought here, we must send assistance to them. The text will be, 'to get them here.' . . .

"That is my religion; that is the dictation of the Holy Ghost that I possess. It is to save the people. . . .

"I shall call upon the Bishops this day. I shall not wait until tomorrow, nor until the next day, for 60 good mule teams and 12 or 15 wagons. I do not want to send oxen. I want good horses and mules. They are in this Territory, and we must have them. Also 12 tons of flour and 40 good teamsters, besides those that drive the teams. . . .

"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*" (quoted in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* [Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1960], pp. 120-21).

The next morning anvils were ringing in the blacksmith shops as horses were shod and wagons were repaired and loaded.

The following morning, Tuesday, October 7th, "sixteen good four-mule teams and twenty-seven hardy young men headed eastward with the first installment of provisions. The gathering of more to follow, was pushed vigorously" (Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, p. 124).

"By the end of October, two hundred and fifty teams were on the road to give relief" (Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, p. 125).

There have been many eloquent sermons preached from the pulpits on Temple Square, but none more eloquent than those spoken in that October conference of 135 years ago.

Story of Ellen Pucell Unthank

Now let me leave that for a moment and pick up the story from another position.

A few weeks ago, it was my privilege to dedicate a monument to the memory of Ellen Pucell Unthank. It stands on the campus of Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah. It is a bronze figure, beautiful and engaging. It is of a little nine-year-old girl, standing with one foot tiptoe, her hair blowing back in the wind, a smile on her face, eagerly looking forward.

Ellen Pucell, as she was named, was born in a beautiful area of England where the hills are soft and rolling and the grass is forever green. Her parents, Margaret and William Pucell, were converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From the time of their baptism in 1837 until the spring of 1856, they had scrimped and saved to go to the Zion of their people in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains of America. Now that was possible if they were willing to pull a handcart one thousand miles across a wilderness. They accepted that challenge, as did hundreds of their fellow converts.

Margaret and William took with them their two daughters, Maggie, fourteen, and Ellen, nine. They said good-bye to loved ones they would never again see in mortality. Near the end of May they set sail from Liverpool with 852 of their convert associates. My wife's grandmother, thirteen-year-old Mary Goble, was a part of that company and, I like to think, played with those little girls aboard ship.

After six weeks at sea, they landed at Boston and took the steam train to Iowa City. They had expected their handcarts and wagons would be ready. They were not. There was a serious and disastrous delay. It was not until late in July that they began the long march, first to Winter Quarters on the

Missouri and from there to the Rocky Mountains.

The Pucells were assigned to the Martin Handcart Company. The Goble family, my wife's forebears, became a part of the Cluff Wagon Company, which followed the handcarts to give help if needed.

With high expectation they began their journey. Through sunlight and storm, through dust and mud, they trudged beside the Platte River through all of the month of September and most of October. On October 19, they reached the last crossing of the Platte, a little west of the present city of Casper, Wyoming. The river was wide, the current strong, and chunks of ice were floating in the water. They were now traveling without sufficient food. Bravely they waded through the icy stream. A terrible storm arose with fierce winds bringing drifting sand, hail, and snow. When they climbed the far bank of the river, their wet clothing froze to their bodies. Exhausted, freezing, and without strength to go on, some quietly sat down, and while they sat, they died.

Ellen's mother, Margaret, became sick. Her husband lifted her onto the cart. They were now climbing in elevation toward the Continental Divide, and it was uphill all the way. Can you see this family in your imagination?—the mother too sick and weak to walk, the father thin and emaciated, struggling to pull the cart as the two little girls push from behind with swirling, cold winds about them, and around them are hundreds of others similarly struggling.

They came to a stream of freezing water. The father, while crossing, slipped on a rock and fell. Struggling to his feet, he reached the shore, wet and chilled. Sometime later he sat down to rest. He quietly died, his senses numbed by the cold. His wife died five days later. I do not know how or where their frozen bodies were buried in that

desolate, white wilderness. I do know that the ground was frozen and that the snow was piled in drifts and that the two little girls were now orphans.

Rescue party arrives

Between 135 and 150 of the Martin company alone perished along that trail of suffering and death. It was in these desperate and terrible circumstances—hungry, exhausted, their clothes thin and ragged—that they were found by the rescue party. As the rescuers appeared on the western horizon breaking a trail through the snow, they seemed as angels of mercy. And indeed they were. The beleaguered emigrants shouted for joy, some of them. Others, too weak to shout, simply wept and wept and wept.

There was now food to eat and some warmer clothing. But the suffering was not over, nor would it ever end in mortality. Limbs had been frozen, and the gangrenous flesh sloughed off from the bones.

The carts were abandoned, and the survivors were crowded into the wagons of the rescuers. The long rough journey of three hundred, four hundred, even five hundred miles between them and this valley was especially slow and tedious because of the storms. On November 30, 104 wagons, loaded with suffering human cargo, came into the Salt Lake Valley. Word of their expected arrival had preceded them. It was Sunday, and again the Saints were gathered in the Tabernacle. Brigham Young stood before the congregation and said:

"As soon as this meeting is dismissed I want the brethren and sisters to repair to their homes. . . .

"The afternoon meeting will be omitted, for I wish the sisters to . . . prepare to give those who have just arrived a mouthful of something to eat, and to wash them and nurse them. . . .

"Some you will find with their feet frozen to their ankles; some are frozen to their knees and some have their hands frosted . . . we want you to receive them as your own children, and to have the same feeling for them" (quoted in Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, p. 139).

The two orphan girls, Maggie and Ellen, were among those with frozen limbs. Ellen's were the most serious. The doctor in the valley, doing the best he could, amputated her legs just below the knees. The surgical tools were crude. There was no anesthesia. The stumps never healed. She grew to womanhood, married William Unthank, and bore and reared an honorable family of six children. Moving about on those stumps, she served her family, her neighbors, and the Church with faith and good cheer and without complaint, though she was never without pain. Her posterity are numerous, and among them are educated and capable men and women who love the Lord whom she loved and who love the cause for which she suffered.

We became acquainted with God

Years later, a group in Cedar City were talking about her and others who were in those ill-fated companies. Members of the group spoke critically of the Church and its leaders because the company of converts had been permitted to start so late in the season. I now quote from a manuscript which I have:

"One old man in the corner sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it. Then he arose and said things that no person who heard will ever forget. His face was white with emotion, yet he spoke calmly, deliberately, but with great earnestness and sincerity.

"He said in substance, 'I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about.

Cold historic facts mean nothing here, for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. A mistake to send the handcart company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that company and my wife was in it, and Sister Nellie Unthank whom you have cited was there too. We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the Church because every one of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives, for we became acquainted with him in our extremities'" (manuscript in my possession).

That speaker was Francis Webster, who was twenty-six years of age when with his wife and infant child he went through that experience. He became a leader in the Church and a leader in the communities of southern Utah.

Our Redeemer's sacrifice

Now, my brothers and sisters, I have spent a long time telling that story, perhaps too long. This is October of 1991, and that episode of 135 years ago is behind us. But I have told it because it is true and because the spirit of that saga is as contemporary as is this morning.

I wish to remind everyone within my hearing that the comforts we have, the peace we have, and, most important, the faith and knowledge of the things of God that we have were bought with a terrible price by those who have gone before us. Sacrifice has always been a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The crowning element of our faith is our conviction of our living God, the Father of us all, and of His Beloved Son, the Redeemer of the world. It is because of our Redeemer's

life and sacrifice that we are here. It is because of His sacrificial atonement that we and all of the sons and daughters of God will partake of the salvation of the Lord. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). It is because of the sacrificial redemption wrought by the Savior of the world that the great plan of the eternal gospel is made available to us, under which those who die in the Lord shall not taste of death but shall have the opportunity of going on to a celestial and eternal glory.

In our own helplessness, He becomes our rescuer, saving us from damnation and bringing us to eternal life.

In times of despair, in seasons of loneliness and fear, He is there on the horizon to bring succor and comfort and assurance and faith. He is our King, our Savior, our Deliverer, our Lord and our God.

Those on the high, cold plains of Wyoming came to know Him in their extremity as perhaps few come to know Him. But to every troubled soul, every man or woman in need, to those everywhere who are pulling heavy burdens through the bitter storms of life, He has said:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

A mission of saving

Now, I am grateful that today none of our people are stranded on the Wyoming highlands. But I know that all about us there are many who are in need of help and who are deserving of

rescue. Our mission in life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be a mission of saving. There are the homeless, the hungry, the destitute. Their condition is obvious. We have done much. We can do more to help those who live on the edge of survival.

We can reach out to strengthen those who wallow in the mire of pornography, gross immorality, and drugs. Many have become so addicted that they have lost power to control their own destinies. They are miserable and broken. They can be salvaged and saved.

There are wives who are abandoned and children who weep in homes where there is abuse. There are fathers who can be rescued from evil and corrosive practices that destroy and bring only heartbreak.

It is not with those on the high plains of Wyoming that we need be concerned today. It is with many immediately around us—in our families, in our wards and stakes, in our neighborhoods and communities.

Put aside our selfishness

"And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18).

If we are to build that Zion of which the prophets have spoken and of which the Lord has given mighty promise, we must set aside our consuming selfishness. We must rise above our love for comfort and ease, and in the very process of effort and struggle, even in our extremity, we shall become better acquainted with our God.

Let us never forget that we have a marvelous heritage received from great and courageous people who endured unimaginable suffering and demonstrated unbelievable courage for the cause they loved. You and I know

what we should do. God help us to do it when it needs to be done, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Behold, the Tabernacle of God" without announcement.

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Behold, the Tabernacle of God."

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Tabernacle Choir's European tour

In June of this year, Sister Nelson and I had the great privilege of accompanying the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on its historic concert tour in Europe. We are grateful to the First Presidency for that assignment. Much has been written regarding the success of the choir and of its favorable influence that will yet continue. Members and friends of the Church worldwide join with me in expressing appreciation to the officers, staff, directors, accompanists, and all vocalists for their wonderful service. I won't mention anyone by name; I will simply refer to them all as members of the choir.

I'll not comment as a music critic would. While musical experts of the world focus on what choir members can do, I would like to focus on what choir members can be. This I do because I witnessed in choir members great examples that can inspire and improve the lives of each of you who honestly strives to emulate the Lord who said, "I am the light; I have set an example for you" (3 Nephi 18:16; see also John 13:15). So we should strive to learn from His example—and from the good example of those who love and follow Him.

Attributes of disciples

Members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir are not superhuman. They

are ordinary people with ordinary frailties. But therein lies the power of their example. They believe this promise from the Lord: "Because thou hast seen thy weakness, thou shalt be made strong" (D&C 135:5).

Before attending their first rehearsal, choir members brought with them not only musical education and talent but qualities of personal righteousness. Before singing to their first audience, they were blessed by another promise from our Savior:

"Ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls" (Alma 17:11).

Have you not learned that strength comes to an ordinary soul when given an extraordinary calling? The choir has! Indeed, each member seemed to be imbued with a real sense of mission, striving for those ten traits that missionaries are expected to possess and practice:

"Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence" (D&C 4:6).

Those are attributes the Lord deserves from His disciples. Because each of us is to be "an example of the believers" (1 Timothy 4:12), I would like to address those ten topics as members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir "were