The Two Guiding Lights

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1 February 2004
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The Great Journey

My beloved brothers and sisters, I am pleased to be with you to speak about two principles that will give you light throughout your journey through life.

Like many others, I have followed with interest the landing of an unmanned craft on the planet Mars.

What a remarkable feat!

Since the early 1960s, thirty-five missions have been launched from Earth to the red planet. Of these, less than one-third have been considered successful (see William Harwood, "Mars Lander Remains Silent," *Washington Post*, 27 Dec. 2003, p. A2). Mars, on average, is roughly 50 million miles away. Can you imagine the challenge of launching a rocket from Earth—a planet that is traveling faster than 66,000 miles per hour itself—having it cross millions of miles of space, and then having it arrive at another planet that is hurtling through space at its own speed of 54,000 miles per hour?

But getting the rover to the planet is only part of the challenge. Landing it safely is another.

Scientists knew the lander would make its descent through the Martian atmosphere at a rate of 12,000 miles per hour. Even after deploying its parachutes, the rover would be going too fast to land safely. So the scientists designed a cocoon of glorified airbags that would surround the rover, cushioning it during impact.

The landing worked beautifully and the rover is now exploring the surface of the red planet, collecting a harvest of images and data that will be studied by students and scientists for years to come.

During my lifetime there have been a number of great voyages that will ever be etched upon the pages of history. When I was a young boy, Charles A. Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic Ocean in his *Spirit of Saint Louis*. When he took off, many throughout the world held their breath, wondering if he would survive. He became a hero of mine, and I remember

how we celebrated when news broke that he had landed in Paris.

In another great voyage that took place in the summer of 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped away from the Apollo 11 lunar module. With the words "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind," he set foot upon the moon.

In the last century mankind has taken many great journeys. We have mapped the human genome, made amazing advances in medicine, and reached into the heavens and pulled back answers to riddles that have puzzled mankind for centuries.

We are ever on the threshold of new journeys and new discoveries. Can you imagine the excitement of the Wright brothers on the morning of that first flight? or the anticipation of Jonas Salk as he analyzed the data that demonstrated a way to prevent polio?

Today I look at the youth of our Church and see nearly limitless anticipation. You stand at the very threshold of life!

Who is to say what your lives will hold? What discoveries will you make? What remarkable events will you witness?

I have been thinking of late of another man who lived long ago, a man who also stood on the threshold of his own great adventure. This man lived in an ancient time during the confounding of languages at Babel. We know him by the unusual name of "the brother of Jared."

This righteous man obeyed the command of the Lord and built eight barges for the purpose of crossing a vast ocean. You will remember that the barges were watertight both from below and from above. The boats would not so much sail above the ocean as through it, "as a whale in the midst of the sea" (Ether 2:24).

But as the boats were sealed to water, so too were they sealed to air and light. The Lord instructed the brother of Jared how to provide air for them, but as for light, He merely asked, "What will ye that I should prepare for you?" (Ether 2:25).

The brother of Jared thought about the problem and then went to work. He prepared sixteen stones—two for each of the vessels—white and clear and transparent as glass, and he carried them up to the top of the mountain and asked the Lord to touch the stones and make them shine.

The Lord touched the stones, and they produced light!

Throughout their voyage to the promised land the stones gave "light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness" (Ether 6:3).

Like the brother of Jared, you stand at the threshold of your own exciting journey; you stand at the shores of the ocean you are about to cross. And perhaps you are wondering, as did he, "How will I ever get across?"

It's only natural that you feel a bit apprehensive about the voyage you are about to undertake. You probably know that there will be tempests along the way. Furious winds may crack and blow. Mountainous waves may crash against you. Monsters of the sea may try to destroy you. Sometimes it may seem as though you are surrounded in darkness without even a glimmer of light.

As the brother of Jared placed two stones into each barge to provide light for the journey, may I offer two words of counsel, two beacons of light that will provide direction to you during your journey?

The Two Great Commandments

During the time of the Savior's ministry, the lawyers and students of scripture often tried to catch Him in a snare. They asked questions, hoping that He would say something they could use against Him.

Of course for them this was an exercise in continual disappointment.

The scriptures tell us that after Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees decided to try their hand with a question they were sure would be impossible for Him to answer: "Master," they asked, "which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36).

The reason they thought this was such a difficult question was that they themselves had invested an enormous amount of time trying to answer the questions themselves. In fact, they had determined that there were more than 600 commandments—365 of them negative, 248 positive (see James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. [1916], 564–65).

That must have been quite a list—no wonder it was so hard to keep all of the rules straight. In fact, the list was so cumbersome that the Pharisees had worked hard to identify which of the 600 commandments were "heavy," or most important, and those that were "light," meaning of lesser importance.

At any rate, it must have been a topic of considerable debate, and if the question was such a difficult one for the scholars, then certainly it would be impossible for this young man from Galilee.

Of course in that hope the Pharisees were once again disappointed, for the Messiah turned and answered their question directly:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," he said.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37–40).

In a few short sentences the Savior silenced the Pharisees and provided mankind with two great guiding commandments—commandments that belong at the center of and provide the foundation for all we think, feel, and do: *Love the Lord and love your fellowman*. These two guiding lights I wish to impress upon your hearts this day. These lights will shine ever in the darkness and provide guidance during the storms of life.

Why does the Lord command us to love Him? He is all-powerful and all-knowing. Why, then, is the first commandment to love Him? Is He incomplete if we do not worship Him? Is He any less if we fail to acknowledge Him? Of course not.

Then why is the first and great commandment to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"?

The answer to this question has little to do with how our love benefits God and everything to do with how that love benefits us.

Immortality and Eternal Life

What is the work and glory of God? "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

Bringing to pass immortality is essentially a work of creation. God speaks and worlds are formed. Oceans and atmospheres, plants and animals, and insects of all kinds and of every species spring forth and thrive, fulfilling the measure of their creation. At the culmination of this work, man is placed upon the world to learn, be tested, and gain experience.

Because of the sacrifice of the Son of God, the hour will come when "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

"And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28–29).

The just as well as the unjust are given a priceless and incomprehensible gift: immortality. Because of Jesus the Christ, we will live forever.

We are immortal.

Eternal life, however, is something altogether different.

Immortality is about quantity.

Eternal life is about quality.

To use a metaphor, immortality is how long the dinner lasts. Eternal life is what is on the menu and who is with us at the table.

Eternal life "is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7).

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I could speak of kingdoms and glory and knowledge beyond comprehension, but the words would do little justice to the reality. I could speak of exquisite joy and of infinite peace, but meager words fall incomplete and empty compared to the glorious truth.

Can the word *waterfall* describe Niagara? Can *nebula* describe the glory of Orion? Can *love* give a satisfactory description to the tender and profound feelings of a mother for her child?

Eternal life is the culmination of existence. As spiritual children of God, you and I are heirs to this priceless fortune, benefactors to a glorious future, recipients of grace.

If immortality is God's work, then eternal life is God's glory. Our Heavenly Father, with love that is scarcely within our power to comprehend, desires each of us to partake of this greatest of all gifts: eternal life.

However, eternal life does not come automatically. We must learn for ourselves the lessons that bring wisdom. We must fill our minds with truth. We must purge our hearts of evil and fill them with the desire to do good continually. Like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we must continue grace for grace until we receive a fulness (see D&C 93:13).

Heavenly Father in His love for us has revealed the path we must walk in order to reach the ultimate goal of eternal life. You and I understand this path as the commandments. We can look upon these commandments as oppressive rules that limit our enjoyment of life, or we can look upon them as "the way"—the path that leads to a glorious and incomprehensible future.

The First Light

When we love our Heavenly Father with all our heart, might, mind, and strength, we follow Him joyfully. When we love our Heavenly Father, we leave behind the grudging "have to" and embrace the enthusiastic "can't wait to" attitude. In thanksgiving we joyfully walk the path of the Lord—the path of discipleship that leads to Him.

Why must we love the Lord? Because as we do so, we become refined, pure, and holy. When we love the Lord, the benefits of the Atonement can wash away our earthly stain and, though our sins be as scarlet, we can become new creatures filled with new life, new thoughts, and a desire to do good continually.

When we love the Lord we hunger and thirst for knowledge of Him.

I commend you for seeking light and knowledge by attending courses taught by the dedicated and inspired instructors who make up our Church Educational System. What a wonderful blessing to study the gospel at the feet of men and women who, as a result of their love for the Lord and for His word, have devoted much of their lives to teaching the sacred truths of the gospel.

When we love the Lord we cherish the scriptures. We hold the truths therein precious, as gems of great worth. In our day we eagerly wait upon the words of our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. General conference becomes a time of feasting and rejoicing, a time of gratitude for the great blessing we have that in our day God once again speaks to man.

It is easy to say we love the Lord, but true devotion means more than mouthing syllables. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), the Savior taught His disciples, and so He urges us today.

As members of the Church keep the commandments, they will feel the influence and guidance of the Spirit in their lives. Gradually, through a process of spiritual refinement, they will become sanctified and filled with the gift of the Holy Ghost. Their prayers will become effectual, their faith more certain.

"Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you," the Lord has spoken in these latter days; "seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (D&C 88:63).

The first light, then, that I would urge you to carry with you during your journey through life is *love of* the Lord.

The Second Light

The second light I urge you to take with you is *love* for your fellowman.

Loving our neighbor is not just a good idea—it is the core of what has distinguished the followers of Christ in every age since the beginning of time. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples," the Savior taught, "if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35)

Look at every Zion society from ancient times to present and you find at its center love for others.

The great Book of Mormon prophet King Benjamin counseled that caring for others is linked to the power of the Atonement. "For the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God," he taught his people, "I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually

and temporally, according to their wants" (Mosiah 4:26).

The scriptures caution us that even our power of prayer is dependent upon our compassion for others, for "if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need . . . , behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing" (Alma 34:28).

Disciples of the Living Christ have always known that as we bear one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ (see Galatians 6:2).

The irony of this is that, although we may make a difference in the lives of those we help, often the person who benefits most from charitable service is the person who gives. When we sacrifice our time, talents, and resources for the sake of others, we refine our character and thereby become more fit for the kingdom. The Savior said the poor will always be with us (see John 12:8), and it is a good thing, too, because we cannot become exalted without them. We need the poor as much as the poor need us.

As we open our hearts to those in need—whether they be poor or discouraged or grieving or in distress—and as we give of ourselves to lift their burdens, our problems seem a little smaller. We grow in spirit. We grow in peace. We grow in joy.

As we lift up the hands that hang down, the light within us grows a little brighter and illuminates the way before us.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that a member of the Church "is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them" (*Times and Seasons*, 15 Mar. 1842, 732).

In our day President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, "Where there is stark hunger, regardless of the cause, I will not let political considerations dull my sense of mercy or thwart my responsibility to the sons and daughters of God, wherever they may be or whatever their circumstances" in (Conference Report, Apr. 1985, 72; or *Ensign*, May 1985, 54).

We manifest our love for others by our kindness. Like the people in Alma's day, we too are desirous to "bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; ... mourn with those that mourn; ... and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9).

We manifest our love for others by standing "as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9). The great missionary work of the Church is a testimony to our love of our fellowman. The gospel of Jesus Christ restored to the earth in these latter days is the great hope for individuals, families, communities, and the world itself. We say to our friends, "Come unto Christ, enter the purifying waters of baptism, receive the Holy Ghost, and your lives will be transformed in the light and life of the Spirit."

Because of love of our fellowman, we enter holy temples to perform vicarious ordinances for those who have departed from this mortality without the blessings of the everlasting gospel. This act of compassion is selfless. It is an act of love for those who wait upon us, praying continually for our assistance.

Love is the great commandment. "Love your enemies," the Savior proclaimed, "do good to them which hate you" (Luke 6:27).

Imagine for a moment how our lives would be transformed if everyone in the world had as a central motivation love and compassion for all of God's children. What do you suppose their families, wards, communities, and nations would be like if our central focus was less on themselves and more on what they could do to serve others?

To Build a House in Ecuador

The *Church News* published a story about a small ward in Ecuador that did just that.

For three decades the Church had thrived in the small town of Otavalo, and many had entered the waters of baptism. Not everyone in the village, however, shared those warm feelings. One man in particular hated the Church and everything about it. "Whenever the members wanted to build a new meetinghouse, this man opposed it. When graffiti appeared on Church property, it was rumored that he had taken part in it."

One day an earthquake hit the Otavalo area and toppled the man's house.

"He appealed [for help] to the city, then to the churches. But Otavalo is a humble community and few had the resources to do anything.

"And so it happened that . . . this man who hated the Church did something he thought he would never do—he knocked on the door of Rafael Campo, the high priests group leader. . . .

"... My house fell down," he said, "and I don't have the money to fix it. I know we haven't seen eye to eye in the past and that I have no right to ask anything of you, but the fact remains, I have no house for my family and I wondered if ... your church could help?"

Brother Campo had been a member of the Church for thirty years. He was one of the first to be baptized in this area. "He had personally witnessed the man's often vindictive words and actions towards the Church."

As the man spoke, "numerous thoughts passed through Brother Campo's mind. . . . But, ultimately, the words that struck him with the greatest power were those of the Savior, 'but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' (Matthew 5:39.)

"We have been teaching this for 30 years,' he told himself. 'Perhaps it is time to practice what we have been taught."

Brother Campo explained the situation to the bishop, and during a quorum meeting the next Sunday the bishop said: "We all know this man. We all know what has happened in the past. But the man does not have a home and he has come to us seeking help."

"The bishop passed around a list and asked the brethren who desired to help to indicate what they were willing to donate. There were 23 men in the meeting that day. When the list had finished circulating, 23 names appeared on it.

"One offered to bring 5 pounds of nails. One said he had some framing wood. Another could bring 50 cement blocks. One offered sand, another labor."

The following day the quorum "assembled at 7 A.M. and built a modest but sturdy home for a man who only a few days before had been their greatest enemy." (Neil Newell, "To Build a House in Ecuador," *Church News*, 20 Jan. 2001, 11.)

The Essence of the List

Brothers and sisters, if only we could develop that same spirit of compassion, our lives, families, wards, and communities would be filled with greater meaning and abundant joy. We live in an age of industry. Our lives are filled to capacity with lists of tasks we need to accomplish. If you are like many, you place on the list things such as prayer, reading the scriptures, visiting the sick, and helping those in need.

These two lights we have spoken of—loving the Lord and loving our neighbor—are not merely things we should include on our lists. They are the very essence of the list. For upon these two commandments "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

How much more meaningful would our lives be if our thoughts, hearts, and actions were guided by these two great lights?

How much more vibrant and filled with love would our families, quorums, Relief Societies, wards, and stakes be if we kept these two great lights ever at the forefront of our agendas, our discussions, our plans, our lives?

Where Love Is, There God Is Also

In 1885 the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote a story about an old cobbler by the name of Martin who lived in a humble shop in a small village. He did quality work, didn't charge too much, and was reliable and honest.

Like many of us, Martin had experienced his share of sorrow. He had buried not only his wife but his only son as well. In his grief Martin prayed again and again that he too might die. Gradually his despair gave way to anger, and Martin, in his bitterness, lost his faith and would have nothing to do with God.

One day a holy man who had spent eight years in prayer and meditation came by to see him. Martin opened his heart and told the man that he no longer wished to live since he was quite without hope in the world.

"You have no right to say such things, Martin," the other said. "We cannot judge God's ways. . . . If God willed that your son should die and you should live, it must be best so. As to your despair—that comes because you wish to live for your own happiness.'

"'What else should one live for?' asked Martin.

"For God, Martin,' said the old man. 'He gives you life, and you must live for Him. When you have learnt to live for Him, you will grieve no more, and all will seem easy to you.'

"Martin was silent awhile, and then asked: 'But how is one to live for God?'

"The old man answered: '... Can you read? Then buy the Gospels and read them: there you will see how God would have you live....'

"These words sank deep into Martin's heart, and that same day" he opened the New Testament "and began to read.

"At first he meant only to read on holidays, but having once begun he found it made his heart so light that he read every day. Sometimes he was so absorbed in his reading that the oil in his lamp burnt out before he could tear himself away from the book."

The more he read, the more he felt his love for the Lord growing stronger. His heart grew lighter as well.

"From that time [forward] Martin's whole life changed." He drank and gossiped less. When he was tempted to say unkind words, he refrained. "His life became peaceful and joyful."

One night as he was reading his Bible, he drifted to sleep. Suddenly, he heard a voice.

""Martin!" it said.

"Who's there?' he asked. . . .

"... Martin!" the voice said. "Look out into the street to-morrow, for I shall come."

The cobbler "rose from his chair and rubbed his eyes, but did not know whether he had heard these words in a dream or awake."

The next morning as he was working, he thought about what had happened the night before. "At times it seemed" as though it must have been "a dream, and at times he thought he had really heard the voice."

Could it be that his beloved Savior would visit him in his humble shop?

While he worked, he looked out onto the street at everyone who passed by to see if he recognized their face.

After a while an old soldier with worn and shabby boots came near the window. Martin knew the man. He had no money and stayed with a neighbor who, out of charity, had offered him a room in exchange for help around the house.

It was cold outside and it had started to snow, and the old soldier was trying to get warm by leaning against Martin's building. Martin put some tea on the stove and invited the man into his shop.

"'Don't trouble to wipe your feet,' said Martin; 'I'll wipe up the floor—it's all in the day's work. . . . "

The old man sat down and emptied his glass. Martin offered him another while continuing to look out the window onto the street.

"Are you expecting someone?' asked the visitor.

"'... Well, now," Martin said, "'I'm ashamed to tell you. It isn't that I really expect any one; but I heard something last night which I can't get out of my mind."

And he told the old man about the voice he had heard.

The old soldier listened intently and, after drinking a third glass of tea, he thanked Martin for giving him "food and comfort both for soul and body," and told him he hoped he wouldn't be disappointed and that his visitor would appear.

Later in the day Martin noticed a woman whom he had never seen before. She was poorly dressed, wearing only summer clothes that were shabby and worn. On her feet she wore peasant-made shoes, and she had a baby in her arms.

"Through the window Martin" could see the woman was shivering; he could hear "the baby crying, and the woman trying to soothe it."

Martin went out and insisted she enter his shop. "'. . . Sit down . . . near the stove," he told her. "'Warm yourself and feed the baby."

She told him that she had no milk to feed the baby and that she herself hadn't eaten since early morning.

Martin made some soup and offered the woman some bread. While the woman ate, Martin held the baby. As they talked, Martin learned that she had been working as a cook until her baby was born but that her employer wouldn't keep her on with a newborn child. She had no money for food and had pawned her last shawl for a few coins the day before.

She explained that a woman in another village had offered her a position and that she was on her way toward that village when Martin invited her in.

Martin smiled and gave the woman a cloak to wrap her baby in. He then handed her some coins and told her to get her shawl out of pawn. After she left, Martin went back to work, always looking outside the window, hoping against hope to see the face of the one he loved with all his heart, his Savior

Time passed, and after a while Martin saw an apple vendor stop just in front of his window.

She was attempting to shift an old sack from one shoulder to the other when a boy in a tattered cap ran up, snatched an apple, and tried to slip away. But the woman was too quick, and she caught the boy and held onto him with both hands. She knocked the cap off his head and seized hold of his hair.

The woman scolded and the boy screamed.

Martin rushed out of the door as he heard the woman threatening to take the boy to the police. He separated the boy from the woman and begged the woman to forgive him. Although the woman did not want to let him go, something in Martin's words struck her, and she let go.

As she did so, the young boy saw his opportunity and tried to run away. But he did not get far. Martin seized him, held him fast, and insisted he ask the woman for forgiveness.

The boy, realizing he had nowhere to run, cried and pleaded for the woman to forgive him.

Seeing that the boy was truly penitent, Martin paid the woman for an apple and gave it to the boy, telling him not to steal again.

By the time Martin returned to his little shop, "he noticed the lamp-lighter passing on his way to light the street lamps." Evening had come.

The Savior had not appeared.

Finally Martin put away his tools and pulled down his beloved Bible from the shelf.

"He meant to open [it] at the place he had marked the day before, . . . but the book opened at another place." As Martin opened it, his experience of the night before "came back to his mind, and no sooner had he thought of it than he seemed to hear footsteps, as though some one were moving behind him. . . . And a voice whispered in his ear: 'Martin, Martin, don't you know me?'

"Who is it?' muttered Martin.

"It is I,' said the voice. And out of the dark corner stepped" the old soldier, "who smiled and [vanished] like a cloud. . . .

"It is I,' said the voice again. And out of the darkness stepped the woman with the baby in her arms, and the woman smiled and the baby laughed, and they too vanished.

"It is I,' said the voice once more. And the old woman and the boy with the apple stepped out and both smiled, and then they too vanished.

"And Martin's soul grew glad. He . . . put on his spectacles, and began reading the Gospel just where it had opened; and at the top of the page he read:

"I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

"And at the bottom of the page he read:

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me' [Matthew 25:35, 40].

"And Martin understood that his dream had come true; and that the Saviour had really come to him that day, and he had welcomed him." ("Where Love Is, God Is," in *Twenty-Three Tales*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude [1906], 131–46.)

Standing at the Threshold

My dear brothers and sisters, you stand at the threshold of an amazing and wonderful journey. As one who has gone before you, I offer these two words of counsel, two sources of light that will provide light for you throughout your life's journey: Love the Lord

with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

This is the essence of who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As a special witness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I testify with all my heart that the gospel of Jesus Christ is restored to Earth again. I testify that a young boy retired to a grove of trees and sought the answers to the questions of his heart. God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith, and so began the great work of restoration that unveiled the gospel in all its fulness.

Jesus the Christ lives. He loved us so much that He paid the ultimate price to save us from our sins.

Jesus the Christ lives today. He is not aloof nor uninterested in our lives. He has told us, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

The heavens are not closed. The master of ocean, earth, and skies speaks to prophets and apostles today.

All who approach Him with humility and real intent, seeking to know of Him, surely shall find Him.

It is my testimony to you today that as we make our lives living monuments that testify of our love for God and for our fellowman, we will be walking in the path that leads to eternal life. That we may do so is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.