



**Lesson 35: "A Mission of Saving," D&C 4:4-7; 18:10-16; 52:40; 81:5-6; Moroni 7:45-48; Our Heritage, pp. 77-80.**

**Introduction**



Consider why it is important that we to continue to repeat the stories about the experiences of the early Latter-day Saint pioneers.

**President Gordon B. Hinckley** said: *"Stories of the beleaguered Saints and of their suffering and death will be repeated again and again. ... Stories of their rescue need to be repeated again and again. They speak of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ"* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 118; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 86).

**President Brigham Young guided the rescue of the Martin and Willie handcart companies.**

In the 1850s Church leaders decided to form handcart companies as a way to reduce expenses so that financial aid could be extended to the greatest number of emigrants. Saints who traveled this way put only 100 pounds of flour and a limited quantity of provisions and belongings into a cart and then pulled the cart across the plains. Between 1856 and 1860, ten handcart companies traveled to Utah. Eight of the companies reached the Salt Lake Valley successfully, but two of them, the Martin and Willie handcart companies, were caught in an early winter and many Saints among them perished.

**President Gordon B. Hinckley:**

*"I take you back to the general conference of October 1856. On Saturday of that conference, Franklin D. Richards and a handful of associates arrived in the valley.*

*They had traveled from Winter Quarters with strong teams and light wagons and had been able to make good time. Brother Richards immediately sought out President Young. He reported that there were hundreds of men, women, and children scattered over the long trail. ... They were in desperate trouble. Winter had come early. Snow-laden winds*



**Lesson Highlights**

- President Brigham Young guided the rescue of the Martin and Willie handcart companies.
- The Savior rescues us through His atoning sacrifice.
- As Latter-day Saints, we are to rescue those in need.

**A study of this lesson will teach us about the rescue of the Martin and Willie handcart companies, show that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of rescue, and encourage us to help rescue those in need.**

**Next Week**

#36 "The Desert Shall Rejoice, and Blossom as the Rose" (Our Heritage, pp. 81-96)

were howling across the highlands. ... Our people were hungry; their carts and their wagons were breaking down; their oxen dying. The people themselves were dying. All of them would perish unless they were rescued.

"I think President Young did not sleep that night. I think visions of those destitute, freezing, dying people paraded through his mind. The next morning he came to the old Tabernacle which stood on this square. He said to the people:

" 'I will now give this people the subject and the text for the Elders who may speak. ... It is this. ... 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' (in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* [1960], 120–21).

"That afternoon, food, bedding, and clothing in great quantities were assembled by the women. The next morning, horses were shod and wagons were repaired and loaded. The following morning, ... 16 mule teams pulled out and headed eastward. By the end of October there were 250 teams on the road to give relief" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 85–86).

### **The Savior rescues us through His atoning sacrifice.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of rescue. In a conference address, after sharing the story of the rescue of the handcart companies, **President Gordon B. Hinckley** testified of the rescuing mission of the Savior: "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

The Martin and Willie handcart companies had done all they could to reach the Salt Lake Valley, but they could go no farther. They needed to be rescued. Without the rescue parties, they all would have died.

**President Hinckley** shared this account of the rescue:

"It was in ... desperate and terrible circumstances—hungry, exhausted, their clothes thin and ragged—that [the handcart companies] 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)" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 54).

*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" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 54).*

"I am thankful that I was counted worthy to be a pioneer and a handcart girl. It prepared me to endure hard times in my future life. I often think of the songs we sang to encourage us on our toilsome journey. It was hard to endure, but the Lord gave us strength and courage."

Suzanna Stone, age 25,  
Willie Handcart Company



## As Latter-day Saints, we are to rescue those in need.



**President Thomas S. Monson:**

*"Let us for a moment join Captain Edward Martin and the handcart company he led. While we*

*will not feel the pangs of hunger which they felt or experience the bitter cold that penetrated their weary bodies, we will emerge from our visit with a better appreciation of hardship borne, courage demonstrated, and faith fulfilled. We will witness with tear-filled eyes a dramatic answer to the question 'Am I my brother's keeper?'*

*"The handcarts moved on November 3 and reached the [Sweetwater] river, filled with floating ice. To cross would require more courage and fortitude, it seemed, than human nature could muster. Women shrank back and men wept. Some pushed through, but others were unequal to the ordeal.*

*"Three eighteen-year-old boys belonging to the relief party came to the rescue; and to the astonishment of all who saw, carried nearly every member of that ill-fated handcart company across the snow-bound stream. The strain was so terrible, and the exposure so great, that in later years all the boys died from the effects of it. 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" ' (LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* [Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1960], pp. 132–33).*

*"Our service to others may not be so dramatic, but we can bolster human spirits, clothe cold bodies, feed hungry people, comfort grieving hearts, and lift to new heights precious souls" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 61–62; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 46–47).*

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have a rescue mission. *"Our mission in life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ,"* said **President Gordon B. Hinckley**, *"must be a mission of saving" (Ensign, Nov. 1991, 59).*

As President Monson said, our service may not be as dramatic as the sacrifice made by the three young men in the story. However, we can help rescue family members, friends, and others through our simple daily efforts to love, serve, and teach them.

Referring to the suffering of the Martin and Willie handcart companies, **President Hinckley** said: *"I am grateful that those days of pioneering are behind us. I am thankful that we do not have brethren and sisters stranded in the snow, freezing and dying, while trying to get to this, their Zion in the mountains. But there are people, not a few, whose circumstances are desperate and who cry out for help and relief.*

*"There are so many who are hungry and destitute across this world who need help. ... Ours is a great and solemn duty to reach out and help them, to lift them, to feed them if they are hungry, to nurture their spirits if they thirst for truth and righteousness.*

*"There are so many young people who wander aimlessly and walk the tragic trail of drugs, gangs, immorality, and the whole brood of ills that accompany these things. There are widows who long for friendly voices and that spirit of anxious concern which speaks of love. There are those who were once warm in the faith, but whose faith has grown cold. Many of them wish to come back but do not know quite how to do it. They need friendly hands reaching out to them. With a little effort, many of them can be brought back to feast again at the table of the Lord.*

*"My brethren and sisters, I would hope, I would pray that each of us ... would resolve to seek those who need help, who are in desperate and difficult circumstances, and lift them in the spirit of love into the embrace of the Church, where strong hands and loving hearts will warm them, comfort them, sustain them, and put them on the way of happy and productive lives" (Ensign, Nov. 1996, 86).*

We have counsel in the Doctrine and Covenants on how we can be involved in a mission of saving:

- **D&C 4:3-7** list qualities which can help us rescue those in need (desire to serve God, faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God...faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, humility, and diligence)
- **D&C 18:10-16** counsel us about opportunities to teach the gospel and the doctrine of repentance (remember the worth of souls and your eternal joy with those you save through missionary service)
- **D&C 52:40** tell us what to do for those in need (remember and serve them in their need)
- **D&C 81:5-6** command us to care for physical needs...and spiritual needs also.
- **D&C 138:58** counsel us to remember the opportunity to save the dead (through temple ordinances)

### Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What have you learned from some of the difficulties in your life?
- What have you learned from the great faith, courage, and endurance of the pioneers?
- How can you pass on this same kind of legacy to those who will follow you?

