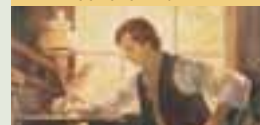




THIS IS OUR RELIGION,





BY ELDER ERICH W. KOPISCHKE

Of the Seventy

A favorite hymn that we often sing in priesthood meeting is “Ye Elders of Israel,” with lyrics by Cyrus H. Wheelock. The third verse reads:

*We'll go to the poor, like our Captain of old,
And visit the weary, the hungry, and cold;
We'll cheer up their hearts with the news
that he bore
And point them to Zion and life evermore.¹*

“I will tell you that your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the Celestial Kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. *Go and bring in those people now on the plains.*”²

Cyrus H. Wheelock sat in those meetings. He became a member of the first rescue party that left Salt Lake City on October 7 to search



Brigham Young told those sent to rescue the stranded pioneers that our religion is to save souls. In our time, conditions have changed drastically. But President Young's statement has not changed. We will always be under an obligation to rescue those in spiritual and physical need.

TO SAVE SOULS

On the Saturday before general conference in October 1856, Elder Franklin D. Richards and a handful of returning missionaries arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. They reported to President Brigham Young that hundreds of pioneer men, women, and children were scattered over the long trail to the valley, facing the early onset of winter. The people were hungry, and many carts and wagons were breaking down. People and animals were dying. All of them would perish unless they were rescued.

Sunday morning President Young assigned all those who would speak that day and during the conference that followed to address the pioneers' plight. In his address he said:

“That is my religion; that is the dictation of the Holy Ghost that I possess. It is to save the people. . . .

for the Saints scattered on the plains.

Later, George D. Grant, who headed the rescue party, reported to President Young: “It is not of much use for me to attempt to give a description of the situation of these people, for this you will learn from [others] . . . ; but you can imagine between five and six hundred men, women and children, worn down by drawing hand carts through snow and mud; fainting by the wayside; falling, chilled by the cold; children crying, their limbs stiffened by cold, their feet bleeding and some of them bare to snow and frost. The sight is almost too much for the stoutest of us; but we go on doing all we can, not doubting nor despairing.”³

The text of “Ye Elders of Israel” may have been on Brother Wheelock's mind during those difficult days of 1856. The rescuers literally reached out to the weary, hungry, and

cold. They cheered them up and showed them the way to Zion in the Salt Lake Valley.

Saving People

In our time of jet planes, when it takes less than a day to travel from Europe to the Salt Lake Valley, settings and conditions have changed drastically. But President Young's statement has not changed—it is still our religion to save people. As members of the Lord's Church, we will always be under an obligation to rescue those in spiritual and physical need. As the Lord stated to the elders of the early restored Church: "Remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple" (D&C 52:40).

We want to be true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. We declare that we love God and want to follow His commandments. Every Sunday we renew our baptismal covenants, worship God in our meetings, and praise Him for the many blessings He extends to us. King Benjamin's reminder is still true: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17).

When the Lord wants to bless someone's life or help someone in need, He often sends a neighbor, friend, or family member. This is one way He brings support and salvation to others. By doing so, He helps us understand the great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39).

Is it any wonder that we are often the greatest beneficiaries of our reaching out to others? The Lord has promised, "He that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul" (D&C 4:4). Bringing salvation to others brings salvation to our own soul.

Keeping Our Eyes Open

There are many ways we can reach out to others and help those with physical and spiritual needs. If we walk through life with open eyes, the Lord will show us opportunities that will bless others and ourselves.

Recently I attended a conference of Church humanitarian missionaries in Jordan. As I met with them, I saw two sisters knitting. They told me they were knitting little caps for newborns. In the northern part of the capital city of Amman is a hospital that delivers 50 babies a day. The people there are very poor. After delivery, mothers and babies are sent back to their homes, where there is no heating. Many of these babies suffer from disease and die because of a loss of body heat. I asked for two samples of their knitting.

After I returned home, my wife took the samples to Relief Society. As a result, a miracle began—just as it so often begins in many of our Relief Society meetings around the world. During the Christmas season many sisters from our surrounding wards started to knit and sew baby caps. They did it alone, with friends, at home, or at Church activities.

One day I asked a friend how he was doing. With a twinkle in his eye, he replied, "I am a 'victim' of baby caps. We are talking baby caps night and day. We are surrounded by them." One sister called and asked me, "Isn't it warm in the Middle East?" When I assured her that the caps were needed, she went to work.

When I returned to Jordan, I had more than 800 baby caps in my suitcases. As we turned them over to the senior consultant of the hospital's baby station, he thought they were a godsend. Jordan had just experienced the coldest winter in 16 years, with temperatures well below freezing.

Reaching Out to Others

Reaching out and helping is not limited by age, health, time, skills, or financial resources. Everybody who has the desire can help others in need. We can participate in organized welfare projects. We can give a generous fast offering. We can visit and comfort a friend who is sick. We can invite someone facing problems into our home. We can faithfully visit the families we home teach and the sisters we visit teach. We can invite a friend struggling with adversity to our Sunday meetings. We can accompany the

full-time missionaries. We can do family history work and serve in the temple often. We can listen to our children and grandchildren, teach them, and encourage them to walk in the light.

Sometimes reaching out is as easy as offering a sincere prayer, making a phone call, or writing a short note. If we are too busy to reach out to someone in need, then we are *too* busy. When we go about doing good, we act upon the invitation of the Savior:

“I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

“Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house;

“Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (3 Nephi 12:14–16).

Pointing Others to Zion and Life Evermore

Reaching out to others is simply caring for people. We do not care about numbers or statistics but about the well-being of the people around us. If we do good, reach out, and provide spiritual and physical help according to our strength and ability, we automatically point others to Zion. They will be attracted by what we are and what we represent. They will be blessed by what they see and feel. Their testimonies will be established or strengthened. Then the assurance of the Lord will reverberate in our souls:

“Be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.

“And if thou art faithful unto the end thou shalt have a crown of immortality, and eternal life in the mansions which I have prepared in the house of my Father” (D&C 81:5–6).

Truly, our religion is to rescue and save souls. ■

NOTES

1. “Ye Elders of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 319.
2. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, Oct. 15, 1856; see also LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (1960), 120–21; LaRene Porter Gaunt and Linda Dekker, “Go and Bring Them In,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2006, 43.
3. *Handcarts to Zion*, 228.



A MISSION OF SAVING



“All about us there are many who are in need of help and who are deserving of rescue. Our mission in life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be a mission of saving.”

**President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008),
“Our Mission of Saving,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 59.**

