

# *“As Long as the World Shall Stand”*

DAVID A. BEDNAR

I am grateful to gather with you today in this Brigham Young University devotional. Susan and I love you and have looked forward to this occasion with great anticipation for many weeks.

I am pleased to bring to you the love and blessings of President Russell M. Nelson, President Dallin H. Oaks, President Henry B. Eyring, and all of my associates in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We love and pray for you, and we appreciate your prayers for us.

I do not know the exact number of devotionals like this one that I attended during my years as a student on the BYU campus. But I do know and am grateful for the lasting impact that the messages I heard have had upon my life. I encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity to receive spiritual nourishment from the faithful men and women who are invited to speak in your campus devotionals.

I pray for the companionship, help, and edifying power of the Holy Ghost for all of us as I share my thoughts with you.

## **The Nauvoo Exodus**

Today is January 19, 2021. Almost exactly 175 years ago, on February 4, 1846, Charles Shumway ferried across the Mississippi River and started the westward migration of Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo, Illinois. For three weeks in frigid temperatures, wagons ferried across the river, often steering clear of large ice chunks. After Charles C. Rich walked across the Mississippi on February 25, scores of additional refugees crossed the river on solid ice.<sup>1</sup> The winter phase of this mass exodus was directed by President Brigham Young—the well-known Camp of Israel trek across Iowa involving approximately 3,000 Saints.

The spring phase of the exodus included three large waves of refugees departing Nauvoo and involved more than 10,000 Saints—triple the number in the winter departure.

The fall phase of the exodus included about 700 Saints who were forced from Nauvoo at gunpoint.

The winter withdrawal from Nauvoo in particular caused unimaginable hardship for these

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faithful Latter-day Saints, and many sought shelter in camps along the Mississippi River. When word reached Brigham Young at Winter Quarters about the condition of these exiles, he immediately sent a letter across the river to Council Point encouraging the brethren to help—reminding them of the covenant made in the Nauvoo Temple. He counseled: “Now is the time for labor. Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the house of the Lord burn in your hearts, like flame unquenchable.”<sup>2</sup> Within days, wagons were rolling eastward to rescue the struggling Saints.

What was it that gave those early Church members such strength? What fueled their devotion and enabled them to press forward in overwhelmingly adverse conditions? It was the fire of the temple covenants and ordinances that burned in their hearts. It was their commitment to “worship, and honorably hold a name and standing”<sup>3</sup> in the house of the Lord.

President M. Russell Ballard explained:

*Sometimes we are tempted to let our lives be governed more by convenience than by covenant. It is not always convenient to live gospel standards and stand up for truth and testify of the Restoration. It usually is not convenient to share the gospel with others. It isn't always convenient to respond to a calling in the Church, especially one that stretches our abilities. Opportunities to serve others in meaningful ways, as we have covenanted to do, rarely come at convenient times. But there is no spiritual power in living by convenience. The power comes as we keep our covenants. As we look at the lives of these early Saints, we see that their covenants were the primary force in their lives.*<sup>4</sup>

In their extremity, these devoted disciples were keenly aware of their dependence upon God and trusted in Him for deliverance. And I believe they understood that sacred covenants and priesthood ordinances received worthily and remembered continually open the heavenly channels through which we have access to the power of godliness and all of the blessings made available through the Savior's Atonement.

*And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.*

*Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.*

*And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh.*<sup>5</sup>

Through their faithfulness, those stalwart Saints invited “the fire of the covenant” and “the power of godliness” into their lives. Strengthened and enabled by that fire and power, they were blessed to trek westward “with faith in every footstep.”<sup>6</sup>

Please note that the eternal importance of temple covenants and ordinances anchored both ends of the Latter-day Saint movement west.

In Nauvoo, Brigham Young labored diligently and encouraged the people to finish the temple. He personally worked night and day with members of the Twelve and other temple workers so that worthy Saints could receive their temple blessings in Nauvoo before beginning their westward journey.

President Young explained:

*Such has been the anxiety manifested by the saints to receive the ordinances [of the Temple], and such the anxiety on our part to administer to them, that I have given myself up entirely to the work of the Lord in the Temple night and day, not taking more than four hours sleep, upon an average, per day, and going home but once a week.*<sup>7</sup>

And please remember that one of the first things President Young did upon entering the Salt Lake Valley was to select a site for another temple.

Early members like Sarah Rich were blessed to recognize and understand the supernal blessings available in the Lord's holy house. She described her experiences in Iowa in 1846:

*But many were the blessings we had received in the House of the Lord which has caused us joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows and enabled us to have faith in God knowing he would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us, for if it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the influence and help of the Spirit of the Lord our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark. To start out on such a journey*

*in the winter as it were, and in our state of poverty it would seem like walking into the jaws of death but we had faith in our heavenly father and we put our trust in him feeling that we were his chosen people and had embraced his gospel and instead of sorrow we felt to rejoice that the day of our deliverance had come.*<sup>8</sup>

My dear brothers and sisters, sacred covenants, priesthood ordinances, the fire of the covenant, and the power of godliness are central to understanding the breadth, depth, and reach of the migration of Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo to the Great Salt Lake Valley. And the lessons learned in Nauvoo and along the trails as the Saints traveled west continue to bless us to this very day.

### **A Three-Day Warning**

To provide a frame of reference for what I am about to describe, I invite you to do your best to remember where you were and what you were doing between Tuesday, November 10, and Friday, November 13, 2020. Important episodes in Church history were occurring on those four days as the fire of the covenant and the power of godliness were evident in miraculous ways in several temples located in North America.

On November 10, 2020, government officials in a large jurisdiction announced that religious organizations should suspend all public gatherings and meetings. These restrictions were intended to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and would be in effect for a minimum of three weeks—and likely longer. The announcement included a three-day warning that all operations should cease by midnight on Friday, November 13.

Because the temples had been closed for a period of time earlier in 2020, temple patrons, leaders, and workers were especially disappointed that ordinance work again would be halted. And given that only living ordinances were being performed by individual appointment and with reduced capacity resulting from physical distancing and other safety protocols, scores of members had been waiting patiently for their turn to enter the temple to make sacred covenants through priesthood ordinances. The new restrictions would cause Church members to face yet another heart-aching delay of uncertain duration.

Temple leaders and workers in one temple prayed earnestly for direction, counseled together, and sought inspiration from heaven. Answers came. The decision was made to keep the temple open around the clock on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday to accommodate as many patrons as possible. The doors of the temple would remain open, and the lights would not be turned off until midnight on Friday, the 13th of November.

The tasks that needed to be completed seemed overwhelming. Some patrons would have to be contacted to confirm existing appointments. Other patrons with appointments scheduled after Friday the 13th would need to be informed about the temple closure and offered the opportunity to reschedule. Availability of temple workers would have to be evaluated so the extended hours of operation could be covered adequately. Crews to clean and sanitize the temple interior would need to be arranged. So many things to do and so little time to get them done!

The work began. Phone calls were made. Emails were sent. Text messages were delivered and answered. Volunteers were requested, and they responded by the dozens. The temple doors opened early Wednesday morning, and the lights were not turned off until midnight on Friday.

I now want to share with you quotes from eight individuals who were involved in these remarkable experiences. Please excuse the lengthy quotations, but only firsthand descriptions can do justice to the events that occurred.

**Quote #1:** “When I started calling patrons Tuesday afternoon, . . . I completely expected to leave messages. Almost everyone answered their phone. To me, [this was] a miracle. Almost all available time slots were filled in less than a day and a half.”

**Quote #2:** “Office clerks and secretaries spent countless hours calling patrons affected by the closure to see if they would like to reschedule their appointments. Every time I walked by their desks, they were on the phone. When they hung up, they would have smiles on their faces as they filled the schedule with new appointments for ordinances to be performed throughout the night. I have never seen such dedication as these sisters

worked so hard to accommodate patrons in the work of the Lord.”

**Quote #3:** “In every aspect of this experience, the Lord’s hand was evident. There was miracle after miracle—miracles in scheduling, miracles in obtaining necessary paperwork to have ordinances completed, miracles in having one available appointment time precisely at the only time a patron was able to come. I am convinced that we are only aware of a small portion of that which the Lord did to allow His children the opportunity to receive temple blessings.”

**Quote #4:** “As I arrived at the temple on Thursday morning around 5:00 a.m., I saw ordinance workers who had served all night long still smiling as they served. The most common theme that I heard from the workers was that this felt like Nauvoo when the Saints needed to leave but kept coming to the temple to receive their temple ordinances.

“And just like Nauvoo, I saw sacrifices made by people who love the Lord and who love the temple. One brother stayed at the temple day and night, not going home for three days. His service was invaluable and needed in so many ways. I saw sisters who serve in the office spend countless hours on the phone to reschedule the people desirous to receive their ordinances. I saw older adults walk the halls of the temple after receiving their endowment—with huge smiles on their faces. I saw the happy faces of couples sealed in the house of the Lord, grateful they didn’t need to wait for the temple to reopen. I saw missionaries come to the temple with their families, ready to be endowed with power from on high before embarking on their missions. I saw guests who had driven all night to attend the temple with their family. I witnessed a beautiful two-year-old girl surrounded by parents, grandparents, and other family members as they prepared to have her sealed to them for all eternity. I saw temple staff and ordinance workers spend countless hours sanitizing the temple, keeping everyone safe during the pandemic. There were ordinance workers who had served all morning who volunteered to come back and work all night. I will never forget the dedication and kindness shown this week in the Lord’s house.”

**Quote #5:** “What is inspiring to me are all the ordinance workers who came in droves at all hours of the day and night to make this happen, along with the engineers, assistant recorders, and especially the housecleaning crew (which I believe deserves the greatest praise. What a challenge they must have had!).”

**Quote #6:** “One sister, a convert of one year, received her endowment. She was so full of joy that the warmth and love she brought was felt by everyone. She was accompanied in the temple by her bishop, her Relief Society president, her stake president, a few other friends, and the two sister missionaries who taught her, both of whom had since been released from their missions. One of the very few ordinance workers serving in the temple for this session was someone close to this sister but who did not know of the appointment. When the sister receiving her endowment saw this ordinance worker, she said, ‘I prayed you would be here today.’”

**Quote #7:** “There are many challenges and experiences we face in life and sometimes wonder if we are or ever do ‘enough.’ Some of them are once in a lifetime that we read about or hear that someone else has experienced. Serving in the temple during the middle of the night, as did the Nauvoo pioneers of old, was one of those treasured once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Our entire shift was in awe of the light that shone in the eyes of the patrons that came and their gratitude, and were touched by the sacrifice and the privilege it was for us as workers to serve them in this way.”

**Quote #8:** “I have compared my feelings toward receiving my endowment to the early Saints who refused to just let the Nauvoo Temple close down before they fled west. They knew and understood the importance of the sacred ordinances that took place inside. I have felt how these pioneers felt. I knew that if I were a Saint then, I would have stood outside of the temple, waiting to make those eternal covenants. I understood how they felt. I understood the feeling of longing and urgency.

“I got to be one of those pioneers. I not only had the opportunity to make sacred covenants and receive sacred knowledge and blessings, but I got to be a part of history. I am extremely grateful for the Lord and the miracles and tender mercies He has blessed me with.”

## The Day of Miracles Has Not Ceased

The prophet Mormon posed the following powerful questions:

*Has the day of miracles ceased?*

*Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?*

*Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men.<sup>9</sup>*

Occasionally I am asked by Church members why we do not have mighty miracles today like those that occurred in the early days of the Restoration. My answer always is the same: “We do!” The faith-filled events in Nauvoo in February 1846 and in North America in November 2020 are stunningly similar.

Perhaps such a mighty miracle occurred for the temple secretary and the Church member who were able to schedule an appointment—in an almost completely filled schedule—for the precise and only time that patron was able to come to the temple. The day of miracles has not ceased.

Perhaps such a mighty miracle occurred for the recent convert who was delighted to discover in her live endowment session an ordinance worker who was very close to her but who did not know about the appointment. “I prayed you would be here today.” The day of miracles has not ceased.

The mighty miracles in our lives are exactly the same today as they always have been for devoted disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ: making sacred covenants with God and receiving worthily priesthood ordinances, the fire of those holy covenants working on and within us, and receiving the power of godliness in our lives as we honor those covenants and “walk in all the ordinances of the Lord.”<sup>10</sup> The identical spirit that drew Latter-day Saints to the temple in Nauvoo clearly was at work in November of last year. And it is operating today and will continue into the future. The day of miracles has not ceased.

*And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.*

*And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand.<sup>11</sup>*

## Promise and Testimony

We are blessed to live and serve in a most remarkable season of the dispensation of the fullness of times. With all the energy of my soul, I testify that no unhallowed hand and no pandemic can keep the Lord’s holy work from progressing. And I promise that as you honor your covenants and strive to discern “with an eye of faith,”<sup>12</sup> your spiritual vision will be magnified and refined to help you learn that the seemingly small miracles in your life will be the mightiest and most impactful of all.

I joyfully witness the divinity and living reality of the Eternal Father and of His Only Begotten and Beloved Son, and I do so in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. See William G. Hartley, “The Pioneer Trek: Nauvoo to Winter Quarters,” *Ensign*, June 1997.

2. Brigham Young, letter to the high council at Council Point, Iowa, 27 September 1846, Brigham Young Office Files, General Correspondence, Outgoing, 1846 September–October, Church of Jesus Christ, [catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=ecc4c37f-dc60-4b7a-b6a0-3b19e4abf8b3&crate=0&index=29](https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=ecc4c37f-dc60-4b7a-b6a0-3b19e4abf8b3&crate=0&index=29).

3. D&C 109:24.

4. M. Russell Ballard, “Like a Flame Unquenchable,” *Ensign*, May 1999.

5. D&C 84:19–21.

6. K. Newell Dayley, music and lyrics, “Faith in Every Footstep,” from Dayley, “In Tune: Faith in Every Footstep,” *New Era*, April 1997.

7. Brigham Young, journal entry, 12 January 1846, as reported in *HC* 7:567; see Brigham Young Office Files, Journal, 1844 September 28–1846 February 3, Church of Jesus Christ, [catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=de233849-df29-4851](https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=de233849-df29-4851)

-b79d-ba78721d1476&crate=0&index=2; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 299.

8. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, *Reminiscences of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich*, holograph (1885–1893), Church of Jesus Christ archives, Salt Lake City; quoted in Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to*

*Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 173–74. Spelling has been modernized.

9. Moroni 7:35–37.

10. D&C 136:4.

11. Moroni 10:18–19.

12. Ether 12:19.