He Cares More About the Shoulder
Than About the Wheel

MONTE R. SWAIN

Brothers and sisters, I’m grateful to be here. I’ve been rather sleepless while preparing my remarks. I’ve felt some concern. But standing here today, seeing you all before me, I feel blessed—blessed to speak from a lectern where saints and scholars and prophets have spoken, and more blessed to come to this campus each day to teach and be taught by wonderful students who are my brothers and sisters and to work with faculty and staff who are reaching for something here that is more than a job.

Today I want to address my remarks to you who may be feeling tired and a little worn down, who may be struggling with feelings of frustration about being a student at BYU, and who may even be feeling a little cynical about what we’re trying to accomplish here. There are some challenging days. There are days when a teacher, an administrator, a classmate, or a roommate does not speak or act as one should in Zion. There are days when you and I do not speak or act as we should in Zion. There are days when we’re confused about a policy or process here that seems inconsistent with the principles of Zion. Sometimes we experience a bit of emotional whiplash when our lives get bumped hard by an experience or a challenge that is painful—painful enough that it pulls us up short and we find ourselves saying, “Wait a minute! I thought this was BYU, the Lord’s school. I thought it was Heavenly Father’s will that I be a BYU student. What in the world is going on here?” You may chuckle—perhaps a bit nervously—at that representation. If you do, it’s probably because you have had some experiences along these lines. And so it’s to you that I address my remarks.

BYU is not Zion. Not yet. It is Zion’s university—and it is under construction. It is a work in progress. However—and this is the core of my remarks today—here at BYU it is not an academic program or an athletic program or even a missionary or leadership program that is under construction. It is you. You and I are the whole point of it.

Occasionally it is my great privilege to host colleagues from other universities and other faiths who come to present their academic work in the Marriott School. On several occasions I have begun the day by driving my colleague to a place overlooking campus. From this vantage point we can see BYU as well as the Provo Temple and the Missionary Training Center. My objective is to begin the day with a speech that is more about the shoulder than about the wheel.

Monte R. Swain was a BYU professor of accounting when this devotional address was given on 27 May 2008.
visual of what BYU is all about. I speak briefly to my guest about you students—who come here to learn and in whom so much hope is placed by the Church, as evidenced by investments made in your education. I talk about how the learning that occurs simultaneously at the MTC and at the temple imbues a larger sense of purpose to us here on campus. I share this because I believe that my guests have good hearts and will reverence the message. I believe that they are impressed by the vision of what they see. I hope that this view is endorsed by what they experience later that day as they meet with faculty and students. Regardless, I know that each time I host a colleague in this manner, I am personally very impressed by the vision of it all.

I have many important memories of my time as a student at BYU. The most important memories involve my wife and the auspicious beginning of our life together in Trailer No. 3, a little green trailer in the old Wyview trailer park. I know that all of you are making important memories here, some of which involve long dog days as you work on classes, exams, tight budgets, and other more personal challenges. While some days can seem very long, I can assure you that the years are very short. Many of you will be shocked at how quickly you’ll find yourself looking back on this important time and waxing sentimental with someone younger than you—call it an occupational hazard of the BYU experience.

One particular memory I want to share today is of going to the administration building shortly after returning from my mission and discovering that all of the devotional addresses that BYU President Jeffrey R. Holland and his wife, Patricia Holland, had given while I was gone were printed in pamphlet form. I picked up a copy of each address and took them back home to catch up. One of those devotional talks absolutely connected with me and became a source of inspiration throughout my entire school experience. In fact, I still have that pamphlet today. The title of that talk is “However Long and Hard the Road.” As part of his message, President Holland related some of the wonderful (and arduous) history of the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. I’d like to share some of his remarks with you today, buttressed by Professor Richard Neitzel Holzapfel’s wonderful history of that construction, Every Stone a Sermon, which he published in 1992.

On July 28, 1847, just four days after their arrival in the valley, while walking along Brother Brigham stopped very suddenly. He stuck his cane in the ground and said, “Right here will stand the great Temple of our God.” We drove a stake in the place indicated by him, and that particular spot is situated in the middle of the Temple site.¹

The 10-acre lot was designated as the Temple Block. A week later Orson Pratt used the corner of the block as the starting point for laying out the city. Planning for the construction began immediately, but the next six years kept the Saints occupied just trying to survive. Some Saints lost the vision, including William Weeks, the original temple architect, and abandoned the effort. But others gave themselves to the work, including Truman O. Angell, the newly appointed architect, and Daniel H. Wells, who was made supervisor of the construction.

The groundbreaking ceremony was finally held on February 14, 1853. The previous six years had not been easy for the Saints, to say the least. One anonymous recollection of that time effectively summed up the circumstances in which a mammoth, multimillion-dollar project was about to be launched:

*I walked [to the meeting] the morning the ground was broken for the foundation of the Temple . . . on the Temple Block. I went through frozen mud and slush with my feet tied up in rags. I had on a pair of pants made out of my wife’s skirt—a thin
Scotch plaid; also a thin calico shirt and a straw hat. These were all the clothes I had. It was go that way or stay at home. . . . I was not alone in poverty. . . . There were many who were fixed as badly as I was.2

The earth was so frozen that day that Heber C. Kimball had to break up the ground with a pick. “President Young took out the first turf.”3 He “lifted it high up, and said ‘get out of my way, for I am going to throw this’ . . . and declared the ground broken . . . and dismissed the assembly.”4 Rather than departing, many of those gathered then “rushed to the hole to . . . throw a little dirt out.”5

In the 1983 devotional given jointly with his wife, President Holland commented about the building of the Salt Lake Temple:

Its grounds would cover an eighth of a square mile, and it would be built to stand through eternity. Who cares about the money or stone or timber or glass or gold they don’t have? . . . They just marched forth and broke ground for the most massive, permanent, inspiring edifice they could conceive. And they would spend forty years of their lives trying to complete it.

The work seemed ill-fated from the start. The excavation for the basement required trenches twenty feet wide and sixteen feet deep, much of it through solid gravel. Just digging for the foundation alone required nine thousand man days of labor. Surely someone must have said, “A temple would be fine, but do we really need one this big?” But they kept on digging.6

Setbacks were the one constant in the temple construction effort, one of the best known being the arrival of Johnston’s army in 1858, a deployment that had been ordered by the U.S. president based on rumors back East that the Saints were forming a rebellious break-off from the United States. Brigham Young viewed the coming of the army as government-sanctioned mobbery and ordered the temple foundation buried and the city emptied of its inhabitants.

After the threat of Johnston’s army had passed and the foundation was dug out again, it was determined that the sandstone foundation rock was unstable and that plans to build the temple with adobe walls were ill-advised. Brigham came to the painful decision to tear out the foundation and begin again. This time granite from Little Cottonwood Canyon, 20 miles away, was selected as the construction material for the temple. The first quarry in the canyon was opened in 1860.

I want to emphasize to you that, in retrospect, the granite work in Little Cottonwood Canyon was amazing and, at the time, must have seemed daunting. Stones, each weighing between two and six tons, were cut out of the mountain using a sledgehammer and a hand drill. Large holes were dug, and wagons were backed into the holes to be level with the ground. Each stone was then let down onto logs and rolled onto a heavily reinforced wagon, which was pulled by four to six oxen. Transporting just one large stone on the 20-mile trip “took as many as four days.”7 Approximately 60 wagons were employed in a constant rotation to move the granite.8 One reason for so many wagons is that breakdowns happened regularly, and when I say breakdown, I mean breakdown! Once a wagon broke down under the load, the rock, being simply too big to load on flat land, was often unrecoverable and lost to the project.9 I love President Holland’s description of this process:

By mid-1871 . . . the walls of the temple were barely visible above ground. Far more visible was the teamster’s route from Cottonwood, strewn with the wreckage of wagons—and dreams—unable to bear the load placed on them. The journals and histories of these teamsters are filled with accounts of broken axles, mud-mired animals, shattered sprockets, and shattered hopes. I do not have any evidence that these men swore, but surely they might have been seen turning a rather steely eye toward heaven. But they believed and kept pulling.10
Brother Paul Smith, a local historian of the Salt Lake Temple construction, reports that still today a number of homeowners in the Sandy area of the Salt Lake Valley have large granite rocks in their yards with chisel marks on them—and some of those homeowners are wondering how in the world those stones came to be there.\footnote{11}

At this point in our report from President Holland and Professor Holzapfel, I need to introduce a small character into this story: my great-great-grandfather Robert Henry Swain.\footnote{12}

In 1853 Grandpa Henry and his wife were baptized in Kent, England, where he was employed as a policeman and as a member of the queen's local bodyguard. Like many of our ancestors, Grandpa and his wife, Elizabeth, and their children crossed the Atlantic to make the pioneer trek to Utah, but they did not come together. What’s unique in Grandpa Henry’s story is that when he departed from Liverpool on April 29, 1865, on the ship Belle Wood, he left alone. He and Elizabeth had separated five years earlier. We don’t know the circumstances of the divorce, but we do know that Elizabeth was not happy with Henry and had tossed her wedding band into the sea. Grandpa subsequently lost his membership in the Church.

I imagine that if any of you have been napping, I just captured your attention. What captures my attention and imagination is visualizing Grandpa walking alone into the Great Salt Lake Valley with the William S. S. Willes wagon company on November 11, 1865. I wonder what he was thinking and feeling as he entered the valley. What was this divorced and excommunicated brother to do there? He had no useful skills for the Saints at that time, and he wasn’t in a position to provide much priesthood service.

Grandpa went to work as a stonecutter in Little Cottonwood Canyon and as a stonemason on the temple, where he labored for the next 10 years. And while working on the construction of the temple, a reconstruction of his own life began taking place as he returned to full fellowship in the kingdom. Eventually he became a chief stonemason and established a family occupation that was passed forward to many of his descendants, including my father and my brothers and me. As a result, I have some experience with sweating over brick and stone in the summer and working to keep the tools and materials unfrozen in the winter. It became my own “stay-in-school” program and made the work on my doctoral studies a comparatively painless experience. That said, when I look at my soft, pink hands today, I miss the quality of that work and mourn a little its disappearing legacy as the Swain family line continues to move forward into the information age and acquires new skills in a new economy.

At this point let me return to President Holland’s report on the temple construction. As I do, I want you to imagine Grandpa Henry there in the midst of the process:

The precise design and dimensions of every one of the thousands of stones to be used in that massive structure had to be marked out individually in the architect’s office and shaped accordingly. This was a suffocatingly slow process. Just to put one layer of the six hundred hand-sketched, individually squared, and precisely cut stones around the building took nearly three years. That progress was so slow that virtually no one walking by the temple block could ever see any progress at all. . . .

. . . By mid-1871, fully two decades and untold misery after it had begun, the walls of the temple were barely visible above ground. . . .

. . . When President Brigham Young died in 1877, the temple was still scarcely twenty feet above the ground. Ten years later, his successor, President John Taylor, and the temple’s original architect, Truman O. Angell, were dead as well. The side walls were just up to the square. And now the infamous Edmunds-Tucker Act had already been passed by Congress disincorporating The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. One of the effects of this law was to put the Church into receivership,
whereby the U.S. marshall under a November court order seized this temple the Saints had now spent just under forty years of their lives dreaming of, working for, and praying fervently to enjoy. . . .

But God was with these modern children of Israel, as he always has been and always will be. They did all they could do and left the rest in his hands. 13

I’ll end President Holland’s report there. On that cold February day when the frozen ground was broken to start the work, Brigham Young spoke with characteristically poignant humor as he told the recent converts attending the ground dedication to not be discouraged because they had not had all the privileges that many of the older members had had, of being robbed, and driven and mobbed and plundered of everything they had on earth, for he would promise all who would remain faithful, that they . . . should be proved in all things. 14

And so it had been, not surprisingly, a long, hard road.

The story of the Salt Lake Temple ends well—very well—as you know. On April 6, 1892, the capstone on which the angel Moroni statue resides was laid before 50,000 exultant Saints waving their handkerchiefs, their jubilant Hosanna Shout echoing off of the surrounding hills. 15

One year later, on April 6, 1893, 40 years after the groundbreaking and laying of the cornerstones, 75,000 Saints (15,000 more than the total population of Salt Lake City at that time) gathered for the dedication ceremonies. 16 President Wilford Woodruff, who as a young apostle had pounded the stake into the ground to mark Brigham Young’s cane print in the dirt, presided at the dedication. He and the First Presidency had earlier counseled that everyone planning to attend should first commit themselves to repent and forgive and reconcile all past sins and faults. 17 Elder Franklin D. Richards commented that “it was of more importance for the people to be accepted than for the temple to be accepted.” 18

In closing his report on the events that happened so many years ago, Professor Holzapfel made the significant observation in 1992 that these events were much more than the dedication of a building. They represent the dedication of an entire people to God. As long as the Saints continue to exhibit such devotion, the temple, rising towards heaven like the mountains around it, rests on a foundation more secure than the cornerstones so carefully placed “beneath the reach of mountain floods”—it rests on the foundation of faith, the living rock the early pioneers planted more than one hundred and forty years ago. 19

Two and a half years after the temple dedication, on November 18, 1895, Grandpa Henry died of a lung disease attributed to his working so long in the granite dust. 20 I believe, though, that his work on the temple breathed life back into him. Grandpa died surrounded by his large family. He died fully in the faith. Besides a family tradition of brick and stone masonry, he left a legacy of faith for me. Grandpa Henry was built—was remade—into a new creature. C. S. Lewis, drawing from a George MacDonald parable, offered a very insightful description of what Grandpa Henry might have been feeling as he worked in God’s stone quarry and worked to repent and to return:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—
throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.\textsuperscript{21}

More directly, Paul said to the Corinthians, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”\textsuperscript{22}

At the beginning of this devotional hour we sang together the great old hymn “Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel.”\textsuperscript{23} He who is omnipotent really does not need us to move the wheel or to build anything for Him. It is not His ultimate objective to cover the world with chapels and temples. That is a means to His end, and I believe we can all easily quote that end, His ultimate objective: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”\textsuperscript{24} I believe that He cares more about the shoulder than about the wheel—that wheel is how we are moved to come home to Him. The wheel, the work, is a blessing to us. This is important. \textit{The work is a blessing.}

I think that sometimes we live as if the gospel life was an exercise in delayed consumption; by giving up fun and leisure now (while the heathen and heretic party on), we’ll get ours in the eternities, and it’s going to be great watching those heathens and heretics sweat it out while we relax. I think that the parable of the ant and the grasshopper has done us some disservice in this regard. To that end, I would refer you to a very interesting dream/vision that Wilford Woodruff had of meeting Joseph Smith in heaven and of being amazed that the Lord’s vineyard work does go on in the spirit world and that it goes on with even more focus than on earth. As I reread this account, I made a personal observation that President Woodruff seemed to be a bit disappointed initially at this report of heaven but was quickly satisfied that this was good doctrine.\textsuperscript{25}

As a bishop I occasionally had the opportunity to counsel a brother or a sister who was tired of the hard work of full-time school and a part-time job, or even full-time school and a full-time job, all of this combined with a Church calling and the pressure of keeping commandments, reading scriptures, praying, and attending the temple. As I visited with some of these individuals, they expressed that they just didn’t think they could hold on any longer and were not convinced that all the hard work was worth it. On some level I felt like I could relate. As a bishop there were some long dog days in which I dragged myself to the bishop’s office, feeling strongly that I simply had nothing to give to the ward members that day and even feeling a little sorry for myself. Thank goodness I have a dear wife who knew how to rough me up a bit and kick me out the door on occasion because—and this is very significant to me—every single evening I left that bishop’s office, I felt like I was levitating about six inches off the ground. Isaiah counseled, “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”\textsuperscript{26}

I want to acknowledge a wonderful group of new accounting majors that it was my privilege to teach this last winter semester. Those who major in Marriott School programs know of the intensity of the junior core year in the School of Accountancy. My course forms part of this core curriculum. My students were all deeply involved in wrapping up the most intense academic year of their lives. They had worked hard, but they had stayed engaged. These were terrific colleagues in the classroom, and I was blessed to be a part of their semester. One e-mail sent to me shortly after the close of the semester resonated strongly with me as I prepared these remarks for you. With the permission of a good student, I share with you part of his e-mail.
A few days ago I thought of the junior core when I was reading Press On, a book by Elder Wirthlin. He shared a story of a psychology professor at the University of Chicago who spent 25 years studying what makes people happy. The professor concluded, “The best moments [in our lives] usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.” . . . The junior core is similar to serving a mission. Sometimes the days never seem to end; sometimes you wonder what you got yourself into; sometimes you question if all the work is worthwhile if you cannot see the results of your efforts. Then, all of a sudden, it does end. Ironically, you wish it wasn’t ending because you look back and see how you’ve grown, you see the experiences that have pushed and stretched you, and you see the friendships that have developed through months of hard work.

I love how this student is teaching me about the concept of long days and short years that seems to be characteristic of good work, of God’s work. I believe that my students and I were about Heavenly Father’s work in our Accounting 402 classroom. Heavenly Father really doesn’t care that much about the debits and the credits, nor does He care about the quizzes and exams. (Though I should hurry to say that this is good knowledge that will empower my students to be effective as good business professionals!) Heavenly Father cares more about the shoulder than He does about the wheel. He cared about what my students were becoming as a result of the work. And, in my limited observation, it seems that many of these students became better temples of Heavenly Father’s spirit in the process of struggling, and succeeding, in Accounting 402.

As I close now, I’d like to make one final observation and I’d like to return to my brothers and sisters who are tired and perhaps a little cynical of the work here at BYU. In my study of the gospel it has been pointed out to me that there are many qualities of God’s eternal life that are paradoxes. Sometimes the opposite of an important and profound truth is another important and profound truth. Jesus and His servants occasionally taught in terms of profound paradox, some of which you’ll remember:

“Bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love.”

“He who seeketh to save his life shall lose it.”

And then there is the ultimate and wonderful paradox of God’s mercy and justice.

Satan, on the other hand, would confuse us with counterfeits. For example, he would try to confuse our testimony that justice and mercy are the same wonderful doctrine with the irrelevant fact that vengeance and indulgence are irreconcilable opposites. I hope that today I haven’t confused you with the idea that the objective of this life is to work ourselves to death!

Jesus taught:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Alma the Elder personally experienced this wonderful paradox:

And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

In my heart I see Grandpa Henry trudging into the Great Salt Lake valley, laden with his own burdens. The Lord’s tender response was not to grant a reprieve and a vacation; rather, Grandpa Henry was invited to “come, follow
me” and give himself to the Lord’s will and to His work. The blessed work was restful and refreshing, and Grandpa was renewed. The key to finding rest and renewal is to give ourselves wholly and wholeheartedly to God’s work and to His will. To resist and to live the half-life is exhausting.

Brothers and sisters, may we give ourselves to this great work here at BYU and in so doing be built ourselves into the Lord’s temple, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes


2. Printed on a Charles W. Carter photographic collage entitled “Salt Lake City Temple in its different stages of construction,” LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City; quoted in Holzapfel, Every Stone, 9.


5. Woodruff, 14 February 1853, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 198; see also Holzapfel, Every Stone, 10.


11. See Paul Smith, Stand Ye in Holy Places: The Salt Lake Temple, DVD.


13. Holland, “However Long”; emphasis in original; see Anderson, Contributor, 265–70.

14. McAllister, Diary, 3; Journal History of the Church, 14 February 1853; see also Holzapfel, Every Stone, 9–10.

15. See Holzapfel, Every Stone, 44; but also see Anderson, Contributor, 272–73.

16. See “The Meetings and Attendance,” Deseret Weekly, 6 May 1893, 614; see also Holzapfel, Every Stone, 74, and Anderson, Contributor, 301.


18. Jesse Nathaniel Smith, 8 April 1893, Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith: The Life Story of a Mormon Pioneer (Salt Lake City: Jesse N. Smith Family Association, 1953), 393; see also Holzapfel, Every Stone, 80.


22. 1 Corinthians 3:16.


30. JST, Matthew 10:34; see Matthew 10:39.


34. Mosiah 24:15.