

Borne upon Eagles' Wings

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

While looking into your faces for the last twenty minutes or so, I have seen a lot of male-female combinations, which for some peculiar reason have brought to my mind the only story I know of a college freshman (who may have been registering at this University for all I know). He faced on that day the myriad of questionnaires and information items that freshmen get when they register, and somehow during the day he got one which said, among other things, "Do you believe in college marriages?"

He thought about it a minute, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well, I guess—if the colleges really love each other."

I don't know about love from college to college, but let me say something about the new dean at the University: I am madly in love with you and with the possibilities of coming to be with you. It seems to me that the engagement has been too extended already, so I'm looking forward to the ceremony about the first of July, when I will officially become dean of Religious Instruction.

Since it is June, we could talk about marriage. But instead let me talk about the only other thing that I can think of that's appropriate in June—and that's not cutoff Levi's or hay fever. It is something about the commencement circuit that I've been on.

I've been with big people and little people and young people and not-so-young people, hearing across the length of the land that commencements are "not really the end but the beginning" and things like that. I've been so struck and virtually preoccupied with one recent experience that I'm going to ask your indulgence in letting me share it with you tonight.

An Unusual Commencement

It was unlike any other commencement or baccalaureate exercise I had ever attended or participated in myself. It was held one week ago, last Thursday, on the twenty-third of May. There were forty-four graduates, all male. They did not have traditional academic robes or caps or gowns. Their attire, to a man, was light blue denim shirts and dark blue denim trousers. The ceremony was not held in a fieldhouse or a stadium or even a lovely auditorium. The exercise was held in a modest interdenominational chapel at the Utah state prison. The graduating class consisted of forty-four men who had successfully completed a year's course of Bible

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study sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but open to all who cared to come and participate. These forty-four represented more than a dozen different religions, and, of course, many of them had no formal religious affiliation at all. At this very moment a lot of images and impressions are coming back to my mind, and I hope I can catch them long enough to share some of them with you.

One is of the delightful, tall, cordial, and warm inmate who conducted the exercises. He immediately warmed the group to the evening. About half were pleasantly and appropriately called “outsiders.” He said he wanted the outsiders particularly to appreciate that he was in prison even though he had hired one of the biggest criminal lawyers in America: “It’s only after I was through with the trial that I fully understood that designation. What it means to be a criminal lawyer is that he thought he was a lawyer and I think he’s a criminal.”

I remember the prayers. The opening prayer was given by a young man, but he seemed like a boy and looked like a boy and I think had not yet begun to shave. He gave there the first verbal and public prayer, according to the chaplain, that he’d ever given in his life. He was frightened to death, but it was a prayer of the heart, and you would need to have been there and to have heard it to appreciate fully what that might have meant. He was in the prison for ten years to life on an armed robbery charge. The closing prayer was given by a man who was, I suppose, forty-five or fifty years old—just a pleasant, warm, slightly chubby man who looked as if he should have been somebody’s uncle and undoubtedly was. He was in for a life term on second-degree murder.

The choir sang, among other numbers, the Hammerstein-Romberg song “Stouthearted Men.” If you could have seen the looks on their faces and felt the feeling in their voices, you would have known something about stouthearted men that you’d never understood before. I don’t think any two of them crossed

paths on the same note at any given moment during the rendition. But it was a choir of angels. It really was. When they sang, “Give me some men who are stouthearted men, who will fight for the rights they adore. Give me ten men who are stouthearted men, and I’ll soon give you ten thousand more,” they knew something about rights that had been adored and lost, that were adored all the more because they had been lost, and that perhaps were desired more greatly because someday they might return.

I remember just a couple of other impressions. A young man who was now on the outside had come back to get his certificate and to encourage his colleagues. He said something that I wrote down. I’ll call him Howard, though that isn’t really his name. He looked out to his colleagues and said, “Guys, the perspective in prison is really bad. It really looks better on the outside. Try to remember that.” Then he turned to the outsiders, to the friends and families who had come in, and said, “You people are a light in a dark place. If it were not for love like yours, we would not be able to get from where we are to where we need to be.”

He was followed extemporaneously by another delightful young man who couldn’t have been more than twenty years of age. He had been in and out very quickly—I think for less than eight months on good behavior—and talked about what it was like to be back out, to be keeping a job, dating girls, going to church, and trying to live a moral and law-abiding life. He turned to friend and stranger alike and said, “Please understand that those of us at the halfway house need faith and prayers, too. We have reentered a world of temptation.”

I would also like to mention the concluding comment of the inmate who conducted the service. He said, when it was all over, with some emotion in his voice and a little mist in his eyes, “This is the most auspicious occasion of our year. It is better than Christmas. It’s better than Thanksgiving. It’s even better than Mother’s

Day. It's better because we're enlightened, and that's as close as we come to being free."

Then the gates clanged behind my wife and me. That night we went home, and I confess I couldn't sleep. Pat fell asleep, it was late, and our children were already asleep, but I couldn't sleep. That experience haunted me and does yet at this pulpit. That's why I choose to speak to you tonight as I do. I had in the early hours of that morning, and have had somewhat since, feelings and thoughts and a response to bondage and freedom and their relationship to enlightenment and love in a way that I confess I have never had before—even though I've studied those principles and read the doctrines and thought I had a pretty good understanding of what all of them might mean. The inmate conducting the meeting had talked about enlightenment, and I confess that I was a little more enlightened and I little more free myself because of a couple of ideas. I get an idea only about once every three months, and I was grateful to get two or three there right in a row.

The Justice of God

Let me just enumerate for you the impressions I received the night after that ceremony. One is that God is just. Alma said, "What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:25). Paul said to the Galatians, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

This thought was put in more modern language by a coed at this school after a computer-arranged date. She came home to her roommate and said, "That is the most depressing thing in the world."

The roommate said, "What is?"

She replied, "To spend the evening with exactly what you deserve."

God is just, and mercy cannot rob justice or else God would not be God. We must not be

deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, so shall he reap.

One of the thoughts that followed my remembering that God is just is that Paul really meant we reap in kind, which is obvious to all of you and I don't need to belabor the point. It came to me again that, if we sow thistles, we don't really plan to get strawberries. If we sow hate, we don't really expect to participate in an abundance of love. We get back, in kind, that which we reap. Then another thought came tumbling as I thought of those men in their blue: it's one thing to reap in kind, but we reap, somehow, always in greater quantity. We sow a little thistle, and we get a lot of thistle—years and years of it, big bushes and branches of it. We never get rid of it unless we cut it out. If we sow a little bit of hate, before we know it we've reaped a lot of hate—smoldering and festering and belligerent and finally warring and malicious hate.

A third prophet, Hosea of the Old Testament, warned all of us to be careful lest we learn personally something that I think my friends at the state institution understood more fully than I had: "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). They got back more of a kind than ever they had planned on. Surely no one has ever set out, in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, "to go straight to Sing Sing." Similarly, I suppose no one has ever intended to go to our own institution at the point of the mountain. So my first large thought was that God is just, we really do reap what we sow, and maybe we reap more than we thought we were sowing.

Faith in God Based on His Justice

Then, ironically, I had a comforting thought that my first thought wasn't as painful as it sounded. In this sense, however frightening it may be that all of us have sinned, however frightening it may be to contemplate a just God, it is infinitely more frightening to me to contemplate an unjust God.

Now, I suppose you're taking Humanities 101 or something else along the way, aren't you? I would be the last to disparage that which we have received in Western civilization from the good Greeks. But I, for one, am very glad that we are not submitting to the gods of Tantalus and Sisyphus and Prometheus. When one of those fellows had a bad day, *everybody* had a bad day.

I simply refer you to what I think is a basic principle of Latter-day Saint doctrine. That is the true principle that we have to know God is just in order to go forward. If you get a chance, open to Joseph Smith's *Lectures on Faith* one evening, turn to the fourth lecture, and read a basic list of attributes which God has to have, which we know he does have, and which enable us to have faith—that is, those principles which give us the courage to believe that it will be well with us if we do certain things. One of those attributes is justice, and we would not have the faith, due to fear, to live righteously or to love better or to repent more readily if somehow we didn't think that justice would count for us, if somehow we thought that God would change his mind and decide there was another set of rules. Because we know that God is just and would cease to be God if he weren't so, we have the faith, we have the makings and the beginnings and the foundation of faith, to go forward and to know that we will not be the victims of whimsy or caprice or a bad day or a bad joke. And that assurance was somehow, in a way that it never had been before, very encouraging.

The Mercy of God

Then I had a third thought. How grateful I was that, in addition to just being just, God decided, because he is who he is, that he had to be a merciful God also. We don't need to take the time to read all of Alma 42, but you ought to sometime. After Alma had established with Corianton that God had to be just, it was

then determined that that same God would have to be merciful as well and that mercy would claim the penitent. Now, the reason that thought was different to me was that I'd just been where they had added *i-a-r-y* to that word. That thought gave me encouragement. Mercy could claim the penitent. I decided that if those men had to go to the penitentiary to take advantage of the gift of mercy, if somehow by going there they found the gospel of Jesus Christ or the scriptures or the Atonement or any of those things that might lead to the others, then their imprisonment was worth it. Let's go to the penitentiary, or let's go to the bishop, or let's go to the Lord or to those that we've offended or to those that have offended us. Our own little penitentiaries, I suppose, are all around us. If that's what it takes to make us truly penitent, to enable us to lay claim to the gift of mercy, then we have to do it.

I know it isn't easy to go back and to undo and to start again and to make a new beginning, but I believe with all my heart that it is easier and surely more satisfying to begin anew than to go on and try to believe that justice will not take its toll. As Richard L. Evans was fond of saying, "What's the use of running if you're on the wrong road?" A favorite British scholar said, using the same metaphor:

*I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A [mathematical] sum [incorrectly worked] can be put right; but only by going back till you find the error and then working it fresh from that point. [It will] never [be corrected] by simply going on. Evil can be undone, but it cannot "develop" into good, [worlds without end]. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound. [C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1973), p. 6]*

So God is just, but mercy claimeth the penitent and the evil can be undone.

The Need for Repentance

The final and crowning thought that I had (and by this time I don't know what hour of the morning it was) helped me understand what maybe I'd never literally understood. It is why in every generation, to every dispensation, the Lord has said what he said in section 6 of the Doctrine and Covenants, very early in the doctrines of this dispensation: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments" (D&C 6:9). That became a very positive and a very helpful and a very moving thought and verse for me. I knew in a way that I'd never understood before that there is no other way besides repentance.

Let me shift gears slightly. None of you, I hope, is going to be whisked off to the point of the mountain right after this speech. (Some of you may hope that I will be.) I would pray that there are no Church courts pending on moral transgressions in your lives, but I believe that, if you're like any of the rest of us who are mortal, you have some areas in which to unchain yourselves, that you have some bonds and some fetters that you could afford to be free of, that there is some repenting to be done in all of your lives—although less than the great, dramatic sins and civil transgressions that we read about in the newspapers. May I isolate just two or three examples.

The Bondage of Ignorance

I confess that I cannot begin with anything other than what seems to me the supreme bond at this level, and that is simply not to know enough. There are little clichés that we learn early in our lives. Most of them I hate; some of them I really hate. I think number one on my list is "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." I hate that. I'll take sticks and stones any day. But second to that are the clichés "Ignorance is bliss" and "What I don't know won't hurt me." Let me say to you with all of the intensity that

I have that nothing will hurt you more than what you don't know.

Plato said, about as early as anybody other than the Israelites started making quotable comments, "It is better to be unborn than untaught, for ignorance is at the root of all misfortune." And I don't know whether or not Sam Johnson knew we were going to be here tonight (or whether or not he knew I'd go to visit the prison), but he said, "Ignorance, *when voluntary*, is criminal, and a man may be properly charged with that evil which he neglected or refused to learn how to prevent" (emphasis added).

But I don't want to talk just about Plato's books and Sam Johnson's books. We believe in this Church—we have it as a tenet of our faith—that a man cannot be saved in ignorance, that what we learn in this life rises with us in the resurrection, that we have so much the advantage in the world to come if we are knowledgeable, that we're saved, in fact, in proportion to that which we have learned, that light and truth forsake the evil one, that the glory of God is intelligence, and we go on and on and on. At one time in the history of the Church in this dispensation, the entire Church, collectively, was indicted. Will you listen to this from section 84:

And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.

For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.

For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. [D&C 84:43–45; emphasis added]

The beginning of coming ultimately into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is where section 84 takes us, is a ladder to get on to things, to get started, and to get to where we need to be. The first rung of the ladder, if you will, is the *word*: "The word of the Lord

is truth"; "Give heed to the words of eternal life"; "And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received . . . even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given" (D&C 84:54, 57).

Now, this Book of Mormon is some book! I've wandered off to a school or two and read books—both in and out of libraries. I didn't think there was any other world but the inside of a carrel—not to be confused with that place where you put cows and horses. But I've never known a book, in all the searching that I've done and all of the reading that I've done, which was purported to have been brought by an angel and translated by the gift and power of God—except the Book of Mormon.

Can we also be accused of taking this book lightly? Some of us treat it like almost any other book: let it gather a little dust or press the rose from Mary Jane's wedding, use it as a doorstep in the hallway, do almost anything with it but read it. I believe that we will be indicted for the resulting bondage that we incur and that we will serve some sentence in this life or the next for that which we fail to learn. I can't spend all evening on that, but please remember, from the fifteenth chapter of John, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

The Bondage of Flesh

We're bonded and indentured and in servitude too often to our own bodies. I don't mean just the dramatic sins, the anger and the temper that lead to murder or the passion that leads to sexual transgression or the lust that leads to theft. Even beyond those, as serious as they are (and I suppose an entire evening ought to be spent on each of them), there are other things. Paul said, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members warring against

the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity" (Romans 7:22–23). The war in the members of the body of someone who is a little overweight that makes him huff and puff by the time he gets to the top of the stairs and go into a cardiac arrest because he isn't jogging enough, the war of the mattress on his back which he somehow cannot shake in the morning so that he misses those precious and most inspirational hours of the day, the war of grooming and attention which could do much for us, sometimes, if we would—all these are important. But beyond that, there are serious limitations on our bodies.

Two weeks ago I met for the first time a man I would like to meet again and know more of. His name is Henry D. Stagg—Don Stagg to his friends. He went to bed in August of 1965 about the way everybody else goes to bed and about the way he had all of his life. The difference came the next morning, when his body awoke and his eyes didn't. He was blind, frightened, and he was more than that—terrified. He went to the doctor, who said with guarded optimism, "Well, this thing sometimes doesn't last very long, and it might just be an hour or two." Well, the hours stretched into days and the days stretched into weeks and the weeks finally became a month. Don Stagg could think only of one thing, and that was suicide. He wanted out. (He hadn't asked for this kind of body, and he didn't suppose that he had to go on with it, so he wanted out.)

Well, to make a long story short, Don Stagg found, in the midst of his experience, what one of the prisoners found; that is, it takes some love to get from where we are to where we need to be. One evening Mrs. Stagg arranged to slip the children past the hospital security. They shuffled into the room, and Don did not know who was there. He was surly and arrogant almost all of the time, by his own admission, and he didn't want to talk, but then he felt those little hands on his legs and on his arms. The children said, "Daddy, we love you, and

we want you to come home. We don't want any other daddy."

Don had seen a little light in a dark place, so he went home and started that night to pace off the house. He first paced off the steps from the bedroom to the refrigerator. He says, "It's one thing to be blind; it's another thing to starve to death." When he had the house mastered, he went out into the neighborhood and then up and down the streets for miles away. He decided that he could do quite a little bit, and about two years after the effects of this disease had taken his sight, he enrolled in law school at the University of Utah. In four years he had passed all his courses and the state bar. For one year he worked for the attorney general's office and now is in private practice.

Don Stagg is blind and has some limitations and some bonds put upon him by his own body, but he is doing a great deal. He water-skis and he snow-skis and, just a short time ago, he shot a two-under-par game at the Bonneville Golf Course in Salt Lake City. Now, there are some things he can't do. He cannot see the daughter who has been born to him since he lost his sight. But he believes he will and he believes that that will not be a limitation upon him and that he will not be bound down by that blindness or by anything else. There's something in that kind of spirit which seems to break every kind of bond that might ever come in this life or the next.

The Bondage of Environment

Life itself—external circumstances—seems to me to impose a good deal of bondage upon us; that is, although we may be perfectly healthy, have fine bodies and our eyesight, and even know a little bit, life has cast us in roles that somehow we cannot escape.

I was born in St. George, Utah. I'll tell you a couple of stories I know about St. George. One is that Brother Rolfe Peterson, who used to be in the English Department here, once said that St. George was the only place in the

continental United States that a harpsichord was a "horpsicard."

J. Golden Kimball, on a stake conference assignment down there one day said, "If I owned the two, I would rather live in hell and try to rent St. George."

In discussing limitations of birth and circumstance, I remember the very famous story which Elder Marion D. Hanks told me as a missionary a dozen years ago and which I'm pleased to see recorded in his recently published book. With his permission, I repeat that little story for you because it's a favorite of mine and I really believe in the principle that it teaches:

The famed naturalist of the last century, Louis Agassiz, was lecturing in London and had done a marvelous job. An obviously bright little old lady, but one who did not seem to have all the advantages in life, came up and was spiteful. She was resentful and said that she had never had the chances that he had had and she hoped he appreciated it. He took that bit of lacing very pleasantly and turned to the lady and, when she was through, said, "What do you do?"

She said, "I run a boarding house with my sister. I'm unmarried."

"What do you do at the boarding house?"

"Well, I skin potatoes and chop onions for the stew. We have stew every day."

"Where do you sit when you do that interesting but homely task?"

"I sit on the bottom step of the kitchen stairs."

"Where do your feet rest when you sit there on the bottom step?"

"On a glazed brick."

"What's a glazed brick?"

"I don't know."

"How long have you been sitting there?"

"Fifteen years."

Agassiz concluded, "Here's my card. Would you write me a note when you get a moment about what a glazed brick is?"

Well, that made her mad enough to go home and do it. She went home and got the dictionary out and found out that a brick was a piece of baked clay. That didn't seem enough to send to a Harvard professor, so she went to the encyclopedia and found out that a brick was made of vitrified kaolin and hydrous aluminum silicate, which didn't mean a thing to her. She went to work and visited a brick factory and a tile maker. Then she went back in history and studied a little bit about geology and learned something about clay and clay beds and what hydrous meant and what vitrified meant. She began to soar out of the basement of a boarding house on the wings of words like vitrified kaolin and hydrous aluminum silicate. She finally decided that there were about 120 different kinds of glazed bricks and tiles. She could tell Agassiz that, so she wrote him a little note of thirty-six pages and said, "Here's your glazed brick."

He wrote back, "This is a fine piece of work. If you change this and that and the other, I'll prepare it for publication and send you that which is due you from the publication." She thought no more of it, made the changes, sent it back, and almost by return mail came a check for 250 dollars. His letter said, "I've published your piece. What was under the brick?"

And she said, "Ants."

He replied (all of this by mail), "What is an ant?"

She went to work and this time she was excited. She found 1825 different kinds of ants. She found that there were ants that you could put three to the head of a pin and still have standing room left over. She found that there were ants an inch long that moved in armies half a mile wide and destroyed everything in their path. She found that some ants were blind; some ants lost their wings on the afternoon they died; some milked cows and took the milk to the aristocrats up the street. She found more ants than anybody had ever found, so she wrote Mr. Agassiz something of a treatise, numbering 360 pages. He published it and sent her the money and royalties, which continued to come in. She saw the lands and places of her dreams on a little carpet of vitrified kaolin and on the wings of flying ants that

may lose their wings on the afternoon they die. [*The Gift of Self* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), pp. 151–53]

I do not minimize and I don't mean to be Pollyannaish about the limitations of our circumstances and our environment and the battle that it is to overcome them. I know that there is a bond, that there are fetters that are real that don't get published in civil courts or in Church councils, but about which we can do something. For all I know we may be sitting with our feet on glazed bricks.

The Bondage of the World

Let me just conclude this thought about other kinds of bonds with one that's perhaps as serious as any. We may be bright and learned. We may be physically fit and fully capable. We may have all of the advantages of circumstance and environment and society, but there is a bond and a servitude and a limitation which if we're not careful may, in fact, be more apparent and evident and to which we may be more vulnerable at that point than at almost any other time. For lack of something else to call it, let me call it the world. I want to read you a few lines about this subject:

For that person striving to live righteously, this mortal existence is a testing time indeed. The faithful are plagued with the temptations of a world that appears to have lost itself in a snarled maze of ambiguity, mendacity, and threatening uncertainty. The challenge to live in the world but not of the world is a monumental one, indeed.

Our second estate is indeed a probationary state. The choices we are called upon to make every day of our lives call forth the exercise of our agency. That we fail so frequently to think and do that which is right is not evidence against the practicality of righteous living. We do not falter and stumble in the path of righteousness simply because we do nothing else, but because too often we lose the vision of our relationship with God. The incessant din and

cackling ado of this turbulent life drown out the message which asserts that, as man is, God once was and that, as God is, man may become.

If we will not dance to the music of materialism and hedonism but will remain attuned to the voice of godly reason, we will be led to the green pastures of respite and the still waters of spiritual refreshment. All the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune this world can hurl against us are as nothing when compared to the rewards for steadfastness and faithfulness. It would behoove us all to fix our sights more consistently upon the things which are everlasting and eternal. This world is not our home.

Those are lines from the valedictory address at the Utah state prison, May 23, 1974, given by inmate John McRell, who is about fifty years of age and has been behind bars for more than half of those years.

The Importance of Freedom

We began on something of a theological note. Let me close similarly. I guess if we had to pick a theme for our existence—that existence which we know of, not our past in the preexistence and surely not what lies ahead (although we do have some indication scripturally and through the teachings of the prophets about the past and the future)—that theme would have to have something to do with freedom. We know that an important part of the issue in the great council in heaven was how freedom was going to be achieved once we got here. The Father's course was one of agency and choice and freedom to err, but ultimately freedom to succeed. As many safeguards as possible and all the powers of the universe were brought to guarantee our freedom to the extent that we would wish it so. We really do experience bondage and prison when we are not free. I thought here tonight, while sitting on the stand, what a fortunate time we live in, because our prophet is not incarcerated. I suppose that, if you took the sum total of religious history in the dispensations down

to and including our own, you would find the Brethren in prison most of the time: Israel as a whole in servitude or escaping some Egyptians or some Babylonians or some Lamanites or their own fears or their own sins.

I almost wish I had been in prison so I could make this statement very dramatic. I wish I could talk to you like Peter or Paul and have the angels come, or like Alma and Amulek and have the prison walls crumble, or like Joseph Smith, who could write what may be the most sublime scriptural literature of our dispensation out of the very heart and center or a dingy and dismal and very dreary prison. We thank God that we live in such a time as we do, when the President and prophet of our Church does not need to live in fear or imprisonment and when we are not and Israel is not, at least politically or physically, required to go into bondage and into slavery. But there are other kinds of bonds and there are other kinds of prisons which we need to work to destroy for our own sakes. All that we came here to do we need to do.

I believe with all my heart, I believe as certainly as I stand here, that—if we can repent of our sins, if we can be charitable with the sins of others, if we can take courage toward our circumstances and want to do something about them—there is a power, a living Father of us all who will reach down and, in the scriptural term, “bear us as on eagles’ wings.” When Moses was called to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Jehovah came down and said:

The cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. . . .

I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

And Moses said unto God, who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh . . . ?

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee.
[Exodus 3:9–12]

And then there were demonstrations of God's presence. Sticks turned into serpents and water turned into blood, but that wasn't enough. There were plagues—frogs and lice, hail and locusts—and that wasn't enough. There was darkness, literally, and then death. Finally, that was enough. Then Israel was set free from political servitude to pursue a higher freedom if they would. And that challenge remains before us.

There really is, still stretching before you and me, something of a desert and a sea, like a barbed prison wire between our Egypt and our promised land. We're all somewhere in that desert. When they gathered, that little band of Israelites, at the Mount of Sinai, Jehovah said to the sons of Abraham, "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exodus 19:3–4)

I have, in my life, been borne on eagles' wings. I know with all my heart that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ. I have known those things in a way, over the last few months,

that I've never known in my life, and yet I've known them for a long time. I know that Jesus leads this Church, that it is his church, that he is the chief cornerstone around which the foundation of apostles and living prophets is laid. I know that we'll be with him again, that we will stand free for a time, unfettered, unencumbered, and will recognize in the marks on his flesh something of his bondage and imprisonment and dying service to us. I know that we must repent of our sins and that God has to be just, but I take great delight and eternal love in the scriptural satisfaction and the words of the living prophets that, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound and mercy claimeth the penitent.

May you, in the words of Isaiah, wait upon the Lord and have your strength renewed that you may be borne as on the wings of eagles, that you may run and not be weary, that you may walk and not faint. May you so run, I pray, on the right road and there be borne as on the wings of eagles by a Father who lives and loves us all and gave his Only Begotten Son. For that I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.