

**FROM THE
 PASTOR'S DESK**

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**The Gospel for
 Dummies**

I purchased a book a few months ago called "Word 97 For Windows For Dummies." It is really a neat book and tells what to do when bad things happen, explained in plain English.

If you are like I am, trying to be a man of the 21st Century with a computer, but with the mindset of an 18th Century Neanderthal, you have found that your computer occasionally becomes interactive. In other words, you work for a while and then start to talk to your computer (as if it really understands anyway).

This book is for dummies. It communicates in words that I think I understand. For example, one part is called "Strange Things Under The Hood." Chapter 36 is "Ten Features You Don't Use, But Paid For Anyway." Wouldn't you be curious about what you might have wasted your money on?

After reading my book on Windows, I wondered if there was a book called "The Gospel for Dummies" would I buy it? After all, why can't the gospel be explained in plain English? (Didn't Jesus speak in English anyway?) Before you say no, remember that he seemed to be able to talk to everyone in their own language on different continents.

In any case, the following Scriptures are a beginning for the book "The Gospel for Dummies."

- Short version for the memory impaired
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| | I Corinthians 15:2-8 |
| Why do you want a gospel upgrade? | Galatians 1:6-12 |
| Gospel for vegetarians | I Timothy 4:1-3 |
| How does the gospel work? | James 2:14-25 |
| How do I print my file? | Luke 16:24-36 |
| Following the task bar | Alma 16:7-77 |
| How does the Intel chip work? | D&C 85:3 |
| What do I get if I learn the gospel? | Alma 19:64-69 |

**TESTIMONIES AND
 SERMON NOTES**

Are You Ready?

The Lord's Supper service opened February 3 with the scripture declaring that there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh than the name of Jesus Christ as our call to worship. Priest Kent Clisby addressed the congregation humbly bearing testimony to the fact that the study of the scriptures in preparation for the message had been a good experience. It was a marvelous week, interesting and enlightening and, said he, "It seemed I got more done by studying the scriptures."

Kent's sermon consisted largely of scripture reading with brief comments reminding us of their application to our lives. He began by reminding us of our purpose in gathering on this Lord's Day. "Today we are here for the Lord's Supper. Most of the time we gather Sunday and Wednesday and we meet on the street at work or at play, and we want to be as one. Paul wrote to the Romans Saints, Romans 12:1-9, 'I beseech ye, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God is. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts different according to the grace that is given to us, whether to prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good.'

Brother Clisby reminded us that preparation had been made for the service of this day and questioned whether we had prepared according to the instruction the Apostle Paul gave those Saints at Rome. "The emblems have been prepared," he said. "Have we preped ourselves? Have we prayed for this service? Have we prayed for this Priesthood? Have we prayed that we might come

closer to God by becoming one in heart, mind and soul?"

From section 85:38 a, b and c of the Doctrine and Covenants our speaker read the instruction: "See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires; cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early that ye may not be weary; arise early; that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated; and above all things, clothe yourselves with the bonds of charity, as with a mantle, which is a bond of perfectness and peace; pray always, that you may not faint until I come; behold, and lo, I will come quickly, and receive you unto myself. Amen."

In view of those instructions, our speaker asked, "Are you ready? Are you ready to come forward? Are you ready to be served?"

As further instruction and reminding us of our baptismal covenant, Kent read the account of Alma baptizing Helam recorded in the Book of Mormon, Mosiah, 9:43-44. Standing in the water with Helam, Alma cried, "Oh Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart. And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and he said, Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve the Lord until ye are dead, as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world." Mosiah 9:50-56 continues to explain that whoever was baptized by the power and authority of God, was added to the church. And Alma, having authority from God, ordained one Priest to every fifty of those numbered in the church whose duty it was to preach and to teach them things concerning the kingdom of God. And he commanded them that they should preach nothing except the things he had taught them and the things that had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets. They were to preach nothing save it be repentance and faith on the Lord who had redeemed His people. He commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one toward another. "And thus He commanded them to preach and thus they became the children of God. And he commanded them that they should observe the Sabbath Day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord, their God."

"Today's is not the only day we are supposed to give thanks." Kent commented. "Today is not the only day we are supposed to be ready. I really worry about myself sometimes. I don't think I am ready."

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Paul gives further instruction for those who covenant with God through baptism and thus become the Body of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

"We can't do everything ourselves." Brother Clisby reminded us. "Everybody has their own place. We have to come together as one body."

Out of the third book of Nephi, chapter 8:34-43 we heard read Christ's own instructions concerning the manner in which the

Lord's Supper should be observed and the purpose for that ordinance. "And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father, that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you. And it came to pass, when he had said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take the wine of the cup, and drink of it, and they should also give unto the multitude, that they might drink of it. And it came to pass that they did so, and did drink of it, and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled. And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them, Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you.

"And this shall ye always do unto those who repent and are baptized in my name, and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you. And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things. And if ye shall do these things, blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock. "Christ gave us a foundation to stand on." Kent declared. "Are you ready to build upon that rock?"

"May the peace of God be with you," was his final prayer.

The Good Shepherd

In keeping with the theme he had chosen for his February 10 sermon, Seventy Ronald Smith asked that hymns proclaiming the Savior as our Good Shepherd be sung. Psalm 23 was the scriptural setting for the sermon, a Psalm known and loved by a great part of Christendom. To begin with, he shared a little story about his car. Ron's second car has stayed in the driveway all winter and had not moved until yesterday. When he would go stick the key in and turn it, nothing would happen. It was a sort of a gradual thing. It seemed that it got harder and harder to start even though putting a key in isn't that hard to do. It just seemed like there was just less and less power there, and all of a sudden one day there wasn't any power there at all. It didn't click. It didn't do anything. He took the battery in to get it checked. It was fine. The power was there. It just wasn't making any connection.

Jim Simpson, a custodian at Graceland comes in about 3:00 o'clock in the morning and Ron gets there about 5 a.m., so sometimes they talk. When Ron mentioned that his car was in the driveway not going any place. Jim asked, 'Have you tried cleaning the battery posts?' 'Well, no. I haven't done that,' Ron acknowledged.

Jim brought a battery post cleaner and said, 'Here. Go clean your battery posts.' Ronald took off the cables, cleaned the posts and clamps put them back together, got in, turned the key and ker-boom!. There it went. "By that time the car was totally iced in and there was no way it could move any place," Brother Smith said, "but at least it started. When we had a little melt, I dug it out and we actually have a car that works just fine.

"Some times my life is just like my car. It doesn't seem to go anywhere. I can't figure out why. I hope things will get better, but there just isn't any power there. Maybe you have been in that type of situation, too. When we stop to think about it, we know that God has the power. He tests out every time. The power is really there, but

it's just that we are not making the connection. Sometimes we need to get out and clean the posts - do some prayer and maybe a little fasting and some study and do the things that we all know that we are supposed to do. I know I am supposed to have clean battery posts. I just didn't think about cleaning them off. That's kind of the way it is sometimes with our lives.

"What I would like to share with you today came out of making one of those connections. I was getting ready for my winter term class, on 'The Book of Mormon in Context' and had a chance to revisit some of these prophecies in the Bible that were fulfilled by the Book of Mormon. I decided to read the content of those prophecies just to be sure I was not taking things out of context. I had occasion to read Ezekiel 37 in its entirety. That's the one that talks about the two sticks, the Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph and God says, 'They shall become one stick in thine hand'.

"In the time Ezekiel was writing, books were written on scrolls. Papyrus or whatever was used, was rolled up on a stick. One way that we can understand this particular passage is that there are going to be two sticks or scrolls - two books that are going to be written. One is for Judah. That means there will be a book written for the Jews, and I believe the Bible is that book, written primarily about the Jews and for the Jews.

"There would be another stick, and this would be for Joseph. I understand that the Book of Mormon was written by descendants of Joseph and was written for their tribe. In Ezekiel it says these two sticks will become 'one in thine hand'. That represents the fact that the House of Israel will at some time accept these books and their testimony of Jesus as they become one in our hands.

"Of course, not all of the world interprets this prophecy that way. If they did, they would understand the Book of Mormon. Right? Some of the newer versions of the Bible talk about the sticks as standards, like the flag that you would have in front of an army. So I began to wonder in my mind, 'Is this really an appropriate way to understand Ezekiel the thirty seventh chapter. Is he really talking about the Book of Mormon or is he talking about something else. Should I be presenting this as a Book of Mormon prophecy, or should I be thinking of it in some other way?

"I reread the chapter, and as I did I discovered some interesting details of which I had not been aware before. These details reinforced my faith that Ezekiel did indeed prophesy about the Book of Mormon, about Jesus Christ and the part the Book of Mormon will play in the restoration of the House of Israel. I would like to share with you the insights that I think I had into Ezekiel the thirty seventh chapter. Actually, the insight is in John the 10th chapter, and I am going to read both of them to you this morning.

"I want to share my insight because I believe that parts of these prophecies have yet to come to pass, and we need to know what the Lord is doing. But even more than this, I want to remind you that we need to hear the voice of the Lord and to follow that voice no matter what happens to us. If you go away this morning with this conviction that you need to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, then your time will not have been wasted. And if, while you are here, you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, then for sure, it will not be wasted. "With the expectation of perhaps hearing some detail that you had not heard before, let me rehearse to you some of the scriptures of the prophets, and I am going to begin with the 37th chapter of Ezekiel.

"The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions; then take another stick, and write upon it,

For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions; And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land; And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all; Neither shall they defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them; so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forevermore."

Clearly this is a prophesy about the restoration of the house of Israel. When the children ask what this means, they are to be told that the house of Israel will be gathered from among the heathen, wherever they have been scattered, and brought back to their own land. At first, I thought that this part of the prophecy had already been fulfilled in the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. However, some details of the prophecy don't quite fit that scenario. In particular, the prophecy says that one king shall be king to them all. This king is identified as "my servant David," and he was to reign forever. Of course, the modern state of Israel does not have a king. On the other hand, Ezekiel was writing after the Babylonian captivity, long after David was dead and gone. So how should we understand this part of the prophecy? Then it occurred to me that Ezekiel was using a very common prophetic device. Often in prophecy things that happened in the past are used to predict the future. David was the king over the entire house of Israel, and the one to come will be king over all the house of Israel. This king is identified as the "one shepherd" who will be their prince forever. And this servant will establish a new covenant of peace with the house of Israel, and the Lord will be their God.

It should be clear that this part of the prophecy of the coming shepherd is yet to be fulfilled. But as I looked farther, it became clear that this same prophecy has been repeated many times throughout the Old Testament. Let us look at a few examples.

In Numbers 27:15-20, Moses prays for someone to replace him.

And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God

of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation. Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And- set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

Now the name "Joshua," or "Yeshua" as I am told is closer to its correct pronunciation, is a Hebrew name meaning, "Jehovah saves." In the Greek, it is rendered "Jesus," the name that the angel Gabriel told Mary to give to her baby. In this story, the shepherd of Israel is identified with the name "Yeshua". Several hundred years later, a shepherd boy named David wrote a song in which the shepherd was further identified with God himself. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Another lesser-known Psalm also identifies the shepherd of Israel with God. Psalm 80 says,

"Give ear O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

The prophet Isaiah made several prophetic references to this shepherd who would save Israel. Isaiah 40 contains one of the most well known, made famous by Handel in the Messiah.

"Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

At the time of the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah referred to the shepherd imagery regarding the restoration of Israel as well. In the 31st chapter we read,

"Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock."

This brings us up to the time of Ezekiel, who was a priest carried to Babylon. In the 34th chapter, we find the following words:

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ...For thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with

judgment. ...Therefore will I save my flock and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, ..."

Of course this sounds a lot like the description of the shepherd in the 37th chapter as well. But Ezekiel was not the last of the Old Testament prophets to talk of the shepherd. Zechariah also mentions him in prophecy. Zechariah 13:7 reads, Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Matthew tells us that this prophecy of the Shepherd was fulfilled the night Jesus was arrested and the apostles fled. So is Jesus the shepherd who was to gather Israel? Listen to what Jesus said to people who were very familiar with the prophecies that I have just rehearsed to you. John records in the 10th chapter,

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. And the shepherd is not as a hireling, whose own the sheep are not, who seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the world catcheth the sheep and scattereth them. For I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. But he who is a hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall bear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

...Now there was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. ...Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe me not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall they be plucked out of my hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

You will notice in the foregoing passage that Jesus said he was the good shepherd. The people were divided over whether he meant that he was the shepherd who was prophesied that should save Israel, so they asked him to tell them plainly. Jesus said that he had already told them plainly, but that they were not his sheep since they did not know his voice. This did not sit well with his audience. They at once understood that Jesus was saying that he was the good shepherd of the prophecies, who was God, and that they were not going to be saved. So they tried to stone him.

Those who are familiar with the Book of Mormon know that it claims to be a record of a people who were descendants of Joseph, whom Jesus visited after his resurrection. Jesus told these people that they were the ones to whom he was referring when he talked about his "other sheep." We also understand that the Book of Mormon has been referred to as the "New Covenant" that Jesus would make with the house of Israel. In light of these understandings, I find it very interesting that Ezekiel's prophecy mentions not only the sticks becoming one, but he is also very specific about the fact that this event is intimately connected with the restoration of all the house of Israel under one shepherd who would make a new

covenant of peace with them. When Jesus announced that he was the good shepherd, he was referring to the fulfillment of these prophecies. This is why the Jews got so excited that they wanted to stone him for saying it. They understood that the Lord was their shepherd, and Jesus was claiming to be God. In the same breath, Jesus referred to the people of the Book of Mormon as his "other sheep." This gives a further testimony that Ezekiel was indeed referring to the Book of Mormon in his prophecy.

So why should we care about all this? Maybe this is just old Ron getting excited over nothing. But here are two reasons why I think it is important.

1. We need to understand that the prophecies concerning the restoration of the house of Israel to one fold and one shepherd are still to be fulfilled. We belong to a small group of people who understand this and who have been asked to be part of bringing it to pass.

2. These scriptures remind us that we need to hear and know the voice of the good Shepherd. Just as the people of Jesus' day did not want to hear the news that they were not the sheep they thought they were, so also we do not want to hear that we are not his sheep. But his sheep hear his voice and know him. Do we? Are we willing to put our trust in that Spirit that leads us to do good, to walk humbly, and to judge righteously? If not, how can we think that we know his voice? And if we do not hear his voice and follow his commandments, we are not his sheep.

Let us hear the voice of the good shepherd this day: My purposes will not fail, neither will my promises, for the foundation of the Lord standeth sure. Zion shall be redeemed, and Israel shall be gathered in my own due time. Fear not, little flock, the Kingdom is yours until I come. Hold fast to the rod of iron. Behold, I come quickly.

May God bless you and keep you all. Amen.

Faith and Trust in God

The sermon on February 17 was given by Elder Gerald Bolingbroke. Brother Bolingbroke recently traveled to Mexico with Ron Smith and a group of Graceland University students for a Winter Term on the Book of Mormon. As he studied and traveled, he discovered several proofs of the validity of the Book of Mormon. For his sermon, he shared some of his experiences with us, and taught us about the faith and trust that is so important as we seek to do God's will.

Gerald began by telling about the Jaredites and the great tower. Today we call it the Tower of Babel. The people of that time called it the great tower. If Joseph Smith had written the Book of Mormon without God's direction, he probably would have called it the Tower of Babel, a term that was not used at that time. This is another proof that Joseph Smith did indeed translate the Book of Mormon under God's direction.

Through the grace of God, Jared's family and friends did not have their language confounded. The Lord guided them in building barges to cross the sea. The Brother of Jared had great faith. He talked with Christ and did not want to cross the ocean in darkness. He asked the Lord to touch six stones he had prepared, that they would give light for many months crossing the ocean. Jesus told him that man had never come before Him with such great faith. We have scriptures that show Christ was working throughout history. Most churches do not know this. See Ether 1:72-82.

When the Winter Term group got on the plane to go to Mexico, they put their trust in God, not knowing if a terrorist was on the plane or not. Faith and trust in God is very important in today's world.

There are many examples in the scriptures of faith and trust. In Alma 21:38 Amalickiah, a cunning man, sought to destroy the Church of God and to destroy the liberty of the people. Now Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, heard of the dissensions of the people led astray by Amalickiah. He was angry with Amalickiah. So he took a piece of his coat and wrote upon it, "In the memory of our God, our religion and freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children." He then fastened the cloth onto a pole and called it Title of Liberty. One of the sites the group saw in La Venta, Mexico, was a stone carving of a man carrying a pole

carrying a pole and cloth. It could be Captain Moroni.

Moroni bowed himself to the Earth and prayed mightily unto God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his people so long as there would be Christians in the land. They were called Christians because of their belief in Christ who was yet to come.

Amalickiah joined the Lamanites and directed them to go to war against the Nephites. Moroni prepared the Nephites for war and helped them prepare their minds to be faithful to the Lord their God. He strengthened their armies by erecting forts, building up banks of earth and walls of stone around the city. The city Uxmal in Mexico had a stone wall around it. It could have been one of the cities Moroni fortified.

It was said of Moroni that he was a man of perfect understanding who did not delight in bloodshed. His heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God. He was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ. He believed God would prosper them in the land if they kept the commandments of God and would warn them to flee or to prepare for war.

In the twentieth year of the reign of the judges, Moroni had his armies dig up heaps of earth around the cities throughout the land possessed by the Nephites. Around the city Becan, Brother Bolingbroke and the group saw a three and one half mile moat. This is another evidence that the Book of Mormon history is true.

They also saw a cog-toothed wheel on a glyph, and stones piled in the river where a bridge had once existed across the Usumacita River near Yaxchilan. This may have been the city Zarahemla and the river Sidon. A picture of how that bridge may have looked is in the October, 1995, issue of National Geographic. The Nephites had a greater knowledge of technology than was originally thought by archaeologists.

In Alma 26 we can find the account of the two thousand sons of the people of Ammon. The parents would not take up arms to defend themselves because they had made an oath to the Lord. But their sons had not taken such an oath, so they took up arms in defense of the Nephites. They had Helaman as their leader. They went to battle against the Lamanites. They called Helaman Father. They said to him, "Father, behold, our God is with us and He will not suffer that we shall fall." They had been taught by their mothers that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. After several battles, not one of them was slain. After Helaman discovered that not one of them had died, they told him why. It was because they had put their trust in God.

Another example of faith and trust is found in Helaman. Helaman had two sons which he named Lehi and Nephi who preached to the Lamanites with great power and authority. Eight

thousand Lamanites were converted and baptized. When they went to the Land of Nephi they were cast into prison and the Lamanites came to the prison to slay them. When the Lamanites got to the prison they found Lehi and Nephi encircled about as if by fire, and they were afraid to lay their hands on them. The prison shook, and a voice above a cloud of darkness spoke and said, "Repent ye, repent ye! And seek no more to destroy my servants which I have sent unto you to declare good tidings."

There was a man among them named Aminadab, a Nephite who had belonged to the Church of God but had dissented from them. Nephi and Lehi lifted their eyes to heaven as if talking with someone. The people in the darkness of the prison asked who they were conversing with and what must they do? Aminadab said, "You must repent and believe in Christ." They repented, the darkness went away, and fire encircled everyone. Then a voice spoke from heaven and said, "Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my Well-Beloved which was from the foundation of the world." There were about three hundred souls who saw this.

There are many examples in the scriptures of people with great faith. If we could have such faith we could do anything for God. Christ told his disciples that if they had the faith of a grain of a mustard seed, they could say to the mountain remove and it would be removed and would be impossible unto them. Matt 17:20

Enoch had great faith. He was journeying in the land when the spirit of God descended upon him. He heard a voice from heaven telling him to prophesy unto the people, telling them to repent. Enoch went forth in the land and cried with a loud voice, testifying against the evil works of the people. They were offended by his words. And after speaking to the people to repent, these words were said of Enoch in Gen. 7:15-16: "And so great was the faith of Enoch, that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them, and he spoke the word of the Lord, and the Earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command. And the Earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command. And the rivers of water were turned out of their course, and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness." All nations feared greatly because Enoch's words were so powerful because of the language God had given him.

Brother Bolingbroke ended his sermon by telling the congregation a modern day story from Chicken Soup for the Soul called Highway Hero by Carol A. Price-Lopeta. She was driving to Wheeling, West Virginia, to teach a class on self-esteem to 150 women.

She was eight miles from Wheeling when she heard a tire blow. She slowed down and braked carefully. Every story about women having bad experiences on the road went through her mind. Carol's grandmother had taught her that things work out if you keep your head, and she was trying hard to do just that.

At that instant a large semi truck passed very fast on her left, and she saw that his direction light was on, indicating he was pulling over in front of her. She again thought, "Am I safer now or in more danger?" She could see the truck backing up slowly, and she decide to be safe she would write down the name of the trucking company and the Ohio license number. She put this information on a pad under the driver's seat just in case!

The driver came running back from the truck to the car and said, through the window that she had opened only three inches, that he had seen the tire blow and would be glad to change it.

He asked for the car keys to get into the trunk. It seemed to be the best choice. She gave him the keys. He changed the tire and

gave her back her keys. She asked him through the partly opened window if she could pay him for his kindness. He said, "We drivers in Ohio believe in taking care of women in trouble on the highway."

She then asked for the name of his boss so she could send him or her a letter relaying how wonderful he had been. He laughed and gave her the name of his boss and his card, which had the trucking company, the address, and the phone number. Gratefully, she went to Wheeling to present her seminar.

Upon returning home, she had a T-shirt made for this man that showed an angel in a truck with the words "Highway Hero", and sent it to the address on the card. It came back, Addressee Unknown.

She called the number on the card and got a recording saying no such number existed. She called the city newspaper for that town, asked for the editor, explained the dilemma, and asked that a letter to the editor be placed in the paper thanking the driver. The editor, who had lived there all this life, said there was no such company in that city. He further called Carol back and said he had called the state motor vehicle bureau to ask about the license and was told no such plate had ever been issued.

The upshot is that this man, his truck, and the company never existed, The "rescue" never happened, and she must have been dreaming. But she knew she wasn't dreaming.

We know not what the future holds, but if we put our trust in God, we do not have to worry. In Nephi, Chapter 7:32, we find these words:

"For behold saith the prophet, The time cometh speedily, that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men: For the day cometh, that all the proud and they who do wickedly, shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned. For the time cometh, that the fullness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the children of men: For he will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous. Wherefore, he will

Gerald Bolingbroke passed around this article from a 1997 National Geographic during his sermon. It is shared here.

preserve the righteous by His power, even if it be so that the fullness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore the righteous need not fear, for thus saith the prophet. They shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire."

The Alabaster Boxes

Alan Smith opened his sermon about the alabaster boxes discussed in the New Testament with the story from the seventh chapter of Luke.

According to Luke, Jesus was in Capernum.

"And one of the Pharisees desired him that he (Jesus) would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

And behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had bidden him saw this, he spake within himself, saying: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, or what manner of woman this is who toucheth him; for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answering, said unto him, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

And he (Simon) said, "Master, say on".

And Jesus said, "There was a certain creditor, who had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And when he found they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the man to whom he forgave most."

And he (Jesus) said unto him, "Thou hast rightly judged."

And he turned to the women and said unto Simon, "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

And he said unto her, "Thy sins are forgiven."

And they who sat at meat with him, began to say within themselves, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?"

And he said to the woman, "Thy faith has saved thee, go in peace."

"I've heard this story before -- heard people speculate on who it might be -- this sinner who anointed his feet with precious ointment," Alan Smith said. "I've looked at story from point of view of Simon and of Jesus and the matter of forgiveness. I heard a song at the communion service in the auditorium last month, however. It was not until I heard the song "The Alabaster Box" that understood the story from point of view of the woman."

The song "The Alabaster Box" sung by CeCe Winans was then played and Alan shared some of the words.

"I can't forget the way life used to be
I was a prisoner to the sin that had me bound
And I spent my days

Poured my life without measure
Into a little treasure box
I thought I found
Until the day when Jesus came to me
And healed my soul with the wonder of his touch.
You don't know the cost
Of the oil in my alabaster box."

Here was a woman -- someone who Jesus would know not even to touch or let her touch him if he was going to be a good Pharisee. Jesus recognized the value of the gift she was offering - value of the ointment and her humility in washing and drying his feet. For this woman to bring it meant countless hours of her "work" -- doing things she knew she should not be doing and which degraded her. That's why Jesus could contrast the love of the woman and the hospitality of Simon -- the depth of the joy of forgiveness for a woman who saw a whole new way of life and the lack of joy for Simon.

It was something like the experience of King Lamoni and Ammon in the words of his prayer. The king had gotten down on his knees and prostrated himself on the earth in humility. This was not something a king would regularly do.

"O God, Ammon hath told me the that there is a God, and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sin to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day."

The woman brought a symbol of the fruits of all her sin to Jesus to give to him that she might know the joy of new life and a new start.

In a way this story is like the pot of the old witch doctor in Kenya. Remember the story of Doug and Ron Smith dealing with a man trying to decide whether to give his life to Christ or to follow the traditions of his father? Using the same story of Ammon, the man was able to smash the pot -- not for some financial gain -- but because of belief in Christ. He was then baptized, repenting of much, just as the woman who brought her alabaster box to be broken open and the contents used.

"What alabaster boxes are we carrying to hold our treasures?" Alan asked. "Are our treasures the lasting kind?"

Mark (March 10:15-22) records the story of the certain ruler that came to Jesus saying: "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

And Jesus said unto him, "Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one that is God. Thou knowest the commandments:

Do not commit adultery.

Do not kill.

Do not steal.

Do not bear false witness.

Honor thy father and thy mother."

And he said, "All these have I kept from my youth up."

(Jesus remembered the 10th commandment -- not to covet or put too much emphasis on physical possessions.)

Now when Jesus had hear these things, he said unto him, "Yet thou lackest one thing; sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasurer in heaven, and come, follow me."

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful; for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, "How hardly shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven."

What is it that we lack yet in our lives? What are we putting in first place before the kingdom of God? What treasure that is the

wages of sin are we saving up in our lives? Can we bring our alabaster box to Jesus and give it to him?

Too often we say thing like--

I just want to get these things done before I can do what you want me to do Lord.

But I like that way doing that sin makes me feel and I don't really want to give that up.

I have trouble getting away from this sin's clutches now that it is a habit.

Jesus calls us to give up all our sin to know him.

It's interesting that the experience with the alabaster box with the wages of sin which happened early in Jesus ministry is balanced by another alabaster box near the end of his ministry.

The story of the alabaster box and the woman who sinned and was forgiven recorded in Luke is not the only story of an alabaster box.

When Matthew and Mark tell the second story, they tell us that the house was in Bethany, shortly before Jesus was to make his way to Jerusalem to be put to death, and name the host as Simon the leper. John, on the other hand, places the dinner at the home of Lazarus -- who had earlier been raised from the dead. John says Judas Iscariot was Simon's son and Simon was at the meal. The reports say the woman involved in this second story was Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

(As an aside, does it make the story any less accurate because the details are reported slightly differently? In the important aspects the story is the same and I think that is what matters. Some people today would discount the story because of the differences. I would do just the opposite, knowing people often remember things a little differently in real life.)

Mark gives us more detail about the ointment -- it was ointment of spikenard, very precious, Mark says. "And she broke the box and poured the ointment on his head." Alabaster vials used at the time had stoppers which were sealed to keep the oil fresh.

An alabaster box was white, translucent box, made of calcite or aragonite/ Spikenard is an east Indian aromatic plant of the valerian family from which a fragrant ointment was made. Plants were turned into ointment by heating in olive oil or animal fat with petals or seeds of plants, then strained when smell and other properties transferred.

John says that the ointment was put on Jesus feet, and that Mary wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Others say she anointed his head.

What is important, however, is that Mary understood something many of his disciples didn't seem to understand -- that Jesus was going to go and die for them soon.

Alan then reminded those listening of some of the story of Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

-- Mary had been the one who loved to listen to Jesus, not just do the household chores to help meet his need.

-- It was Mary who went out to Jesus after her brother Lazarus had died, and it was her weeping that brought Jesus to the point where he wept too.

-- Mary was there when Lazarus came out from the grave where he already was smelling in death. It was Lazarus's raising in this community so close to Jerusalem that was the final stone which turned the murmuring to action by the chief priests to put an end to Jesus. In fact there were people at the supper who had some as much to see the risen Lazarus as Jesus, the scriptures tell us.

So when Jesus returned to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, to visit again, on the way to give his life that we might have eternal life,

Mary brought a pound of spikenard ointment in an alabaster box -- ointment which she had saved for "the time to anoint him in token of his burial." She realized that when he turned his face toward Jerusalem what this would mean, even if some of his other disciples didn't.

The three gospel writers also share another aspect of the story:

But when some saw this, they had indignation saying, "Unto what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor."

John gives us even more detail:

Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence (a workman's wage for 10 months or thousands of dollars today) and given to the poor?" And this he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."

When they had said this, Jesus understood them and he said unto them, "Why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. For she hath poured this ointment on my body, for my burial. And in this thing that she hath done, she shall be blessed for verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this thing that this woman hath done shall also be told for a memorial to her." (Matthew 26)

Despite the grumbling of Judas, Jesus was anointed and shared that Mary knew what she was doing. I like to think that this was a literal expression of the phrase "the oil of joy for mourning." Mary shared her concern and love for Jesus before he died instead of waiting until he was dead to share it. None of the other disciples or followers are recorded as doing this.

Mary had an alabaster box -- but one not filled by the cost of sin but one filled like the lamps of the 10 virgins -- prepared to be used as a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection -- as Jesus had taught Martha and Mary and his disciples with the raising of Lazarus. Mary was willing to be a servant and show her appreciation of Jesus in humility.

If we empty the alabaster boxes in our life those things we hold dearer than Christ so we can have new life, what do we refill our boxes with? Things that will help us move toward Jesus ultimate goal -- the kingdom of his Father here on earth.

What kind of ointment are we to gather in our lives?

This is the balm that Jesus said he came to offer:

Beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness
Good tidings to the meek,
binding up for the broken-hearted,
Liberty to the captives,
Opening the prisons to them that are bound.

Isaiah 41:1-3

What about having a broken heart and a contrite spirit? What about being humble and full of love, which is stated as a requirement if we want to be part of the great work of God and his son Jesus in our day?

Are we gathering the ointment of one heart and mind
-- of a broken heart and a contrite spirit
-- of being humble and full of love
-- of righteous, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost ?

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The Alabaster Boxes

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Do we just store it up or are we willing to share it with the world in loving service, just as Mary did in using her hair to wipe Jesus feet and then spread the sweet smell around the whole room.

What's in you alabaster box? It can make all the difference in the world and in eternity what you have there and if you are willing to give it to Jesus. What is the depth of your love? What is the depth of your praise?

My hope is that our response will be of the kind that it can be said of us what Jesus said of Mary:

"Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this thing that you have done shall also be told for a memorial to you."

News & Notes

A shower was held at the church Wednesday, Feb. 20, for Mike and Rachel at the church. Mike and Rachel Akers were then married in a ceremony Saturday, March 1, at the church by pastor Rob Rolfe. Our congratulations to Mike and Rachel.