

# Deliverance

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On the heels of such a wonderful general conference in which we heard from so many experienced speakers, I confess that I stand here feeling a little like the inexperienced youth speaker in sacrament meeting. I suddenly wish I had asked my mom to write this talk. This could all be over in about three and a half minutes.

To introduce my topic this morning, I invite you to review a list of the top fifteen highest grossing films of all time and to identify a common thread among them:

1. *Avatar*
2. *Avengers: Endgame*
3. *Titanic*
4. *Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*
5. *Avengers: Infinity War*
6. *Spider-Man: No Way Home*
7. *Jurassic World*
8. *The Lion King*
9. *The Avengers*
10. *Furious 7*

11. *Top Gun: Maverick*
12. *Frozen II*
13. *Avengers: Age of Ultron*
14. *Black Panther*
15. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*<sup>1</sup>

What do most of these movies have in common? These are stories of action and adventure. These are stories about heroes coming to the rescue. These are stories in which the lines between good and evil are generally well defined—the one possible exception being the story in *Titanic*, in which we can hardly blame the iceberg for simply doing what icebergs do.

To use language common in the Book of Mormon, these are stories of deliverance.

What don't we see on this list? We don't see straight comedies. We don't see many dramas, love stories, or rom-coms. Sorry, no Jane Austen. The financial takeaway is straightforward: if your objective is to make as much money as possible in Hollywood, then make a story about deliverance.

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Production studios such as Marvel have clearly figured this out. Since 2008, when *Iron Man* was released, Marvel has produced twenty-nine stories of deliverance.

Why do we love stories of deliverance? Why do we keep going back for *Ant-Man* number five? (It's coming, and many of you will see it.)

I don't think it's for the capes and masks. I don't think it's for the visual effects. When you've seen one explosion, you've seen them all. (I've been to Scout camp—I've seen them!) No, I think that we love films of deliverance because we are living in the ultimate deliverance story here on earth.

From day zero, deliverance is a central and recurring theme of this film called mortality. After all, we cannot even enter mortality and take our first breath without being *delivered* by someone. And then what? We find ourselves unable to do anything on our own until we are at least, say, fourteen years old. We are entirely at the mercy of our first heroes—mom and dad, grandparents, and guardians. As we get older, we realize that we are in a fallen world and that each of our character arcs includes periods of serious trial and struggle. At times we are even pushed so far as to say, “Well, this movie isn't very good and certainly isn't worth the price of admission. The floor is sticky, and the popcorn is stale.”

I testify that hope comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a Savior. There is a Redeemer. There is One Who Is Mighty to Save. There is a Great Deliverer.

This morning I wish to share a few thoughts on deliverance. As with any proper epic trilogy, I will proceed in three acts:

- Act 1. The Bolivian Gas War: A Deliverance Story
- Act 2. “Wait, Where Is My Deliverance?”
- Act 3. Deliverers on Mount Zion

### **Act 1. The Bolivian Gas War: A Deliverance Story *We Must Be Tried in All Things***

It is important to recognize that trials and challenges are what we signed up for. The road was never going to be easy. We learn from Lehi that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things”<sup>2</sup> and from the Doctrine and Covenants

that “my people must be tried in all things.”<sup>3</sup> President Nelson has said, “You who may be momentarily disheartened, remember, life is not meant to be easy. Trials must be borne and grief endured along the way.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet at the same time the Lord promises that “if [we] endure it well,” He will “exalt [us from] on high” and we will “triumph over all [our] foes.”<sup>5</sup> The Lord tells us, “Wherefore, I am in your midst, and I am the good shepherd, and the stone of Israel. He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall.”<sup>6</sup> And the Psalmist proclaims, “The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”<sup>7</sup>

Now I don't know what specific trials and challenges you face—we each have our list. But what I do know is that when Jesus walked on the earth during His ministry, He didn't spend very much time—if any at all—with people who were worry-free, struggle-free, or trial-free. “Have ye any that are sick among you? . . . Any that are lame, or blind . . . , or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Bolivian Gas War Miracles***

To illustrate our Lord's power of deliverance, I want to share with you a modern-day deliverance story—the story of a miracle. We often use the term *miracle* casually, but today I mean *miracle* in the strictest sense of the word: in the Moses-parting-the-Red-Sea sense of the word. I share this story because it gives me hope and reminds me that there is a God in Israel, there is One Who Is Mighty to Save. I share it because what the Lord did in Bolivia in 2003 on behalf of a dozen or so missionaries was miraculous, and it gives me hope that He will do the same for you and for me.

I share this story with the permission of my parents—who were serving as mission leaders of the Bolivia La Paz Mission at the time—and of Brooke Porter—a young sister missionary who served with them. This story is movie worthy.

In October 2003, Bolivia was experiencing a period of significant civil unrest that is now known as the Bolivian Gas War. People were upset about the government's policies regarding the use of their natural resources—oil and gas in particular. The details of this conflict are

beyond the scope of my message today, but suffice it to say that the label of *war* is appropriate. The conflict turned bloody and resulted in the deaths of more than seventy people, with hundreds more wounded.

One of the goals of the protesters was to shut down all transportation in the cities of El Alto and La Paz—cities that are located about twelve miles apart. To accomplish their goal, the protesters erected barricades and scattered broken glass in the streets to limit transportation inside of and between the two cities. Their leaders vowed that no goods, including fuel, would come in or out of the cities.

Violence soon broke out, and the government responded by declaring martial law. A dozen or so missionaries in El Alto were trapped and needed to get out. Sister Brooke Porter, a missionary serving in El Alto at the time, described the situation in her journal as follows:

*Today is Sunday, and it has been the longest day ever. The whole afternoon we heard machine guns going off, and they seemed very close. We could hear dynamite blowing things up and ambulances by the dozens coming in. . . . It is very scary, and I just want to get out of here.*

The news reported that three thousand miners from the rural areas of the country were on their way to El Alto armed with dynamite to reinforce the protesters. The danger was real and getting worse by the hour; it was clear that the missionaries needed to get out of El Alto and into the safety of the mission home in La Paz.

But there were two massive problems.

First, the two mission vehicles each had less than one-fourth of a tank of gas—not enough to pick up all the missionaries. Furthermore, the news had reported that no gasoline had entered the city of La Paz for the past five days.

Second, both my parents and their car would be targets for the protesters—my parents because they were foreigners with possible ties to the U.S. government and their large white Toyota vehicle because that vehicle was commonly used by government officials.

It was in this context that very early in the morning my father—after a night spent almost entirely in prayer—received the following impression: “Leave now and you will find gas.” Now this was a particularly tricky endeavor because in order to find gas, they would need to use gas.

With this risk in mind, my dad turned to my mom and said, “We must leave right now if we want to find gas.”

Without a word she jumped up from bed. Off they went, like Nephi, “not knowing beforehand the things which [they] should do.”<sup>9</sup>

My parents recorded the following in their journal:

*After a time, we came across a parked car with two men in it. We stopped and asked, “Do you know where we can find gas?” The men simply told us to drive another block and look left. We followed their advice, and when we looked down the street, we saw a gasoline tanker driving slowly.*

My parents followed the tanker to a gas station and filled up their car to about half a tank, limited by a quota imposed by the station. They then called the assistants and told them to leave that minute to try to find gas for the other vehicle. The assistants were also successful and were able to fill up their car to half a tank. Both gas stations closed soon thereafter, having run out of their limited supply of fuel. But both mission vehicles now had enough gas.

The stage was now set for the evacuation of the missionaries. Because the missionaries were scattered throughout El Alto in their various areas, different rendezvous points were determined as pickup locations; however, getting to each of the pickup locations required the missionaries to leave the safety of their apartments and walk the dangerous streets of El Alto.

Sister Porter recorded the following:

*President Drake said that we were going to leave that afternoon. I knelt down in that adobe, closet-sized room and prayed harder than I had ever prayed before.*

*We left around 4:30 p.m. . . . I was scared to be walking down the main street because there were so many*

*people. Luckily no one did anything to me. I have never felt so protected, though, in my entire life. With each step I took, I felt more and more invisible. I am amazed at the safety and protection we had in making it to the bishop's house.*

Now I do not have time to share all the amazing stories that happened to get each missionary out, but I will share one.

During one of the evacuations, my father and his assistant needed to drive on a very dangerous six-mile stretch of highway between La Paz and El Alto. As they approached the highway, they noticed an enormous convoy entering the highway ahead of them. This convoy consisted of military and police vehicles, including troop carriers with armed soldiers. To my father and his assistant's surprise, they also noticed that many of the vehicles in the convoy were large and white, and a fair number of them were Toyotas. My father recorded that without being invited, they "slipped in behind the lead troop carrier. No one said a thing. We looked very official in our big white car."

They had thought that driving a very conspicuous big white Toyota would be a dangerous weakness. But instead it turned out to be precisely the vehicle they needed to drive to be inconspicuous within the convoy.

What they didn't know at the time was that they were now part of the military convoy evacuating the president of Bolivia and his family out of the city of La Paz to the airport in El Alto.

This powerful military escort was not only protecting the president of the country of Bolivia but was also protecting the president of the Bolivia La Paz Mission.

My father and his assistant drove inside the convoy for as long as possible and then proceeded to the rendezvous point. When they arrived, they found a group of armed soldiers standing there, and in the midst of these soldiers they found five very anxious missionaries. My dad hugged each of the soldiers, who explained that when they had seen the missionaries in such a dangerous location, they knew they had to protect them.

Miraculously, every missionary was safely evacuated that day.

### **Call Out to God**

While we can learn several lessons from these stories, the one I want to emphasize is the power that comes through pleading with the Lord "with real intent."<sup>10</sup> Recall Sister Porter's account: "I . . . prayed harder than I had ever prayed before." Also, recall my father praying through the night before receiving the prompting to "leave now [to] find gas."

When things look bad and when the struggle seems unending, when we feel surrounded by darkness and don't know how to proceed, what can we do? We can call out to the Light, our Deliverer. This has been a recurring message from the voices and the examples of prophets.

When Joseph Smith was in the Sacred Grove surrounded by "thick darkness" and in the grips of Satan himself, he "call[ed] upon God," and "a pillar of light" replaced the darkness.<sup>11</sup>

When Moses had his own personal encounter with the adversary, he "began to fear exceedingly," seeing "the bitterness of hell."<sup>12</sup> But when Moses "called upon God . . . in the name of the Only Begotten," he was delivered.<sup>13</sup>

When Alma the Younger "was tormented with the pains of hell . . . , [he] cried within [his] heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me," and then deliverance came.<sup>14</sup>

The message is clear: we need to call out to God for deliverance. Again, as the Psalmist proclaimed, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles."

In addition to prayer, President Henry B. Eyring taught us that deliverance is available to the humble and the repentant:

*The tests we will face, their severity, their timing, and their duration will be unique for each of us. But two things will be the same for all of us. . . .*

*First, the tests at times will stretch us enough for us to feel the need for help beyond our own. And, second, God in His kindness and wisdom has made the power of deliverance available to us. . . .*

*The Lord always wants to lead us to deliverance through our becoming more righteous. That requires repentance. And that takes humility.<sup>15</sup>*

## Act 2. “Wait, Where Is My Deliverance?”

But what about when we call out and all we hear is nothing? We call again. Nothing. What about when deliverance doesn’t come? Time passes, and then more time passes. As Elder Dale G. Renlund observed, this can seem unfair, and that unfairness can be infuriating,<sup>16</sup> especially in a world in which it has become so easy to compare our lot to that of everyone around us. It is easy to say, “Wait, you sent a military convoy to help Jane? I know because I saw pictures of it online. Where is my convoy? You sent gas to Jack. Look, here it is on social media. Why am I stuck walking? Where is my miracle? This is unfair.”

While I don’t have the answers to these questions, I do know that this unfairness is a feature of mortality and that some of the Lord’s most elect and chosen have experienced it. I also believe that there are lessons to be learned while we wait for deliverance.

### *Lessons from Prison*

I will make my point here using several jailbreak stories. Now it is hard not to enjoy a good jailbreak story. I, at least, love cheering on the unjustly imprisoned as they patiently tunnel through prison walls—armed, of course, only with Cannon Center cutlery. (Forgive me, I didn’t mean to imply that Helaman Halls is a prison.)

And perhaps nowhere is the theme of deliverance more clear in scripture than in the case of prophets who found themselves in jail.

Let’s briefly consider three jailbreak stories from ancient scripture:

**Jailbreak Number 1:** King Herod threw Peter in jail. Peter was asleep in his cell when an angel appeared, filled the room with light, and essentially said, “Put on your clothes. Don’t forget your shoes. We’re out of here.” The prison gate opened on its own, and Peter and the angel walked out.<sup>17</sup> No cutlery required.

**Jailbreak Number 2:** Alma and Amulek were thrown in jail. They were beaten, mocked, and spit on. After three days, they had had enough: “Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even

unto deliverance.”<sup>18</sup> Then what? Their jailbreak was made easy when the jail was literally broken to pieces. Alma and Amulek just walked out.<sup>19</sup>

**Jailbreak Number 3:** Years later, brothers Nephi and Lehi had a jailbreak experience similar to that of Alma and Amulek. After a few days in prison, fire surrounded them, the prison walls came down, and they walked to freedom.<sup>20</sup>

These are important faith-promoting accounts, and like the stories I shared about Bolivia, they have happy, miraculous endings. These are the types of movies I like to see. When someone recommends a film, I often find myself asking, “Does it have a happy ending? No? Not interested.”

But real life cannot be so easily avoided. What about times when deliverance doesn’t come when we feel it is scripted to do so?

Let’s consider another prisoner’s experience. Joseph Smith was imprisoned in Liberty Jail. The conditions were terrible. The only amenity: straw. Three days went by, then three weeks, then three months. Four months. Five months.

Joseph knew of Peter’s jailbreak. He knew that the walls came tumbling down for Alma and Amulek. And we know from a letter Joseph wrote to the Church while he was in jail that he wondered, “Wait, where is my deliverance?” He wrote, “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?”<sup>21</sup>

At times we feel like Joseph. We ask, “When will this end?” Like you, I struggle inside of my own prisons—challenges that lead me to say, “Okay, I’ve had enough here.” Or perhaps even harder is having a front-row seat to watch a loved one struggle to endure their own delayed deliverance. We should not forget that while Joseph was suffering, Emma and the children were also suffering.

Emma wrote the following in a letter to Joseph while he was in Liberty Jail:

*Was it not for conscious innocence, and the direct interposition of divine mercy, I am very sure I never should have been able to have endured the scenes of suffering that I have passed through . . . ; but I still live and am yet willing to suffer more if it is the will of kind Heaven, that I should for your sake.*<sup>22</sup>

She then went on to describe how their toddler son, Alexander, pushed a chair around the room as he learned to walk.<sup>23</sup>

### *Hope in the Midst of Delayed Deliverance*

For reasons that I do not fully understand but that I believe are part of the test of mortality, deliverance is sometimes—perhaps even often—delayed. Two things, however, give me hope and optimism in the midst of delayed deliverance.

First, the unfairness will ultimately be for our benefit. From Elder Renlund:

*In the eternities, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will resolve all unfairness. . . .*

*. . . If we let Him, Jesus Christ will consecrate the unfairness for our gain. He will not just console us and restore what was lost; He will use the unfairness for our benefit.<sup>24</sup>*

While waiting for deliverance, we can ask ourselves, “What lessons can I be learning that I couldn’t learn otherwise? What can I take from this experience to grow and improve?” While in Liberty Jail enduring the delay of his deliverance, Joseph received some of the most powerful and important revelations of this dispensation—or any dispensation—including revelations that are now sections 121 through 123 in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Just as with any important life lessons, those we learn while waiting for deliverance will draw us closer to the Savior and help us to understand His love and His plan more fully. I love these words from former Relief Society general president Jean B. Bingham:

*Life’s experiences can range from humorous to heart-wrenching, from grim to glorious. Each experience helps us understand more about our Father’s encompassing love and our capacity to change through the Savior’s gift of grace.<sup>25</sup>*

The second thing that gives me hope in the midst of delayed deliverance is that the promises of the Lord are sure, and deliverance will eventually come. From Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: “Some blessings come soon, some come late, and

some don’t come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, *they come.*”<sup>26</sup>

### **Act 3. Deliverers on Mount Zion**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have made promises and covenants to participate in the work of salvation, to be saviors on Mount Zion.<sup>27</sup> In other words, we have made promises to be deliverers. And all around us are people in need of deliverance. They suffer from loneliness, depression, isolation, and sickness. They struggle with school, work, their social life, and health.

It is my testimony that we can pray to know who to help, how to help, and when to help. This can be challenging, but it will get easier, and our efforts will be more effective if we pray to see others in the way the Savior sees them. And sometimes, like Esther, whose courage saved the Jewish nation, we may be the only person uniquely suited to help. As Esther’s cousin Mordecai observed, “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”<sup>28</sup>

### *A Lesson from Grad School*

I needed to learn this lesson during my own college years.

At the time, I was a third-year graduate student and was doing well in my program. A new student arrived—let’s call him Dave. Right from the start I had a challenging time being around him. I chalked it up to personality differences. Dave was really struggling in his first year and was at risk of washing out.

So what did I do? I am ashamed to say that I took the easy course and simply avoided interacting with him. While I was never overtly mean, I can say that I knew he was struggling, and I did nothing to help. In other words, I ignored an opportunity to help someone when I was uniquely positioned to do so. My attitude was, “What, you fell among thieves again? Well, that’s just part of the ball game. This is grad school; grad school is hard.”

I held on to this attitude for quite some time.

Then one Sunday, Kenny Loveless, our ward mission leader, approached me with an invitation. Now before I get to the invitation, it is important that you know two things about Kenny. First,

Kenny is extremely fit and very strong. My guess is that for Halloween he often dresses up as a wall or a building. Second, Kenny has been well trained in the martial arts. He is a master, and at one point he held—and may still hold—the record for breaking the most wooden boards with his bare fist. He broke eight boards with no spacers.

Kenny had an invitation for me: “Mike, you are going to have a missionary experience this week and then report on it in quorum meeting next Sunday.”

Joseph Smith taught, “When the Lord commands, do it.”<sup>29</sup> Well, I would add, when someone who can break eight boards with his bare fist invites you to do something, do it.

What were my options? My response to Kenny was simple: “Yes, Sensei!”

I immediately started thinking about people I could potentially invite to church. The first name that popped into my head was Dave, but I pushed it away. His name came again. I pushed it out. It came a third time. I accepted the challenge.

Then something unexpected happened. From the very moment I made the decision to extend the invitation to Dave, I started to feel differently about him. I started to see his situation more clearly, and my heart softened. I could suddenly sense *how* he must be feeling.

That next week I had two nice conversations with Dave before I invited him to attend a church activity. He sincerely appreciated the offer, though in the end he was not that interested.

So what came of all of this? Dave didn’t join the Church. But those interactions did help both of us get to a better place. We were each delivered, even if just partially, from our own challenges. Dave found in me someone who could uniquely help him, particularly with learning some of the more technical research skills required to be successful in our program. And I was delivered from my shameful attitude. I learned that when we see others the way the Savior sees them, we will not only be inspired to help but will be inspired to know how to help. And this help may not take the form of gospel discussions. Those discussions may need to come later. Today we may be inspired to deliver another from struggles with school, with work, with isolation, or with feelings of loneliness.

## Conclusion

To summarize the key points of my message:

**First**, we are *all* living in a deliverance story, and the Lord our God is the Great Deliverer. In Him there is power to save us from all struggles, sicknesses, and sins. There is a “balm in Gilead.”<sup>30</sup> There is One Who Is Mighty to Save.

**Second**, it is left to the Lord to know the when and how of our deliverance. And while we wait, there are important lessons to be learned—our personal section 121s to receive.

**Third**, we can participate in the work of deliverance together with our Savior to ease the sufferings and burdens of others. We can pray to see others the way the Lord sees them. We can ask what we can do to help.

And now for the really good news (massive spoiler alert). We know how this movie will end. While we don’t know the character arc of each player, we know the grand story arc. We know who the Great Protagonist of the story is, and we have His promises.

His message to us, as recorded in John, is beautiful and fills me with hope:

*Let not your heart be troubled. . . .*

*In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you.*

*. . . Where I am, there ye may be also. . . .*

*. . . I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. . . .*

*I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. . . .*

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*<sup>31</sup>

I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior. As taught in the recent *Come, Follow Me* lesson on Isaiah 50 to 57, He removes our chains of grief by taking the chains upon Himself. He frees us not only by opening the gates of our prisons but also by taking our place there. He does not deliver us remotely or from a social distance. He is there suffering with us.<sup>32</sup>

He is the Great Deliverer and the Hero of each of our stories.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. “Box Office Mojo: Top Lifetime Grosses,” IMDbPro, as of September 30, 2022.
2. 2 Nephi 2:11.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 136:31.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “With God Nothing Shall Be Impossible,” *Ensign*, May 1988.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 121:8.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 50:44.
7. Psalms 34:17.
8. 3 Nephi 17:7.
9. 1 Nephi 4:6.
10. Moroni 10:4.
11. Joseph Smith—History 1:15, 16; see also verse 17.
12. Moses 1:20.
13. Moses 1:21; see also verse 22.
14. Alma 36:13, 18; see also verses 14–23.
15. Henry B. Eyring, “The Power of Deliverance,” BYU devotional address, 15 January 2008.
16. See Dale G. Renlund, “Infuriating Unfairness,” *Liahona*, May 2021.
17. See Acts 12:1–10.
18. Alma 14:26.
19. See Alma 14:14–29.
20. See Helaman 5:21–52.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1; see also verse 2.
22. Emma Smith, “Letter from Emma Smith [to Joseph Smith], 7 March 1839,” in *Joseph Smith Letterbook 2*, 37, Documents (Documents, 1839), Joseph Smith Papers Project, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-emma-smith-7-march-1839/1#source-note.
23. See Emma Smith, “Letter from Emma [to Joseph Smith].”
24. Renlund, “Infuriating Unfairness”; see 2 Nephi 2:2; Job 42:10, 12–13; Jacob 3:1.
25. Jean B. Bingham, “Covenants with God Strengthen, Protect, and Prepare Us for Eternal Glory,” *Liahona*, May 2022.
26. Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, November 1999; emphasis in original.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 103:9–10; see also Obadiah 1:17, 21.
28. Esther 4:14.
29. Joseph Smith, *HC* 2:170 (November 1834).
30. Jeremiah 8:22.
31. John 14:1–3, 16, 18, 27.
32. See “September 26–October 2: Isaiah 50–57,” *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: Old Testament*, 2022 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2021), 370–77. See also Isaiah 53:4: “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”