

Elder Jack H Goaslind

Ordinary men can do extraordinary tasks

This evening, brethren, I have a strong desire to relate to you an aspect of a well-documented story that is little known in the Church. It involves the courage, the strength of a few young men from the pioneer era; some were priest- or teacher-age like many of you assembled here tonight. These young men willingly made significant sacrifices when they received a call.

As I tell their story, please keep in mind what power it is that unifies us and also connects us to them. The royal priesthood we bear is more than coincidental to this account. Theirs was the same priesthood which today empowers you to perform great and small acts of service to your fellowmen.

Ordinary men—including, and perhaps especially, young men—blessed with the privilege of holding the priesthood of God may be called upon to do extraordinary tasks. Holders of the holy priesthood can accomplish mighty feats of heroism, bravery, and service through faith in that sacred power.

The pioneers did not doubt it. They bore frequent witness that the Spirit of the Lord guided and directed them. In confirmation of their testimony, I declare unto you His Spirit is with each of us. He desires to bless and strengthen us. He will make us equal to every righteous task we undertake in His name. He will magnify many times over our own natural ability. You can succeed beyond your own strength *if you learn to rely on the Spirit of the Lord.*

Rescuing the handcart companies

Now, the story I promised to tell you began before the October 1856 general conference, but that is where we will begin. President Brigham Young stood at

the Old Tabernacle pulpit on this square and issued a call to go rescue the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies. Two days later, about 30 faithful brethren with good mule teams were dispatched to go bring in the handcarts stranded several hundred miles east. Dan W. Jones, a convert of about five years, volunteered.

After arduous effort, the Willie Company finally was found. Caught in the storms of early winter, the Saints were freezing and starving to death. The relief party did all they could to improve conditions, but for some it was simply too late. The morning after the rescuers' arrival, nine of the company were buried in a common grave.

Some of the rescuers were assigned to escort the handcarts to the Salt Lake Valley, but others pushed further eastward in an effort to find the Martin Company. Finally they were found, along with the Hodgett and Hunt Wagon Companies, bogged down and helpless in the snow east of Devil's Gate, Wyoming.

Members of the Martin Company were in dire straits. Their food rations had been cut to a few ounces of flour per day. Only a third of them could walk, and deaths were recorded daily.

The leaders of the rescue party wisely decided to spare no effort in getting the suffering survivors to safety in the Salt Lake Valley. Because of the shortage of space in the wagons, it was necessary to leave most of the handcarts' possessions in storage at Devil's Gate till spring.

The sacrifice of pioneer young men

Brother Dan W. Jones and two others from the relief party, along with 17 young men from the wagon companies, were called to stay behind to guard the property. They were left to face five winter months in Wyoming, hundreds of

miles from help, with scarcely anything to eat, and under conditions of extreme privation. Imagine the sacrifice! Offers were made to each man to join the wagons bound for the valley, but every one of them chose to stay behind, obedient to the call to serve.

That winter was recorded as one of the most severe ever. The intrepid watchmen struggled to repair the cabins at Devil's Gate; killed the remaining cattle; stored the tough, stringy beef for food; and reconditioned and stacked the goods they were left to protect.

They killed a few buffalo, but the hunting became bad. Soon they were reduced to living on animal hides, from which they scraped off the hair, then boiled the leather. They ate the leather wrappings off the wagon tongues, old moccasin soles, and a well-worn buffalo hide that had been used as a foot mat for two months. At one point Dan Jones was literally preparing to eat his own saddle!

In February of that extreme winter, a member of the Snake Indian tribe visited and helped them. That first night he and two scouts came to camp loaded with good buffalo meat.

Inspiration received by Dan Jones

The winter passed, and finally, early in May, the relief wagons began to roll in. Of the various communications Brother Jones had received, one critical letter from Brigham Young had not arrived. Loading and shipping of the stored goods could not commence without it.

For days they waited, becoming increasingly anxious. Finally Brother Jones sought the Lord in prayer to know how to proceed. He recorded the following testimony: "Next morning without saying anything about the lack of instructions we commenced business. Soon some one asked whose teams were to be loaded first, [and] I dictated to my clerk. Thus we continued. As fast as the

clerk put them down, orders would be given, and we passed on to the next. We continued this [way] for four days. . . . All the teams were loaded up, companies organized and started back [to the valley]" (Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years among the Indians* [1960], 107).

The 17 young men were loaded on the last wagons departing to the Salt Lake Valley, where they would be reunited with their families and loved ones.

Brother Jones arrived later to report to President Young, feeling not a little uncertain how he would be received. Should he have waited for the President's written orders? As everything unfolded, it was learned that President Young had indeed dictated a letter of instructions, which was never received. Dan carefully presented his detailed report. It was a testimony to him to find that the inspiration he'd received in Wyoming was *exactly* the same as in the prophet's letter.

More than they could have imagined

Dan Jones's young men had done more than they ever would have imagined they could:

- They had crossed the plains in wagons and by handcart, mostly on foot.
- They had seen many of their friends and relatives die along the way.
- They had volunteered to spend the winter 300 miles from their destination.
- They had survived a harsh winter with little food and few, if any, comforts.
- They had heeded the call of the prophet to serve their fellow Saints.
- They had endured to the end nobly and were blessed for their efforts.

I repeat, brethren: Ordinary men, blessed with the privilege of holding the priesthood of God, may be called upon to do extraordinary tasks and accomplish mighty feats through faith in that sacred power!

We can perform mighty miracles

One of my Book of Mormon heroes, Ammon, the great son of Mosiah, explains how much two people can accomplish when one of them is the Lord: "Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever" (Alma 26:12).

To you young men of the Aaronic Priesthood and to you brethren of the Melchizedek Priesthood, I witness that we *can* perform "many mighty miracles," as testified by Ammon and by Dan Jones! They took the Lord as their guide, listened to and obeyed the Holy Spirit, and learned that they could indeed perform mighty miracles, which thing they never had supposed.

Our own challenges in this day will be great. Our needs will be significant.

Our loyalty to great gospel truths must be no less valiant than that of those young men over 140 years ago.

It is my prayer, brethren, that each of us will make the Lord—and His revealed word through His servants, the prophets—the guiding influence in our lives. Each of us has a miracle to perform, a journey to complete, and a marvelous mission to fulfill.

May Heavenly Father bless you to know that you are one of His chosen sons in a blessed and royal generation, and that He has mighty miracles for *you* to perform. With His strength and the guidance of the Spirit, you too can do all things! To which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have just listened to Elder Jack H Goaslind of the Seventy. President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will now address us.

President James E. Faust

Priesthood is the greatest power

My dear brethren, I prayerfully seek your faith as I undertake the overwhelming responsibility of addressing this great body of priesthood holders. May I express my profound appreciation for your loyalty, faithfulness, and devotion. The work of God our Father goes forward as never before because of your commitment and devotion to this holy work.

Brethren, we must never let the great powers of the holy priesthood of God lie dormant in us. We are bound together in the greatest cause and the most sacred work in all the world. To exercise these great powers, we must be clean in thought and action. We must do nothing

which would impair the full exercise of this transcendent power.

Priesthood is the greatest power on earth. Worlds were created by and through the priesthood. To safeguard this sacred power, all priesthood holders act under the direction of those who hold the keys of the priesthood. These keys bring order into our lives and into the organization of the Church. For us, priesthood power is the power and authority delegated by God to act in His name for the salvation of His children. Caring for others is the very essence of priesthood responsibility. It is the power to bless, to heal, and to administer the saving ordinances of the gospel. Righteous priesthood authority is most