Recollections of Past Days

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Williamsburg, April 21, 1856.

Dear Brother Jaques—On the 18th April we received your letter, dated March 29. We had been anxiously expecting to hear from you, and I can say, that when we did hear, we felt somewhat surprised to find that we have to go by the hand-carts. Father and mother think this cannot be done, and I am sure I think the same, for mother cannot walk day after day, and I do not think that any of us will ever be able to continue walking every day. We think it will be better to remain here or at St. Louis for a time until we are able to help ourselves to a wagon. We are across the water, which is a great part of the way to Zion. Father and mother think you had better come here for a time. We will take lodgings for you if you will let us know. Do you and your wife think it right to go by the hand-carts? If we girls were strong boys then I think it might be done, but father is the only man in our family. I don’t feel myself that I can go like this. If, by staying here for a little time, we can get means to go by a wagon, it will be far preferable. Mother, I am sure, can never go that way. She says herself that she cannot do it, and I don’t think that any of us can. Why, we understood that the hand-carts were the last resource! Mother says that she must have a revelation before she can see this right. Why, we shall have to sell nearly all our clothes! And what shall we do for things to wear when we get to the Valley? Seventeen pounds weight each is but very little.

We shall be delighted to see you. I wish they in London would come with you. We are doing very comfortable now.

I remain your sister in the Gospel,

P______________
Liverpool, May 19, 1856.  
Dear Brother L___________  

On May 7, I received with great pleasure the letter written by P____ ______, and dated April 21, because we had been so long expecting one. But my pleasure was changed to sorrow when I read the contents. I have read the letter about half a dozen times. I could scarcely believe that you could have sent such a one. There is not one atom of the spirit of Zion in it, but the very spirit of apostacy. I felt to exclaim in my heart, “Who has bewitched you, and with whom have you been taking counsel, that you should so soon forget the goodness of the Lord in delivering you from this part of Babylon, and opening up your way to Zion?” Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, and said, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” And again, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” And truly I felt to weep over you as Jesus did over the Jews. Here I have been praying, and exerting my faith and my influence with the Lord, and with you, to get you gathered to Zion, and now that He has been graciously pleased to open up your way, you turn round in His face, and ungratefully tell Him you cannot walk in it, but He must bring you a wagon to ride in! It is truly grievous to me, and I am sure it is to God and to His good Spirit. If I were to turn aside, on my way to Zion, for such trifling reasons as those in your letter, now that the Lord has so kindly given me the privilege of going, it seems to me that I ought to be damned, and I have no doubt but that I should be.

You invite me and my family to stay awhile in New York, and you will get lodgings ready for us. We appreciate your kindness, and feel thankful for it. But you must allow us to decline accepting the offer. I tell you plainly, that if you would get us lodgings, pay for them, clothe and feed us with the best that Babylon can boast, and give us £10,000 into the bargain, we would not stay with you in New York; no, not if fifty brothers or sisters, or fathers or mothers were to ask us to stay. Brothers, sisters, fathers, or mothers, when they put a stumbling block in the way of my salvation, are nothing more to me than Gentiles. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, and when we start we will go right up to Zion, if we go ragged and barefoot. Why do not you rise up as a man of God and say that you and your house will serve the Lord, and will go up to Zion at all hazards? It would be death to my good name and influence in the Church, if I were to stay with you in New York! It would throw me a hundred years behind.

Joseph Smith prophesied that those who would not gather to Zion when their way was open, should be afflicted by the devil. And how could you or I expect the Lord to bless us if we were to stay in New York, now He has opened up our way to Zion? We could not, but we could reasonably
anticipate that in His own time, and perhaps when we least thought it, He
would permit us to be afflicted more severely than ever before.

Nothing has grieved me more for a long time than the light and
contemptuous manner in which you speak of the hand-cart operation.
Know ye not that it is the holy ordinance of the Lord, revealed through
His Prophet Brigham, for the redemption of the humble, faithful poor,
and that it will be blessed and sanctified of Him to the salvation of thou-
sands who are not too proud to be saved in His appointed way, while many
of those who despise that way will be left to perish in Babylon. The Lord
has promised, through His servant Brigham, that the hand-cart compa-
nies shall be blessed with health and strength, and be met part way with
teams and provisions from the Valley. And I am not afraid to prophesy,
that those who go by the hand-carts, and continue faithful and obedient,
will be blessed more than they have ever dreamed of. When they get to
Zion they will be glad they are there, they will be welcomed, and they will
feel that they have got to just the right place. They will be better Saints
every way than when they started.

You have looked upon the journey all in a lump. Recollect that you
will only have to perform one day’s travel at a time, and the first 200 or
300 miles, from Iowa City to Florence, the handcarts will travel through
a partly settled country, and be lightly loaded, for they will not take their
full load for the Plains till they get to Florence. This first part of the jour-
ney will just get the Saints used to travelling, without a great deal of toil
all at once. You have also thought of performing the journey in your
own strength, forgetting that you should put your trust in the Lord who
strengthens even the weak according to their day. You know that when He
calls His Saints to do any thing, if they will rely upon Him and do the best
they can, He will fit the back to the burden, and make every thing bend
to the accomplishment of His purposes. I know some of your family are
weak, especially your wife, but if you all set out upon this journey in faith,
and continue faithful, the Lord will help you, and make you feel well and
rejoice all the time, and you will be stronger when you get to the Valley
than when you started. There will be a wagon to about every 100 persons,
so that if there should be any ill, or unable to walk, they will be assisted.
You will have to work no harder than you have many a day in England,
while you will feel glad that you are working for the Lord and for yourself,
instead of for the Gentiles.

It astonishes me that you wish to stay in New York. After you have
left one part of Babylon, I wonder how you can think of sitting down in
another, when you have the privilege of bidding it farewell altogether.
Do you not know that some of your family are so fast in London that you
cannot get them away? And now you want to sit down in New York, to
give those you have half saved the opportunity of straying from you, and
settling down as fast there as those are in London! I have heard you talk
of saving all your family, and I know you desire to do so, but is this the way
to do it? No, it is not, but is the way to make shipwreck of your own salva-
ton, and your children’s too.

You wish me to use my influence to get your children away from
London, but, instead of your helping me by your faith and influence, you
want to stay in New York as bad as they want to stay in London. What is
the use of me striving to save you and your family if you do not strive your-
selves? Is it not as much to your interest for you to gather to Zion as it is to
mine? How is it that I have to exhort you so much and so severely to save
yourselves from this untoward generation? It is not pleasant to me to have
to write such severe letters as this. Instead of writing this long one now, I
ought to be preparing for our journey, as we have to start in a few days.

Why should you wish to place the burden of the salvation of your
children upon my shoulders, and then you pull against me by wanting
them to settle again in Babylon, after I have half saved them from it? I
think you are acting very unwisely. The fact is, the devil is trying all he can
to keep you from going up to Zion, and you are tamely giving way to him.
You must resist the devil if you wish him to flee from you. You must say,
“No, Mr. Devil, I will not stay in New York. I have set my face towards Zion,
and I’ll go right up, in the name of the Lord, if you and all your imps try
to keep me back, and I have to sleep on the ground, with a stone for my
pillow, as old Jacob had.” Did not Jesus say, that he that set his hand to
the Gospel plough, and looked back, was not fit for the kingdom of God?
And was not Lot’s wife changed into a pillar of salt because she looked
back upon Sodom? Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” And yet, with such
examples and precepts before you, you must turn back upon New York!
Do you think, if you were to resolve to go to Zion in spite of all the devils
in hell, or out of it, that Satan would be able to hold you in New York? No,
never; he would have no power over you. I and my family did anticipate
the pleasure of your company on the Plains. We sincerely hope you will
be wise enough not to disappoint us.

P__________ seems very much afraid that she will not have clothes
enough when she gets to Zion. Well, if she sets more store upon fine
clothes than upon the counsel of the Lord and the blessings of living
in Zion, I can say she is different to me. The fact is, she has too many
clothes—they are a trouble to her, and she seems willing to hazard her
salvation for them. There is such a thing as being ruined by one’s riches.
If she had scarcely a shirt to her back, or a bit of bread to eat, she would
be glad to get to Zion. I would rather you had sent me word that you all
were in want of bread, and anxious to get to Zion, than that you were
doing comfortably, and forgetting the Lord and Zion, and falling in love
with Babylon again. I wont stop in New York if my wife has to clothe me
in sheep-skins, or goat-skins, or buck-skins, or buffalo-skins, when I get to Zion. I shall be happier in them there than if I and my family were clothed in purple and fine linen, and silks and satins, and the best broadcloth in Babylon.

You can make your beds and bolsters of your extra clothes. You can keep your feather pillows, instead of resting your heads upon Jacob’s stone. If you have any spare money, you can send clothes or anything else through from Iowa, for somewhere about eight pence per lb. carriage. There are hundreds in England who have begged and prayed with tears for your privilege of going to Zion, but have been unable to get it. And now you slight it! It is most grievous! What do you and your family think of yourselves? I should hate myself if I were to slight the blessings of Zion as you are doing. You cannot have much faith in the Lord if you have only enough to take you half way to Zion.

You will say, you never had such a letter before in all your lives. I will say you never before deserved such a letter in all your lives, because you never before turned away from such privileges as you have now within your reach. What! are you going to dash away the cup of temporal salvation from your lips, now it almost touches them? What folly! What madness! It is no little thing to trifle with the Lord, or with His Holy Spirit, or with the counsels of His servants, for the Spirit of the Lord is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, and it will not always strive with you.

You talk of staying a little while in New York or St. Louis, till you can buy a wagon? How know you that you will ever have enough to buy a wagon? How can you expect the Lord to give you means to buy a wagon, when He has provided you a cart? He thinks that is good enough. Why should you think otherwise? Perhaps when you can buy a wagon, if you ever have the means, you will want to wait a little longer, till the railroad is made. And all this time your children will be growing up in all the wickedness of Babylon, and perhaps getting married among the Gentiles. The only place in the wide world where you can save your family is in Zion, and the sooner you get there, the sooner you will have power to save them, and the sooner they will be saved.

You say that you understood that the hand-carts were the last resource. Pray what other resource have you? Those who despise the hand-carts may yet be glad to get to Zion with a pack upon their backs.

What more shall I say? I can but exhort you to repent of your faint-heartedness, repent of your trifling with the salvation of the Lord, and be ready to go with us, with a cheerful heart, trusting in God, and not in your own strength, when we come, and all will be well—you will rejoice in the Lord more than ever before, and thank His holy name that you did not stay in New York. Remember, this is the most critical period of your life.
It is the turning point to decide your destiny. Therefore I exhort you to choose understandingly whom and what you will serve—Zion or Babylon, God or the devil. Greater consequences to yourself, your children, and your ancestors hang on your decision than you can well imagine for it will carry an influence for good or evil into eternity. Remember, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, therefore may you and your family harden not your hearts, nor reject the salvation of the Lord, but close in with His offer, lest He swear in His wrath that you shall not enter into His rest. Pray unto Him without ceasing. Give your souls no rest till you get the spirit of the gathering burning in your bosoms, like a fire that cannot be quenched. We shall not cease to pray for you, that you may be constrained to go with us up to Zion.

Now I have written this letter I shall rest myself, except to pray for you. I have done my duty. It remains for you to do yours.

When your wife has heard this, I think she will fancy she has got revelation enough about the hand-carts.

With love to all, in which my wife and family join, I remain your brother in the Gospel,

John Jaques