

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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### A Whisper From the Dust

Can the earth speak?

The prophets have the earth speaking on several occasions. Isaiah Chapter 29 has a whisper coming from the dust. While we don't often think of Isaiah 29 as a chapter dealing with the "Day of the Lord," it does. One of the promises that it has is that Jerusalem will find that its problems will be like a bad dream. You wake in the morning and all of the bad things are gone.

Isaiah also talks about a sealed book. For most of the world, this sealed books is still a mystery. Being sealed is not unusual as Daniel is told to seal up his vision in Chapter 12 and John refers to a sealed book in Revelation, Chapter 5 and 6. The book is sealed because of the unbelief of mankind.

What is in the book? Isaiah says that the book contains a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof; that it reveals all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof. After the message in the book is read by the person who opens it, the books is to be sealed again until God says it is time for the rest of the story to be revealed.

When is this book to be available to read?

Isaiah says that in the day when the book is to come forth, Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field. The good news is that the book has been found and it is available now, so that "the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and darkness."

If you would like to read a copy of this book, tell me, and I will be sure to get a copy to you.

## TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

### Lovest Thou Me?

Priest Rodney Bastow opened his sermon with the experience of Peter with Jesus as recorded in John 21:15-16. The Disciples had just dragged a net full of fish from the sea. They had toiled all night and caught nothing. After following Jesus' command to drop their nets on the right side of the ship, the harvest as abundant! Jesus feed the fishermen, then He asked Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith unto him again the second time, Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep."

"I thank God for the opportunity to be here, and my prayer, like Norman's prayer, and like the prayer of this morning, is that we might be blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit. And I pray that if we feel that we have been blessed that we may praise God for this blessing.

"Recently I have had an experience that I would like to share with you. This happened to me maybe a month or so ago. I was at home one afternoon right after school, my normal routine - checking papers, sitting in front of the TV just kind of recomposing when I got a phone call. It was from a friend of mine by the name of Kay Nicholas.

"You have heard me talk about Kay before. Kay is the one that provides the angel pins, and we have had a lot of good talks. She has been a very good supporter for me. I feel like I can talk to her about Jesus. I feel I can talk to her about some things of which I would not be able to talk with others. She's a very special person - a very good friend of mine. Kay has been struggling this year. Kay is a Special Ed teacher, and that's bad enough right there; but this year we went through a review, and the review hit the Special Ed department really hard. They have to make sure that they have everything in order. You know, all the papers have to be done in just the right way. Everything has to be up to code or there can be some really big problems. Kay is the type of person - I've done concession stands

with her and you don't leave that kitchen until it is spotless. It has got to look better than when you got in there. Rather than just turning off the lights and throwing the towel back over the rack, she makes sure everything is done right. So she has taken this to heart about her job and what she was supposed to do. She has gone overboard on it, and she has gone to the point where it has really gotten to her. She has really been having some problems over this and has not been able to function because of this and she hasn't been at school.

"So when she called me, I was really glad to hear from her because I didn't know what had been happening to her or how she was doing and really what was going on with her. So we talked, and right away she said, 'You have been praying for me.' I said, 'Well, yeah, Kay. Of course I have.' She said, 'I know. I knew you had been praying for me. We talked some more and she said, 'You have been praying for me!' I said, 'Yes, Kay. I have been praying for you.' And she says, 'I know!' And she said, 'I had an experience that I need to share with you. This week, I was having a really bad day. I was really low. It was one of my darkest days.' And she said, 'I kind of dozed off, and when I woke up, I could feel your presence, and it was like you had your hand on my shoulder and you were telling me that Jesus loved me, that Jesus needed me, and that I needed to get better.'

'I didn't know what to say. I had never had an experience like that before. I was overwhelmed. And I asked her, 'Kay, when did this happen?' Kay said, 'It was on Tuesday.'

Rodney was startled because on Tuesday he had read this devotional which he shared with us:

"February 5. Entitled 'Seeking Jesus'. The Scripture was from Mark 1:36 (32 IV). 'And Simon and those who were with him searched for him.' Simon Peter is well known to us for his foolish extemporaneous statements throughout the Gospels. (And it lists Matthew 16:22; 17:4; 26:33.) But Peter was always seeking Jesus. Peter followed Jesus from afar during the night of Jesus' crucifixion, (Matt. 26:58, (57 IV)). Peter ran to the tomb when he heard that Jesus had risen. (Luke 24:12 (11 IV).) Peter swam in the sea in his haste to get to Jesus. (John 21:7). And even walked on water in order to join Jesus. (Matt 14:29 (25 IV)). Peter did not always say or do the right thing, but he did constantly seek to be with Jesus. Because of this, he was continually encountering his Lord and growing to be a more faithful disciple. Whenever we see Peter coming to Jesus, he is always accompanied by others. Because Peter was always seeking Jesus, others sought him, too.

"What are you known for by those who know you best? Do they see you searching for fame, power, success, happiness? or are you known as a person who seeks after Jesus. God promises, 'And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. (Jer. 29:13.)

"Did you begin today intent on encountering Jesus? Is your search for him half-hearted or are you seeking him with all your heart? Have others grown closer to Jesus because they followed your example and sought Jesus? If your heart is set on pursuing Jesus, you will always find Him. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. Let him who hears say come, and let him who thirsts come. (Rev. 22:17).

"When I read that devotional that morning, I thought, 'Am I seeking Jesus? Am I letting people know that this is me, and this is what I want to do? Or am I just going through the motions?'

"As I went to school that day, I went through the routine first hour, second hour, third hour, then my free period. For some reason, I just

started thinking about Kay that day. For some reason just at that point in time, I had this real concern for her. I am just kind of there by myself - of course everybody else was there, too, but basically you are just there by yourself - I'm thinking, 'Lord, she has got to get better.' I was thinking, 'There are all of these kids that need her so much! She means so much to so many of her students. And I just said, 'Lord, if there is any way that you can lift her up and help her get back to being here'- And then I just went on and didn't think about it too much.

"So when Kay told me, I told her this and told her I needed to share this devotional with her, a thing I still haven't done but need to do for her. We were both in awe of the power of our Heavenly Father and what He had done not only for her but for me at the moment she was sharing this with me. I told her I would keep praying for her and that we needed to get together and we needed to write down what had happened so we could share it with others. And I told her she would make a really good Latter Day Saint.'

"You know, there's a kind of a rest of the story to this. I expected Kay just to bounce right back. That happened on a Thursday. I expected her to be in school on Monday. She did come back, but she couldn't take it and had to leave again. She was gone again for awhile, and now she is back, and she is a lot better. In fact, a week or so ago, I was kind of having a down day, and here comes Kay, and Melissa will like this, because she brings me this Tigers' bear, and I thought, 'Debbie collects bears, and I ought to give that to her, but I'm not.' You know, I just put it up on a file cabinet and it just picked me up. I have to say Kay is back. I talked to her this week to make sure if it was OK if I shared this with you folks and shared her name. She had this experience again with some other people, and I just know God's working with her and that He's there with her.

"I thank Him for this experience, because I feel that it was a real blessing. Because there are a lot of people that I pray for, and it's kind of like Norman said in the scripture this morning, (Alma ), there are so many people that I feel like need our prayers and that I have had some concerns for, but I didn't know how much power God really has and how He can reach out to these people that you have concerns about and touch them on the shoulder and be with them and make a difference in their lives. God is with us. He still reveals Himself to us. That's why I belong to this church.

"I have been anxious to share this experience. I have wanted to share it for some time and have felt guilty that I haven't shared it before. When Rob asked me if I would speak I knew what I wanted to say."

Brother Bastow then shared another devotional he had read this week which he felt said some things that he could best share by reading it. "It's from April 4, and just see if you think this is just a coincidence that this happened to me this week," he instructed us. "This one is entitled, 'Fresh Encounters with Christ.'" That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write to you that your joy may be full. ' (1 John 1:3-4.) John, the Apostle, never seemed to marvel at the life changing relationship he enjoyed with his Lord. It overwhelmed him to know that at a particular time in history, the God of the Universe chose to have fellowship with him, a simple fisherman. John was so overjoyed that he wanted to share his joy with others that they, too might experience the same joy. A special fellowship or a bonding developed between those who had personally encountered Christ as they rejoiced together at God's goodness

to them. Those around you desperately need to be encouraged by your latest encounter with Christ. Some have lost hope that they can experience the reality of God's presence in their lives. They don't need your philosophies or theological speculations. They don't need to hear your opinions on what you should do. They need to hear from someone who has just come from a personal life changing encounter with the living Christ. When you have had such an experience, you will be like the Apostle John, hardly able to contain yourself as you rush out to tell others of your amazing encounter with God. Your responsibility will not be to convince others of the reality of God but simply to bear witness of what your Lord has done for you. The change in your life will be your greatest testimony of your relationship to Christ. There is nothing more appealing or convincing to a watching world than to hear the testimony of someone who has just been with Jesus.'

"I also have been overjoyed with the fellowship with Jesus, and I feel that joy when others bear that testimony of how they have experienced Jesus in their lives. Today I challenge you that you think of those you are praying for - those that you are concerned about. Are there some of them who have lost their way? Are there some of them who need to be embraced by God's Holy Spirit?

'And how about you? Has God touched you lately? What experiences do you have that you can share with others.

"Moroni tells us some things that I think are important and fit in with what I am trying to say. Moroni 10 beginning with the third verse then skipping around to the 13th and the 18th. 'Behold I would exhort you that when you read these things, if it be wisdom in God that you should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, even from the creation of Adam, even down until the time that ye shall receive these things and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, if these things are not true; and if you shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things. Whatever thing is good, is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that He is. And you may know that he, is by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I would exhort you, that you deny not the power of God; for He worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever. And again I exhort you my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. ... I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ. And I would exhort you my beloved brethren, ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men. ... Now I speak to all ends of the earth, that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.'

Today we have the opportunity to renew our commitment to Jesus Christ - to tell him that we love Him and that we wish to bear witness of Him to others. Do you love Jesus? Do you really believe? Will you do His will? Do you believe in Jesus? Will you do His will? Do you believe in Jesus? Then serve Him. 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of the Son, Jesus Christ,

and love one another as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in him and he in them. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."

## Awake, Watch, Pray, and Acknowledge God In All Things

The message for Sunday morning, April 21, was brought to us by Elder Gerald Bolingbroke. He opened his sermon by reading to the congregation from Matthew 26:28-39, which tells us a little about Jesus' final hours before his crucifixion.

Awake! This command broke the stillness of the night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our Savior was suffering. The garden the size it is today. Apostle John called the garden a small plot, which is said to be about fifty yards square. The whole world would not be large enough to contain adequate descriptions of the agony Christ experienced there. Modern day descriptions indicate that only eight gnarled olive trees mark the place today.

Gethsemane was only a half mile from the city walls of Jerusalem. A person could walk from Jerusalem to the garden on a pathway in fifteen minutes. Yet what a startling difference a half mile and a quarter hour produced in our Lord. Before that walk we hear him confident and triumphant, concerned chiefly about the preservation and deliverance of His disciples. But after a short span of space and time, rejoicing gave way to anguish. His thoughts were on his impending death. Until this hour the disciples depended on the Master, but in Gethsemane Jesus needed his followers. He selected three, perhaps those of whom sympathy and perseverance could best be expected. He chose Peter, James, and John to take with Him to a secluded spot. He engaged in the most penetrating prayer earth and heaven have ever heard. The scriptures themselves can hardly find adequate words to picture that agony. They state that Jesus was "sorrowful, very heavy, full of sorrows."

What human weakness we see when after Jesus had prayed "let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt," he came to his three disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "what, could ye not watch with me on one hour?" Peter, who only a few minutes before had loudly boasted the he would be ready to die for Him, now relaxed in heavy slumber. The agonized Savior cried, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour."

Brother Bolingbroke continued by relating Christ's trials to similar crises Christians are going through today. He reminded us that Christianity is coming under assault. Our faith is being assaulted. In the time of Paul he told his believers these words. Romans 13: 11, 12.

The scriptures are under assault today. People say they don't mean what they say. They say that Sodom and Gomorrah was not destroyed because of homosexuality but it was for inhospitality. James Dobson, a noted Christian believer, says our youth are under assault today because of the liberal acceptance of homosexuality. As youth are told that homosexuality is all right and acceptable, more homosexuals may appear.

Gerald related a report which was recently given on a television newscast that up to 75 percent of today's high school students cheat, and don't see anything wrong with it. They also plagiarize re-

sources from the internet for papers and see nothing wrong with it. Wake up to the dangers of this hour when, atheism, materialism, and sensualism, are arrayed against the Church.

We need to be watchful at all times. We are being assaulted for our beliefs. This was witnessed personally by Brother Bolingbroke when a Graceland University Winter Term he and Yvonne Galusha were planning to the church historical sites was regarded as unacceptable by some members of the religion and social science departments at the university. It was unacceptable because it promoted a belief in the Book of Mormon as scripture. We need to be prayerful at all times and follow the scriptures. We must wake up to the fact that our faith is being assaulted. Many churches today are preaching unbelief or changing the meaning of scriptures.

We need also to watch our thoughts. All sin begins with a thought.

We need to watch our actions as well.

We need to be watching for the coming of Jesus. Sec. 108:3-4a says we do not know the day or hour when Christ will return but we should watch. We should be ready to meet Him at any time.

Christ told the apostles after He found them asleep "Watch and pray that ye not enter into temptation." Jesus Himself knew and practiced the power of prayer. The gospels tell us that He prayed often. He even taught us how to pray, in the Lord's prayer. Our Christian life is made stronger by prayer. Have you recognized that His pleading in the garden summarized everything we need to know about prayer? John records the prayer in the 17th chapter. In it Christ tells us that life eternal is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ. He prayed for his disciples that they might be one, even as He and His Father are one. He prayed for those that shall believe in Him through the apostle's words. He also prayed that the disciples would not be removed from the world, but that God would keep them from evil. These are things we should pray for too. We should follow His appeal to "Ask, and it shall be given you."

In Section 68 of the Doctrine and Covenants we are told to teach our children to pray. Gerald also read to us from Section 95:1 and 3a.

Gerald shared a wonderful story with us entitled Answered Prayer from Celebration of Miracles compiled by Jodi Berndi. A man named Gary Gilliam knew he served a miracle-working God, and he had heard many stories that revealed the connections between miracles and prayer. Yet he had never seen or been a part of a miracle himself. He greatly wanted to be a part of a miracle, so he decided to ask God to show him a miracle.

Gary prayed, and he expected God to hear him. Even so, he was startled one morning when at five o'clock, a powerful loving voice interrupted his slumber. "My son," the voice said, "I want you to go to a small town in Georgia, just south of Jackson, and look for a Pentecostal Lutheran."

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Gary struggled to comprehend the message. He and his wife ran a nondemoninational church camp, and they had met people from all religious backgrounds. Never had he encountered anyone who called himself a "Pentecostal Lutheran." Gary couldn't help but be a bit skeptical.

"God," he said, "if that's really you, tell me something else." By now Gary was wide awake, and there was no mistaking the audible voice that filled his room. "You'll go to Georgia, you'll drive a green car, and you'll talk to ten men."

Instead of clearing things up, that answer only added to Gary's confusion. He didn't even own a car--much less a green one. And besides, Jackson was more than six hundred miles away. Nonethe-

less, Gary knew he had heard the voice of God, and he sensed that his miracle was about to happen.

A few days later the first piece of the puzzle fell into place when Gary's brother-in-law got a new car and offered Gary his old one. It was a green Chevrolet. With no real idea as to where he was headed, Gary packed his bags, kissed his wife good-bye, and headed south to Georgia.

He drove all night. The next morning, as he pulled into Jackson, Gary realized the senselessness of his position. He wanted to see a miracle, but he had no idea where to turn. He continued to pray, and driving slowly through town, he pulled into a church parking lot, where he met one of the pastors. Gary asked him if he knew any Pentecostal Lutherans.

The man looked quizzically at Gary before answering, "I've never heard of a Pentecostal Lutheran. But if you'll come into my office, I'll make a few phone calls."

Gary followed the pastor into the church, where a number of calls failed to turn up any leads. No one, it seemed, knew anyone who could be considered a Pentecostal Lutheran. Finally, however, another pastor offered a clue: "We don't have any Pentecostals in this town," he said, "at least none that I know of. But a few years ago a couple who visited our church started some sort of home fellowship group on the outskirts of town. They might know something."

Grateful for any lead, no matter how slim, Gary drove to the couple's house. A woman answered his knock, and he introduced himself, "My name is Gary. I just drove up in a green car. Does that mean anything to you?"

The woman immediately locked her screen door, but as Gary explained his situation, she seemed to soften. "You'll want to talk to my husband," she said. "He's meeting with several men down at Bob Lang's Chevrolet dealership."

Gary was beginning to feel his lack of sleep when he reached the car lot, and introduced himself to a small group of men. "I'm looking for a Pentecostal Lutheran," he said. Gary had repeated the phrase so often that it rolled easily off his tongue. Even so, the men could not think of anyone who fit the unusual description.

Sensing Gary's fatigue, one of the men invited him to join his family for dinner and then to spend the night in an apartment behind his house. Later that evening, during dinner, the telephone rang. It was Bob Lang, the fellow who owned the car dealership. He sounded excited.

"My wife and I just realized something," he said. "My grandfather was a Lutheran minister. I was raised as a Lutheran--but now I'm a Pentecostal. I'm the guy!"

Bob invited Gary to come to his house and meet his wife, Mary. Gary accepted, and thanking his host for the meal, he grabbed his jacket and his Bible. He arrive at the Long's home, still uncertain as to why he was there. He met Mary and the Long's two young sons. Then, not knowing what else to say, he invited the couple to pray.

Gary began a general sort of prayer, and then, before he could stop himself, he heard himself describing a litany of arguments and destructive patterns that marked the couple's marriage. Gary knew he ought to be embarrassed to speak of the intimate details in these strangers relationship, but he felt compelled to continue.

Bob and Mary sat dumbfounded by what they heard. There was no denying that their unusual guest spoke the truth--but how could he know such things? Old wounds and communication problems paled beside Gary's powerful words, and Bob and Mary

did not need to exchange looks to know what each other was thinking: God had sent a total stranger six hundred miles to get their attention, and his message was right on the mark.

Gary continued speaking until some time after midnight. As they soaked up his words, the change in Bob and Mary was unmistakable. Gary could tell something incredible was taking place. Bob and Mary's marriage was being healed.

The following day Gary began his drive home. It was raining, but nothing could dampen his enthusiasm. He had heard God's voice, which was miracle enough, he thought. He had gone to Georgia, driven a green car, and talked with...yes, he realized, exactly ten men. Even more wonderful, though was that he had been privileged to serve, as God's messenger. He had seen the Lord restore a marriage right before his eyes.

Gary slowed down to navigate his car through the rain. As he did, he heard God speak again: "I sent you there to answer that little boy's prayers." Gary became confused.

What, Gary wondered, did that mean? Unable to answer his own question, Gary tucked God's words away in the back of his mind. One more missing puzzle piece.

This time, Gary did not have to wait for an answer. A letter arrived from the Longs, describing how their seven year old son, Aaron, had stood up in church. "Mom and Dad used to fight all the time," the child had said, "and I used to get out of bed and pray. I knew my Jesus could help."

Aaron had prayed for his parents, just as Gary had asked God to show him a miracle. Gary smiled to himself. How very like God to use one miracle to answer two different prayers.

Brother Bolingbroke concluded his message by reminding us to acknowledge the Lord in all things. In Section 59 of the Doctrine and Covenants we are told to acknowledge God in all things. We offend God if we do not do this and keep his commandments. Gerald shared a way in which he sees God. It pertained to the way light is produced. One model of the atom is the planetary model where we think of the electron as a particle going around the nucleus. That electron is accelerated since we get an acceleration when a particle changes direction, even if it is moving at constant speed. Classical Physics found that whenever a charged particle is accelerated it will radiate energy. This can be observed in the lab today. The electron in orbit around the nucleus does not radiate in certain orbits. This was explained by Neils Bohr by quantizing the orbits. He also said the electron can be pushed into higher orbits, but it won't stay there. It will go down to a lower orbit by emitting light. It was not understood why the electron would not radiate at all times until a French scientist Louis de Broglie came up with his idea that matter should also have wave properties and particle properties just as light has dual properties. When his formula is applied to the electron in orbit, it gives a wavelength which would lead to standing waves for stable orbits or a fixed number of wavelengths but not a fixed number for radiative orbits. God set this up so we could have light. Truly light is in all matter as Section 85 says. Gerald then shared a demonstration which helped the congregation understand some of the information which he had just explained.

In closing we were once more reminded: Let us be prayerful, awake to the temptations Satan tries to place upon us, and acknowledge God in all things.

## Seed

Elder Michael Jordison read the parable of the sower, from Matthew 13:1-21, for us to open his sermon of April 14. (Please read it for yourself.) After greeting us in the name of our Lord and Savior, Brother Jordison then reviewed the great value of the parable to all of us this day as well as to those to whom Jesus was speaking. He declared, "The reason I read it to you this morning is because it holds the key to understanding everything that I am going to tell you - everything that the Lord wants me to share with you. In fact, the parable of the sower holds the key to the Restoration movement, the key to the endowment, the key to Zion, and the parable of the sower is the key to your own personal salvation.

"On the surface, this story that Jesus told was a lesson in agriculture. But to those who asked, Jesus opened up the scripture to what He was saying. He told them that there are four responses to the word of God that they could give. Four responses that could be of their own personal nature, of their congregation, of their communities, of the church as a whole. After He told them this parable, He went off alone with His disciples and a few of His followers. By Mark it's recorded, they asked, 'What do you mean by this parable?' And Jesus responded. He said, 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables that seeing they may see and not perceive and hearing they may hear and not understand lest at any time they should be converted and their sins be forgiven them.' (Mark 4:10 -11).

"Was Jesus telling them that He didn't want the multitude to be saved - that He didn't want them to understand and be converted? No, that's not what He was saying. Not at all. He wanted them to see. He wanted them to hear, and He wanted them to understand. But what Jesus was communicating was this, 'I've got a very important piece of information that I would like to share with you. But if you don't want it, I'm not going to give it to you. If you don't ask, you won't receive. In fact, if I give it to you and you don't ask, it will serve to your condemnation. You will trample it under your feet, and it will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.' For to those to whom much is given, much is required, the scripture says. Jesus told them clearly that He spoke in parables so that only those who diligently inquired would know concerning the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven - the Kingdom of God. We have not because we ask not. So the multitude didn't get the rest of the story. They went home trying to figure out, 'What was Jesus talking about - this seed? Why was He telling us how to plant?'

### Why the Key?

"So why is this parable the key? Why is this the most important piece of information that we could have - that the multitude could have? Jesus said 'Know ye not this parable? How, then, will ye know all parables?' (Mark 4:12). In other words. If you don't know this parable, you are not going to understand the rest of the parables and what I tell you. We know from the scriptures that many of the parables that Jesus spoke about were parables of the Kingdom of God. I would expect that this congregation of any congregation would know what the Kingdom of God is with reference to the parables. And what is it? Righteousness, peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost.

"So this parable was the key to understanding the Kingdom of God - the key to understanding each of the elements of the Kingdom - peace, righteousness and joy! And each of those elements is synonymous with our salvation for only those who are righteous

can be saved. Only those who are righteous and are saved receive peace. And only those who are righteous and saved and enter into rest of their God and have eternal life can have joy. This was what Jesus was teaching. This was the important piece of information He was wanting them to understand. 'Look. I have something in regards to your salvation, but if you don't want it, I'm not going to give it to you or it will bring you down in condemnation. Until you are ready, I won't give it to you.'

"We find that pattern begins in the Garden of Eden. When the Lord cast out Adam and Eve by the Cherubim and the flaming sword. He sent them out because, if they had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life after having partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would have lived forever, separated from God being miserable. But God, in His mercy kicked them out of the Garden and gave them a chance to become right with God. So the knowledge they received from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought them condemnation and they became fallen because then they knew good and evil. And through the atonement prepared from the foundation of the world through the blood of Jesus Christ, there was a way prepared by which they might be redeemed. And that redemptive power which was declared by angels unto them gave them the ability to know good from evil, not just to know good and evil, that they might choose the good - that they might discern. God had laid down requirements for that knowledge, and it was up to them now how they would respond to it. God gave them more, and He expected them to use what they had learned either to their salvation or to their condemnation.

"In like manner, God placed a "tree of knowledge" before the multitude. He said, 'Here I have got some more information for you. What are you going to do with it? Is it going to be to your salvation or to your condemnation?' 'Unto you' - His disciples, those who inquire, those who seek, knock - 'unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without (the multitude) all things are done in parables'. Just as our first parents would not have known joy had they not partaken of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, the multitudes will not know joy unless they exercise their inquisitive nature, ask, seek and show a positive response to the word of God.

"This is also spoken of in the Book of Mormon. Alma 9:15 speaks of Alma beginning to expound the truths to Zeezrom, a lawyer who had come to Alma and Amukek and was contending with them over the points of their preaching. The Lord, by the power of His Spirit opened up Alma's mind so that he understood where Zeezrom was coming from. He knew the intents of his heart, and he began to speak to Zeezrom those things. Zeezrom became afraid and began to tremble because he knew that Alma knew the intents of his heart. After he recognized that Alma knew what he was saying by the power of the Spirit, knew the teaching of Alma and Amulek was true, 'He began to inquire of them diligently that he might know more concerning the Kingdom of God.' He began to inquire diligently!," Mike repeated. "He began to ask, which is what the disciples back at the sea did to Jesus. 'Tell us more. What do you mean by these things?'

"What did Alma say? 'And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying, It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God. Nevertheless, they are laid under a strict command, that they shall not impart only (except) according to the portion of His word, which He doth grant unto the children of men; according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him; ... and he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word.

And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until they know them in full; ... .' (Alma 9:15-18).

### **Only One Response Bears Fruit**

"That's what it said in Matthew, wasn't it? There are four responses to the word of God, and the main point that Jesus was trying to bring to those people was this, that of all four responses, there was only one response that mattered ultimately. There was only one response which counted in the end. The rest of them received no fruit. The multitude had various degrees of a hardened heart. As Alma continues on, 'And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word, until they know nothing concerning his mysteries. And then they are taken captive by the devil and led by his will down to destruction.' (Alma 9:19-20).

"What is this teaching you? It is teaching us that when we reject any portion of the word of God, we are in danger of eventually losing everything that we have received. We have to continue on faithfully, asking the Lord what is right - what is true. 'Is this of you?' And then if our hearts have been hardened - "Yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word insomuch that it hath not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we will be condemned; ... ." (Alma 9:22).

"Now with these four responses, any of which level we could be on at any given time, that means we have four understandings for the gospel based on that level that we are on. There are four definitions for everything that is in the gospel. And according to the parable of the sower, if only one response bears any fruit, then we can expect that of the four definitions, of the four viewpoints of the gospel, only one is valid - only one is true. God wants us to understand that only His definition, only His viewpoint is valid. Anything less than His viewpoint is our own viewpoint - it's man's viewpoint. It may be at varying degrees - it may contain elements of God's view but it's not His. He's teaching that if we subscribe to - if we believe those definitions of His definitions mixed in with our own, we are in danger of losing our understanding completely of that information of the Gospel. Only God's hold up in the final analysis of things. He wants us to understand only His definition are valid, and this is true for every aspect of the Gospel. When we speak, He wants us to speak on His terms, not our own. When we use God's definitions in speaking to those who are hearing with man's definitions, they don't hear. They don't understand what we are saying. And likewise, when we speak one to another and one of us is using God's definitions and the other one is using man's definitions, will we ever see eye to eye? (With other churches? I should say, with other denominations. There are only two churches.)

### **Apples and Oranges**

"It's like speaking of apples and oranges. God's definition is apples. Man's definition is oranges, and when we share the gospel with orange definitions, the people never really hear the gospel. That is why Christ has to preach it to them. That's why they have got to the prison house - to learn.

"Do our definitions match God's? When we don't use God's definitions - when we don't see according to His viewpoint, we have hardened our heart in some manner - maybe ignorantly - maybe willfully - but our hearts are still hardened in some degree. But as Mormon indicates to us in Alma 14:58 (he kind of expounds here in his narration) 'And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then

have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse that though they had never known these things.' When we start out with God's definitions and revert back to man's, we fall into sin and transgression because we are not understanding things as God sees them. That, Mormon tells us, is what leads us down to destruction.

"As Saints we have a special gift - the Holy Ghost which is there to guide us in our understanding. It's there to teach us. That's why it's so important that we teach our kids - those who are preparing for baptism - God's definitions so they understand what is going on from His viewpoint. It doesn't mean that they have to understand everything the way that we do completely, but to their own understanding, they need to know this is what God says. This is what God teaches. This is how God views it.

"A few years ago when I was basically just learning about God, really, I went to a retreat in Ottumwa and Brother Steve De Vera was there. One of the points in his class he said, 'We do a disservice to our children and do a disservice to the church when we baptize our children at eight just because they are eight.' What I think he was saying was the fact that for so many years we have looked at the criteria for baptism to be you turn eight and then you have a few pre-baptismal classes. That's not the criteria. We are supposed to instruct our children from an early age so that when they arrive at the age of accountability, they know. And they have got to learn the gospel on God's terms, not our own, so they can make good choices later on in their life. You know if you drill the right answers into somebody enough times, eventually, when you ask them, you get the right answers back. Does that mean that they comprehend? That they really understand? Well, maybe and maybe not. This isn't a blanket statement I am trying to make here, but on the whole, I think we have looked at baptism in that way. We don't want our nine year olds or our twelve year olds not baptized, so we hurry things up a bit. That's what Jesus was teaching the multitude. When you are ready. When you inquire, then I will give it to you. Then you are ready to know the mysteries. Our children as well as the adults need to know these principles by God's definition.

"From Hebrews 6:1 the principles - faith, repentance, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment. We have got to understand those things the way God does, because if we don't we stand in danger of not knowing any of them and following a different gospel as the Apostle says. When you look at faith, for instance, what is God's definition of faith and what is ours? The Book of Mormon talks about two thousand young boys, (Alma 26) We call them the Sons of Helaman. Their mothers had taught them that if they would not doubt, God would deliver them. Doubt is the opposite of faith. God's definition of faith is that we doubt not. Many churches teach that faith is just the mental ascent that Jesus is Christ and that He has died for them. That's true, but there's more to it. James says, 'Faith without works is dead.' Unless you are acting upon that faith, you don't have it. You have a lesser definition of faith. The 2000 Sons of Helaman acted on their faith. They went to battle and they knew that God would deliver them. And what happened? Every single one of them was preserved. They were up against more in number than they were, but they were all preserved because they did not doubt.

"That's the kind of faith that God wants us to have. He doesn't want us to have a lesser faith. He wants our faith to be unshaken. He wants us to have faith as the Brother of Jared so that we can behold the face of God. What is God's definition of Faith? Does it mean that we understand everything? No. 'Faith is the assurance of things

hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It means that we believe everything that God tells us to be true, and we act upon it. And that's what the parable of the seed, Alma 16, also teaches. Begin. Have a desire to believe. Have a desire know God's terms. Have a desire to know His definitions. Understand according to His viewpoints, and then you have faith. Then it can begin to grow. Then it can become true knowledge.

"What about repentance. After Jesus healed the people, he said, 'Go and sin no more.' Is that our definition of repentance, to go and sin no more? Understand I speak to myself here. If we are going to follow God's definition, it means we are going to go and sin no more. Do we teach something different than that? Do we teach that we are fallen and no one is perfect, so if we are just sorry and ask God for forgiveness, that's repentance? In a way, that's repentance but it's not the full story. What God is wanting us to strive for is perfection. He said, 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' So when we teach that repentance is something less than sinning no more, we are teaching each other and teaching our children to do less than what God wants us to do.

"What about love and hope? What about belief? Do we teach God's definition of belief? From Mark 16:16-19, 'And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' Is that part of God's definition of belief? I think so.

"What about peace? We hear a lot about peace today - or the absence of peace. What is the world's definition of peace? From the 1828 Webster's Dictionary - 'A state of quiet, or tranquility. Freedom from disturbance or agitation. Applicable to society, individuals or the temper of the mind. Freedom from war with a foreign nation. Public quiet. Freedom from internal commotion or civil war. Freedom from private quarrels, suits or disturbances.' It sounds pretty good to me, but is that God's definition of peace? Not completely. God's definition from Doctrine and Covenants 59:5c, '... he who doeth the works of righteousness, shall receive his reward, even peace in this world and eternal life in the world to come.' Peace is the reward of the works of righteousness. That's God's definition.

"What about sin? Do we look at sin, lust, envy, greed, lasciviousness, guile, pride? Do we view these things with God's viewpoint? Do we abhor them as He does? If not, we are in danger of falling into them by our ignorance - hopefully not by willfulness and rebellion.

#### **Mixing Man's Definitions With God's Futile**

"Have we given our children the right tools for their life - for their walk as followers of Jesus Christ? Do they or any of us - parents, grandparents, friends, co-workers - understand the gospel according to God's definitions? We've got to diligently seek, ask, knock. We have to keep from mixing man's definitions with God's. That's one of the reasons we have so much strife. We can see it in the world, in our own communities, in our own branches because we speak on different levels, and we can't see eye to eye. We have got to be diligent about seeing as God wants us to see and know as God wants us to understand.

"In 1834 the Elders were told ( D.&C. 102) to wait for the redemption of Zion. We have waited for a hundred and sixty eight years and still Zion is not here. Those Elders were told to wait because they trampled on God's definitions. He told them what their response should be and how they should do things, and they

chose not to follow. Are we any different today? Hopefully we are better off than they were; but if we haven't followed God's gospel according to His dictates, then ultimately, collectively we are no better than they. The scripture teaches that 'when men shall keep all my commandments,' Zion should come on the earth. He didn't say, 'when men shall keep part or most of my commandments'. The great commandment that He gives us is to repent, to be baptized for the remission of our sins, to believe on Christ that we may receive the remission of our sins through sanctification by the power of the Holy Ghost through baptism of fire. That is what enables us to keep the commandments.

"Will that contradict the works of grace? No. Grace is God's alone to give. It's our work, as section 10 points out, to keep the commandments, to call each other to live to higher standards." Brother Jordison read the entire fifth chapter of First John for us. Please read it for yourselves. It is John's dissertation of the new birth and the witness of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are One. It begins, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." Mike called our especial attention to what was being written by saying, "Now, hear this with God's definitions. 'By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments, for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments; for his commandments are not grievous for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth Jesus is the Son of God?'" Other gems found in the chapter include, "He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." "All unrighteousness is sin ... ." "We know that whosoever is born of God contiueth not in sin; ... ." "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

"Should we not choose God's definitions?" Mike continued. "Should we not seek diligently to know as He knows? Shouldn't we begin with the basics in our own life? What is God's definition of this and how can I apply it to my life? How can I make my life fit into God's mold. It's important that we remember that we are not alone in this. Christ has already done it for us, for through our baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost we receive His righteousness. We are sanctified by His blood and we can lay claim to the atonement which was made from the beginning, and as we yield ourselves over unto Him, then we begin to exclaim as did the Apostle Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:20).

"This is the definition of a Saint. Are we Latter Day Saints?"

## Pulpit Exchange Features Psalm 23

April 28 was the date on which the Ringgold County Ministerial Association had its 2002 Pulpit Exchange. Our Pastor, Robert Rolfe, ministered at the First Baptist church in Mount Ayr. Diana

Holland, pastor of that church, spoke to our congregation.

Rev. Holland began by explaining some of the differences between the many Baptist denominations. The American Baptist church, with which the first Baptist is affiliated, she says is not the largest but is the oldest of the Baptists dating back to the first Anabaptists who arrived in America centuries ago. She describes her denomination as being Ecumenical and open minded yet believing that the Bible is the ultimate in deciding what they do or do not believe or do.

After reading the Twenty Third Psalm from the Amplified Bible, the congregation sang the rendition of the Psalm contained in The Hymnal. She described Psalm 23 as one of the most often repeated and most often memorized parts of the Bible. Even people who do not consider themselves Christian often know most of the words. She then asked us to "Shut off the little voice that is repeating it in your head and open yourselves up to hearing this Psalm for the very first time so we can hear it a little differently.

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. The idea of a Shepherd is one that agrarian or farming cultures really understand. A person who provides or protects the flock, will not only do it for themselves, but usually there is a shepherd that 'shepherds' for the whole village. The prosperity of the village and its livelihood rests upon that individual's diligence and ingenuity as a shepherd. He or she finds pasture for the herd, protects them from predators, nurtures them when they are sick or hurt. Such an idea, we can easily assign to God, to Jesus Christ, and in fact, Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd.'"

Unlike our modern day culture, in which you will find shepherds riding around in jeeps, on horses, motorcycles, etc. with their dogs, kind of pushing the sheep along, in Jesus' day, the Shepherds led their sheep. He walked and the sheep, because they trusted him, got in line and followed behind him. "They trusted that this individual was looking out for their welfare. Jesus said, 'My sheep know my voice.' That's exactly the way it always was. The shepherd's voice was what the sheep heard in the middle of the night when it was kind of scary, singing a tune, talking or quoting scripture. The shepherd's voice was the one they heard when they were first born. They were born right into the shepherd's hands. So Psalm 23 starts out saying, 'The Lord is my shepherd' -my guide, my protector, my leader, the voice I hear in the midst of trial.

"It is interesting that the Psalm says he is MY shepherd. In the Old Testament times to say that God is MY God, and make it a very personal thing, is unusual. God was the God of the nation of Israel, not of individuals. The king might indeed say, 'The Lord is MY shepherd', but for any single individual to say that was unusual. Yet we find the Psalmist saying, 'The Lord is MY shepherd'. That's a rather radical statement, and the second statement is just as radical - 'I shall not want'. I shall not need, because God, who is a personal God, provides for all our needs.

At this juncture Diana referred to the early worship in which Valle Smith had shared the story of a little boy who prayed to God for a reading book for school, and it came. "I think the more we lean upon God for our needs, the more they are provided."

"Then the rest of the Psalm talks about how these needs are being met by God almighty. 'He makes me to lie down in green pastures and he leads me beside the still waters.'" Our speaker contrasted the lush Iowa farm lands in the spring with those in the hilly, dry area where the sheep went in Jesus' day. To find a patch of green grass was unusual, she explained, and if they did find green pasture as the shepherd moved the flock, one of the first things he



would do was get the lambs to lie down so they would not trample it. "So the shepherd would cause the sheep to lie down in the green pastures - not trample all over it. That way they could eat the good foliage, and they could stay there for a couple of days."

Of the still waters, Rev. Holland said, sheep don't like the sound of water. It scares them and they will not drink from water that is making a lot of noise. They want still water from which drink, and in the desert, that is found only where there is a deep well. "The run off from rain or snow melt all trickle through and make a lot of noise, so the shepherd looked for a deep spring that would be dependable even in the height of summer, and, believe me, shepherds knew where they all were - a place where there is no worry - no need to move on - a place where one can relax a bit from the anxiety of surviving."

Our speaker referred to the early class discussion of the Kingdom of God on earth and asked, "Since the world is full of evil, how do you find a place like that - a place where it is still and quiet and where we are nourished and fed? We find it where we find the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. We find it many times where we might least expect it.

"Every time we hear September 11th, we all have visions of things come into our heads. One of the visions that has been coming up for me is not of a building being destroyed in a fiery blaze. It's not of people running in terror. It's of a fireman sitting quietly resting and praying." Of the stories from ground zero many tell how the workers who search for victims or clean up the mess sit quietly alone in a corner at the meal site. They find a place that is peaceful and restful, full of serenity in the midst of chaos. "This is what the Psalmist is telling us - that in God's presence, we find a place where we can lie down in green pastures, beside still waters, that restores our souls. The Amplified Bible says it restores our life - our self. I know that in the scientific approach to things we tend to separate our awareness of ourselves into body, mind and spirit. We sometimes will nurture the body and neglect the spirit, or we will nurture the mind and neglect the body, or whatever. But in Old Testament times, in Jesus' day, they didn't have that understanding. You were one! The mind, body and spirit were one, and when it says, 'Restore your soul', to restore your life, to restore yourself, it all meant the same thing. We need to find a place where the Holy Spirit will allow us to renew ourselves - to become one again - not to be separated with parts of us in differing places. Jesus said, 'Come unto me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Weary could be emotional. Heavy laden could be physical, but rest that is promised here is rest for all we are. God revives us, rejuvenates us, restores us to right relationship with Him if that is what we need. But even more, God returns us to the right track - where we should be walking. God shepherds us into that place where we will be the most effective for Him in this world.

"Remember the parable of the lost sheep - where the shepherd left the ninety and nine to go and find the one who was lost, and once finding it brought it back with rejoicing and said, 'Let's have a celebration for this lamb was lost and now is found?' That leads us right into the next line, 'For He leads me down the right paths for His name's sake.' - He leads me in righteousness. We don't need to worry about going the wrong way as long as we are listening to the Holy Spirit within us and taking our direction from God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This new life - this new person that we have become by being born of the Spirit - let's us put on a renewed sense of God in our lives."

When Diana first prepared the message she was giving, there

were bombings in Kosovo and shootings in Colorado, her home state - Columbine. "We now have an even greater thing to think of. When we look at all of the wars that are being waged all over the world right now, the valley of the shadow of death is there for every one of us. But we don't need to fear. There is no reason for us to fear. We don't need to fear evil and we don't need to fear death. Why? Because we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of the Lord - not height, nor depth, nor distance, nor calamity, nor earthquake, nothing - not even evil people, can separate us from the love of the Lord. Why? Because the Lord is love, and we are His. And why should we not fear evil and not fear death? Then next line says, 'For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.' You see, God is with us at all times through the Holy Spirit. That's why the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in us and among us. God never sleeps. He never takes breaks. He never goes on vacation. He doesn't put you on hold. He doesn't send a memo to contact Him later. God is always there and God sent the Holy Spirit so we could have that indwelling Spirit to be made anew through the Holy Spirit - to be reborn - and have that in us. Inside us! You can't get any closer than that."

Our speaker described her shepherd's crook at which she often looks and think, "God is there through the Holy Spirit getting us out of messes with that hook, bringing us back carefully into the place where we need to be. That staff is there to comfort and to guide us, but what about the rod part - the other end of the crook? The rod is for thumping you when you need to be thumped. You don't like that idea of being thumped, huh? I've said there are a lot of people who can hear the still small voice of the Lord. Then there are the rest of us that the Lord has to whap with a two by four to get our attention. Do you want to see the bruises? God is not just a merciful God but also a God who cares deeply, passionately about us, enough to correct us if we need correcting.

"I'm sure you have seen the picture of Jesus with the sheep draped around His shoulders. There's an interesting, little known and rather disturbing story behind that picture. When a sheep was used to wandering off repeatedly, no matter how many times the shepherd brought it back, the shepherd would break the front legs of that sheep and drape the sheep over his shoulder so that the sheep was dependent upon the shepherd to carry it wherever he went, to get it to water, to get it to food. And by the time the legs were healed, it stuck close by the shepherd and never wandered away. So the picture you see with the Shepherd with a sheep draped over his shoulder, that sheep has probably got broken legs and is having to learn that the safest, most secure, most dependable place it could be is right by the shepherd.

"Now this may sound like a bad thing to do, but for the sheep it was the best; because if that sheep continued to go off on its own - continued to wander away, that sheep would fall down a crevice and die of hunger and thirst or be caught by predators and eaten. When that sheep learned that the best place it could be was right by the shepherd, that sheep will prosper. It's no different than the rest of us. We need to depend on that rod and that staff through the Holy Spirit to keep us in line - to keep us on paths of righteousness. It's comforting to know that God does this for us in an intimate, concerned way, even when we are a bit stubborn about it.

"Now the image in the Psalm changes. We leave the images of the shepherd and go into a very different one. It says, 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.' The background here is of ancient tradition of hospitality. The Lord is the host who gives

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## More on Good Shepherd

*Continued from page 9*

refuge to one who is beset by enemies. And when inside the protective shelter of the host's dwelling, you are given abundant food and drink, oil for grooming as well as an assurance of safety. God is the refuge of all who need to be protected, and I think that is all of us! The Lord provides the food of the Word, the drink of the living water as well as the oil of His mercy and grace. Such hospitality can't be found anywhere else."

Our speaker referred to the early class discussion of the fruit of the Spirit being a part of one's life. "One of the things that I love about this is that God nurtures us, and our response is to be what He wants us to be - to walk close to Him - to walk in the same pattern that Jesus walked - to be filled with graciousness toward those around us - to share that brimming over of our cup of blessings. The Amplified Bible said, 'Our brimming cup overflows.' Who gets the benefit of the overflow if it isn't the people around you? When our cup is brimming, there is a tension across the surface and all it takes is just one more drop and it overflows. We all need that one more drop because if we have it, then we can share what we have. We are not going to find that in anything the world has to offer because the world cannot offer us the preparation of a table of abundance in the presence of our enemies, the anointing of the oil of God's mercy and grace, a cup that is so brimming that it overflows.

"Then, what is the result of following the Lord as His sheep - of living in the refuge of His dwelling? That's the rest of the Psalm. 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' God's goodness and mercy are ours for the rest of our lives. The Lord will not take them away. We can turn away from God, but God will never turn away from us. A lot of times the Psalmist will say, 'Where are you, God? You've moved!' But the truth is, I moved. Christ Jesus sacrificed Himself in order that we might have direct access to God's goodness and mercy. That is the promise that we have for all our days here on earth.

"But it's not the end of the story, because there's another line in the Psalm. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever! Those who follow the Good Shepherd - those who accept His guidance and provision who are counted as His own, receive Christ's protection, His chastising, His provision and His reviving, His goodness and His mercy all their lives, but that's not the end of

the story, for when death has ended their lives here in this plane of existence, Christ welcomes His sheep home to abide with the Lord in the presence of the most high God forever. There is nothing that can surpass that promise.

"I happen to believe that Psalm 23 was one of those that Paul liked. Paul said, 'I have learned to survive in whatever circumstance - in plenty and in need, a free man and imprisoned - and I do it all for the glory of God. And for me to live is for Christ and to die is gain. Paul understood that there is nothing that can separate us from the Lord, including death; for once you are His, you are His forever, and forever is an awfully long time.

"So the next time you pray or even think of the twenty third Psalm, let it's meaning sink into your heart and permeate your very soul, for it is a job description of the Lord God almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. And it covers each one of us in all of our needs through all of our lives. Then think how you can share this job description with somebody else - someone who is lost, hurting, fearful of evil in this world - who dreads what the world has to offer. Share with them so that they might also join the fold of the Good Shepherd. Amen."

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## News & Notes

### **Nelson - Bergman Marriage Celebrated**

Norman Nelson and Kathy Bergman were married at 2:00 PM Sunday, April 28 at the Church of Jesus Christ, Mt. Ayr Branch. Pastor Robert Rolfe conducted the Sacrament. A reception was held at Crown Colony in Lamoni that afternoon from 4:00 to 6:00. The couple plans an extended trip to the West Coast to celebrate their marriage.

### **Weekend of fasting and prayer**

Another weekend of fasting and prayer for those who don't know God was planned for Friday through Sunday, May 3-5. Services were held Friday night, and Saturday morning, noon and night as part of the weekend. We hope you participated.

### **Reunion Theme - GO Disciple**

GO Disciple - Get registered for this outstanding Missionary Experience presented by the Restoration Seventy Sunday, June 23 - Saturday, June 29 at Graceland University. Contact Valle Smith, 607 East Madison, Mount Ayr, IA 50854 - Telephone 641 464 2949.