

me" (D&C 19:23). Generally, however, the faith, devotion, and living of correct gospel principles by the members have improved their lives not only spiritually but also temporally, for did not the Lord say that the "willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days"? (D&C 64:34).

That the Lord will continue to bless our people with joy and peace of mind as they obey His commandments

and the counsels of our leaders in the midst of adversity is my humble prayer in Jesus' name, amen.

### President Hinckley

Elders John E. Fowler, Jay E. Jensen, and Augusto A. Lim of the Seventy have spoken to us.

Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us.

## Elder James E. Faust

As this conference comes to a close, I wish to speak of a priceless heritage. I acknowledge the faithful pioneers in all of the countries of the world who have helped establish the Church in their lands. First-generation members of the Church are indeed pioneers. They are and have been men and women of deep faith and devotion. Today, however, I speak primarily of the priceless legacy which belongs to the descendants of all pioneers, but especially to those who came into this valley and settled in Utah and other parts of western America.

### Reenacting the handcart trek

In celebration of July 24th this year, we joined the Saints of the Riverton Wyoming Stake. Under the direction of President Robert Lorimer and his counselors, the youth and youth leaders of that stake reenacted part of the handcart trek which took place in 1856. We started early in a four-wheel-drive van and went first to Independence Rock, where we picked up the Mormon Trail. We saw Devil's Gate a few miles up the road. Our souls were subdued when we arrived at the hallowed ground of Martin's Cove, the site where the Martin Handcart Company, freezing and starving, waited for the rescue wagons to come

from Salt Lake City. About fifty-six members of the Martin Handcart Company perished there from hunger and cold.

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" (quoted in Solomon F. Kimball, "Belated Emigrants of 1856," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1914, p. 288).

We went farther along the trail to the site where the members of the Willie Handcart Company were rescued. We felt that we were standing on holy ground. At that site twenty-one members of that party died from starvation and cold. We continued to travel up over Rocky Ridge, seven thousand three hundred feet high. This is the highest spot on the Mormon Trail. The two-mile ascension to Rocky Ridge gains over seven hundred feet in altitude. It was very difficult for all of the

pioneers to travel over Rocky Ridge. It was particularly agonizing for the members of the Willie Handcart Company, who struggled over that ridge in the fall of 1856 in a blizzard. Many had worn shoes, and the sharp rocks caused their feet to bleed, leaving a trail of blood in the snow.

As we walked over Rocky Ridge, two square nails and an old-style button were picked up. No doubt these objects were shaken loose going over the sharp rocks. My soul was sobered to be in that historic spot. Several of my ancestors crossed that ridge, though none was in the handcart companies. Not all of my forebears who started in the great exodus to the West made it even to the Rocky Ridge. Two of them died at Winter Quarters.

As I walked over Rocky Ridge, I wondered if I have sacrificed enough. In my generation I have not seen so much sacrifice by so many. I wonder what more I should have done, and should be doing, to further this work.

A few miles farther, at Radium Springs, we caught up with 185 young people and their leaders from the Riverton stake, who had been pulling handcarts in reenactment of the handcart treks. We bore testimony of the faith and heroism of those who struggled in agony over that trail 136 years ago.

#### **Bodil Mortinsen and James Kirkwood**

We went on to Rock Creek Hollow, where the Willie Handcart Company made camp. Thirteen members of the Willie company who perished from cold, exhaustion, and starvation are buried in a common grave at Rock Creek Hollow. Two additional members who died during the night are buried nearby. Two of those buried at Rock Creek Hollow were heroic children of tender years: Bodil Mortinsen, age nine, from Denmark; and James Kirkwood, age eleven, from Scotland.

Bodil apparently was assigned to care for some small children as they crossed Rocky Ridge. When they arrived at camp, she must have been sent to gather firewood. She was found frozen to death leaning against the wheel of her handcart, clutching sagebrush.

Let me tell you of James Kirkwood. James was from Glasgow, Scotland. On the trip west, James was accompanied by his widowed mother and three brothers, one of whom, Thomas, was nineteen and crippled and had to ride in the handcart. James's primary responsibility on the trek was to care for his little four-year-old brother, Joseph, while his mother and oldest brother, Robert, pulled the cart. As they climbed Rocky Ridge, it was snowing and there was a bitter cold wind blowing. It took the whole company twenty-seven hours to travel fifteen miles. When little Joseph became too weary to walk, James, the older brother, had no choice but to carry him. Left behind the main group, James and Joseph made their way slowly to camp. When the two finally arrived at the fireside, James, "having so faithfully carried out his task, collapsed and died from exposure and over-exertion" (private letter, Don H. Smith to Robert Lorimer, 20 Feb. 1990, quoting account of Don Chislett).

#### **Rescuing the handcart companies**

Also heroic were the rescuers who responded to President Brigham Young's call in the October 1856 general conference. President Young called for forty young men, sixty to sixty-five teams of mules or horses, wagons loaded with twenty-four thousand pounds of flour to leave in the next day or two to "bring in those people now on the plains" (LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* [Glendale, Ca.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1960], p. 121). The rescuers went swiftly to relieve the suffering travelers.

When the rescued sufferers got close to the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young convened a meeting on this block. He directed the Saints in the valley to receive the sufferers into their homes, make them comfortable, and administer food and clothing to them. Said President Young: "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" (Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, p. 139).

When the rescuers brought the Willie handcart pioneers into this valley, it is recorded by Captain Willie: "On our arrival there the Bishops of the different Wards took every person, who was not provided with a home, to comfortable quarters. Some had their hands and feet badly frozen; but everything which could be done to alleviate their sufferings, was done. . . . Hundreds of the Citizens flocked round the wagons on our way through the City, cordially welcoming their Brethren and Sisters to their mountain home" (James G. Willie, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 9 Nov. 1856, p. 15).

### The legacy of the pioneers

These excruciating experiences developed in these pioneers an unshakable faith in God. Said Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford, "But I believe the Recording Angel has inscribed in the archives above, and that my sufferings for the Gospel's sake will be sanctified unto me for my good" (*Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford* [Ogden, Utah: 1908], p. 7).

In addition to the legacy of faith bequeathed by those who crossed the plains, they also left a great heritage of love—love of God and love of mankind. It is an inheritance of sobriety,

independence, hard work, high moral values, and fellowship. It is a birthright of obedience to the commandments of God and loyalty to those whom God has called to lead this people. It is a legacy of forsaking evil. Immorality, alternative life-styles, gambling, selfishness, dishonesty, unkindness, addiction to alcohol and drugs are not part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Here in Utah there is a voter decision about gambling to be made in a few weeks. The Church is not retreating from its stand on this issue. But as contests and issues heat up, we counsel members of the Church to be tolerant and understanding. We all have our moral agency, but if we use it unwisely, we must pay the price. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said, "We may use our agency as to whether we shall obey or disobey; and if we disobey we must abide the penalty" (*Fundamentals of the Church Welfare Plan* [address at bishops' meeting, 6 Oct. 1944], p. 3).

### Consecrated through their suffering

I cannot help wondering why these intrepid pioneers had to pay for their faith with such a terrible price in agony and suffering. Why were not the elements tempered to spare them from their profound agony? I believe their lives were consecrated to a higher purpose through their suffering. Their love for the Savior was burned deep in their souls, and into the souls of their children, and their children's children. The motivation for their lives came from a true conversion in the center of their souls. As President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, "When there throbs in the heart of an individual Latter-day Saint a great and vital testimony of the truth of this work, he will be found doing his duty in the Church" (*Ensign*, May 1984, p. 99).

Above and beyond the epic historical events they participated in, the pioneers found a guide to personal

living. They found reality and meaning in their lives. In the difficult days of their journey, the members of the Martin and Willie handcart companies encountered some apostates from the Church who were returning from the West, going back to the East. These apostates tried to persuade some in the companies to turn back. A few did turn back. But the great majority of the pioneers went forward to a heroic achievement in this life, and to eternal life in the life hereafter.

Francis Webster, a member of the Martin company, stated, "Everyone of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities" (quoted in David O. McKay, "Pioneer Women," *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1948, p. 8). I hope that this priceless legacy of faith left by the pioneers will inspire all of us to more fully participate in the Savior's work of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children.

### Invitation to come back

You who are among the descendants of these noble pioneers have a priceless heritage of faith and courage. If there are any of you who do not enjoy fellowship with us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we invite you to seek to know what instilled such great faith in your ancestors and what motivated them to willingly pay such a terrible price for their membership in this Church. To those who have been offended or lost interest or who have turned away for any reason, we invite all of you to join in full fellowship again with us. The faithful members, with all their faults and failings, are humbly striving to do God's holy work across the world. We need your help in the great struggle against the powers of darkness so prevalent in the world

today. In becoming a part of this work, you can all satisfy the deepest yearnings of your souls. You can come to know the personal comfort that can be found in seeking the sacred and holy things of God. You can enjoy the blessings and covenants administered in the holy temples. You can have great meaning and purpose in your lives, even in the profane world in which we live. You can have strength of character so that you can act for yourselves and not be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26).

A few years ago the First Presidency of the Church issued the invitation to all to come back:

"We are aware of some who are inactive, of others who have become critical and are prone to find fault, and of those who have been disfellowshipped or excommunicated because of serious transgressions.

"To all such we reach out in love. We are anxious to forgive in the spirit of Him who said: 'I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.' (D&C 64:10)

"We encourage Church members to forgive those who may have wronged them. To those who have ceased activity and to those who have become critical, we say, 'Come back. Come back and feast at the table of the Lord, and taste again the sweet and satisfying fruits of fellowship with the saints.'

"We are confident that many have [wanted] to return, but have felt awkward about doing so. We assure you that you will find open arms to receive you and willing hands to assist you" ("An Invitation to Come Back," *Church News*, 22 Dec. 1985, p. 3).

At the close of this great conference and on behalf of my Brethren, I sincerely and humbly reiterate that request. And we open our arms to you. I so declare in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

Thank you, Brother Faust, for your moving testimony. I may say that it was my privilege recently to dedicate three monuments on that pioneer trail in the areas of which he spoke, monuments which were erected by the people of the Riverton Wyoming Stake, and that we have acquired the property at Rock Creek Hollow, where were buried the thirteen who died in one night and the two the next day.

Before hearing the closing remarks of President Thomas S. Monson, we express appreciation to all who have provided the inspiring and uplifting music heard during this conference.

We thank city officials and many others: the doctors, Church Health Unit nurses, and ambulance services who have been on hand to render assistance;

the ushers and interpreters; and those responsible for the beautiful flowers on the stand and on Temple Square.

We express appreciation to local and national press representatives for coverage of the conference.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations and cable and satellite systems who have made their facilities available. Thank you, one and all. And thank you, my beloved brethren and sisters, for your attendance on this great occasion. May the Lord bless you.

Following President Monson's remarks, the choir will sing "God So Loved the World." The benediction will be given by Elder Lynn A. Sorensen, who was released yesterday as a member of the Seventy. The conference will then stand adjourned for six months.

## President Thomas S. Monson

### A glorious conference

Someone said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." That's the feeling that we have today.

Traditionally the President of the Church, the Lord's prophet, seer, and revelator, provides the concluding expressions of a general conference and gives his blessing to all. Humbly and respectfully I respond to the assignment to represent him at this time.

This has been a glorious conference. The prayers have been sincere and from the heart; the music and singing have lifted us heavenward and given us an upward reach we thought perhaps was beyond our grasp. The Brethren who have spoken, and Sister Jepsen, have declared the word of God and touched our hearts with their inspired messages. We are all better for having been a part of the conference.

### We sustain and love President Benson

President Benson's chair has remained unoccupied during the conference sessions, which brings some sadness to our hearts. His ready smile, the wave of his hand, the declarations of truth that have marked his influence have been missed. However, President Benson, we are pleased and grateful that you have been a part of the conference through television. Our hearts go out to you in the passing of your beloved eternal companion, Flora. How thankful we are for the sacred covenant that binds you two sweethearts together for all eternity! The entire Church joins in a mighty prayer to our Heavenly Father that you may be cradled in the palm of His hand and blessed according to your need and His divine purposes. We sustain you. We follow you. We love you—our prophet.