

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Nothing But Leaves

Looking at my shaggy lawn that is too wet to mow, I have been thinking how beautiful it has been this summer. The grass has been green all summer. The flowers and trees look great. Lots of rain and cool temperatures have produced some of the best crops we've ever seen. Our ponds and lakes have, for the most part, been filled. This year may well be listed on the record books as a great year.

The tree outside my window has already lost a good part of its leaves. The golden-reddish color is lovely. I noticed another tree like this one during one of my daily walks with Lynda. Trees turning colors and losing their leaves in the latter part of August seems unusual to me. But it won't be long until our yards are piled high with leaves and small children are once again jumping into leaf piles.

Farmers are expecting a big crop. Barring some weird storms, the crops should be excellent. But what if, the farmers looked at their ears of corn and found there were no kernels on the cob. The corn stalks were plush and green, but no corn had been formed. They would probably be upset if there were no corn kernels. After all, they plant the corn for the grain, not to see green stalks as "high as an elephant's eye".

I remember Jesus having an experience with not getting a crop. In Matthew 21:17.. it reads: "Now in the morning, as he returned unto the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and there was not any fruit on it, and leaves only. And he said unto it, Let no fruit grow

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TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Your Ark of Testimony

Elder Alan Smith began his sermon August 1, 2004 remembering George Thomas' testimony last Sunday saying that we should have a testimony ready to share at a moment's notice. "And I was thinking about the Communion service this morning and its call for us to remember our covenant and the blessing which the Lord has given us. As I was studying and praying, I came across my Patriarchal Blessing again, which I hadn't read for awhile, and one of the things in it seemed to jump out at me. I don't know if you have that same experience. You've read your Patriarchal Blessing maybe several times, maybe quite frequently, but there are different parts of it that seem to say something to you at specific times.

"One of the things that Brother James Thomas did, as he gave me my Patriarchal Blessing, was pray that the Lord would give me the power of testimony that as I went out to speak for the Lord, I might be moved by a Spirit beyond my own that would strengthen and establish what I said to bring souls to Christ. I sometimes wonder what I have done with that gift that was prayed for me at that time. As I stop and think about it, I guess some of the most effective things I have talked about have been the way that the Lord has moved in my life and in the lives of other people around me. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 that he came to preach, "not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, .. but in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling." His speech was not done 'with enticing words of man's wisdom,' but as a demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God that those listening 'should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.'" I would like to share this morning about testimony - about the power of testimony in our lives. And I hope that I can share in that spirit in which Paul came to the Corinthians as he shared this way.

Testimony, an Important Part of God's Work

"The scriptures tell us that testimony is an important part of God's work. In John 6:44, Jesus said, 'No man can come unto me, except he doeth the will of my Father who hath sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that ye receive the Son, for the Father beareth record of him; and he who receiveth the testimony, and doeth the will of him who sent me, I will raise up in the resurrection of the just.' If you will receive the testimony of Christ in your life, and begin to do the will of the Father, the promise is that you will

be raised up in the resurrection of the just.

"I found something new as I began to look through the scriptures about testimony. We talk about what is called the Ark of the Covenant . But do you know what the scriptures call the ark a lot of times instead of the Ark of the Covenant? The Ark of Testimony, because the things it held were placed in it for a reminder, a testimony of what the Lord had done and what the Lord would do, just as a covenant is a relationship and a testimony of what God has done and what God will do.

"Part of the things that were in the Ark of Testimony were the Tablets of Testimony. Did you know that was what the Ten Commandments were called, the Tablets of Testimony? In Exodus 34 it says, 'And Moses turned and went down from the mount, the two tables of testimony were in his hand.' The tables were written on both their sides, on one side and the other were they written and the tables were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God engraven upon the tablets.'

Ten Commandments - A Testimony of God's Love

"Sometimes we think of the Ten Commandments as just a list of rules - things that you have to do. But what they were was a testimony of God's love for us, saying 'I want you to be happy. I want you to be joyful. I want you to have peace, and if you will follow these - if you will make this a part of your culture - if you will do these things, then these blessings can come into your life. They were a testimony of His love for us! Tables of Testimony!

"The children of Israel had manna from heaven brought all of those years to help them survive when they were wandering around. The scriptures talk about the manna as being a white material that looked like coriander seed and tasted like wafers of honey. I don't know exactly what that would be, but you know one of the things that was placed in the Ark of Testimony? An Omer, that's a measure, of manna that was kept in the Ark of Testimony to remind the people that God loved them so much that he literally fed them from day to day with manna from heaven.

"There are other things. I won't go into all the things that are a part of the Ark of Testimony. One was Aaron's rod. There came a time when people were trying to decide who should be the leader. A lot of people wanted to be leaders, so the Lord told them all to put their rods together overnight, and the one that was sprouted in the morning was the one of the leader. Aaron's not only sprouted, but it grew almonds by morning! And they kept the rod of Aaron as a reminder of the way the Lord was working among them.

"The idea of testimony and keeping things that remind us of what God has done and is doing in our lives is not just something that happened in the Old Testament. The Book of Mormon says that one of these days we are going to find a big pile of swords buried somewhere. This was done, as Alma records that the people said, 'Let us hide away our swords that they may be kept bright as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and made us clean thereby.' So those swords were put away as a testimony to the Lord of their response and the change that He had made in their hearts and in their lives.

Family Arks of Testimony

When Valle's family got together for Paul and Betty's sixtieth wedding anniversary celebration recently, we took Sunday morning time to share experiences of the way that the Lord had moved in the family, to help make sure that they were passed down and shared with all of the family. We began with the testimony that we

have shared before of Valle's great grandmother being raised from the dead. Albert, Valle's grandfather, was at home watching his mother who was ill and dying, and she told him to run and get his father who was out chopping wood. Because of his wife's illness Albert's father had given up his logging business and was just clearing some land for himself. When they got back to the house, she was dead. So Albert's father commanded her, in the name of the Lord, to rise up. And she did. A large tumor that filled a gallon bucket sloughed off, and she lived to be eighty three.

"We shared testimonies like the saving of Paul's leg. Valle's Dad has problems with circulation around his knee. His knee got battered in all his athletic pursuits through the years. We were getting ready to go to the operating room. The doctor came in with his black marker and drew on Paul's leg where they were going to remove the leg. We knew that was going to be a big blow to Paul who had always being active. We were just not sure what that was going to do to him mentally in terms of all those things. We administered to him and asked for the Lord's blessing. I have shared with you before how the radiologist came in and told the surgeon (and he says to this day this is the only time he has ever done this) 'Give me a chance to try to open it up another way.' He had been to some training just that week where they were threading into the veins or arteries with a device (catheter or whatever) that would go down to where the blockage in the artery or vein was and then they would work with drugs and things to try to break it open.

"We were sitting in the recovery room and it was taking an awfully long time! We weren't sure what was happening. Finally the doctor came out and said they had broken through the blockage and would not have to cut Paul's leg off. I remember the joy that we shared knowing that the Lord had known what to do to have that radiologist receive that training at just the right time that he could come back and even give him the courage to tell the surgeon to hold off while he tried something different. All of these things came together, and Paul's leg was saved. He's still on it today and we know what a blessing the Lord brought in that case.

"We shared the testimony of Cindy, Valle's sister who is blind. She was born blind because of her mother having measles when Cindy was being carried. Cindy needed to go to Vinton to the sight saving school to get her special training, but she couldn't go until she could talk. Her speech had been slow in coming. We talked about the time that the Elders in Lamoni came and administered to Cindy and about the ladies and others in all the church circles around the community were praying that Cindy would be blessed. Right at the last minute, just before the deadline, Cindy began to talk and so was able to go off to get that special training.

"We have shared with you the story of Valle's brother Kim and the blessings we received at the time of his illness and death and some of those were shared as the family talked together. It got me to wondering if maybe one of the things that we should do in our families is develop an Ark of Testimony. Wouldn't it be a blessing as our families grow? It could be many kinds of things. It could be a scrapbook where we write down and share our testimonies. Maybe the journals that some of you are already keeping about the blessings that are coming into your life. It wasn't too long ago that Erin and Cara were home and were going through a folder of old memories that we have at our house. They came across the index card that we used when we were looking for a home when we came to Mount Ayr. On this index card we wrote down all the things we needed in our home. We needed this many bedrooms and we needed a separate area so people could be visiting in one part of the house

and not bother people in another part of the house. I can't remember all the things on the card, but I know that the Lord blessed us and answered each request. We could go down and check off each of those things that we felt we needed in a home and know that the Lord blessed us. It might be some of those kinds of things that are in your Ark of Testimony.

"Maybe you taped or videotaped some of the testimonies so that you can share them that way. I think it would have been good if we had done that with Dad so that some of his grand kids now who don't remember what he was like would still be able to share their testimony

"Maybe your Patriarchal Blessing should be in your Ark of Testimony. Maybe it's a box where you have some things that are part of that testimony, like the toy box only it's the testimony box so when the grand kids come, they can pull that box out and you can say, 'This is the story that goes with this and this is the story that goes with that.' Our family has been blessed on both sides in that we have had some of our testimonies written down by Mom and by Valle's grandfather with some of their testimonies in book form. Whether there is a big book or whatever, wouldn't it be nice in our families if we could say, 'Here is our Ark of Testimony', however you want to keep that, 'because it reminds us of what the Lord has done in our life and will continue to do in the future.'

"We don't want it to be like the relic like a piece of the cross or a piece of the robe or all of those things that people of the past have begun to worship the item. That's not what the Ark of Testimony is all about. You don't want to worship the box or worship whatever it is that you have collected; because unless it is a living box, unless we are continuing to add to it, it is not doing what it is supposed to be doing. It is to remind us that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is to remind us of the times He has forgiven us, the times that He has blessed us, and the times we have had special opportunities to know Him, not just because of things of the past but the things of the future as well, because He is a God who doesn't change

"Maybe we need to have an Ark of Testimony for our congregation in some way, so we will remember - so we will have things that will bring to mind the testimonies that we have had as a group, the places that we have gone, the things we have done and the way that the Lord has ministered in our lives. There are so many blessings that we have from day to day that help us remember the goodness of the Lord.

Angel Ministry Is For a Testimony

"You know, angel ministry is about helping us to have a testimony to share. Here is what Moroni says (Moroni 7:30-34): 'Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind, in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him; and by so doing, the Lord prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof. And after this manner bringeth to pass the father the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men,' The angels are there to bring a testimony of Him, a testimony that we will share with others that

will help them come to a knowledge of Him.

Most of you were at Wednesday night service when the Chobars shared their testimony of angel ministry and the blessing that came to them at a time of need in their lives. That was a powerful, powerful testimony to me. For those of you who weren't there, they had just had a child die from crib death, that kind of unexplained death that happens sometimes to children. They had ridden to the hospital in the ambulance. When they got there, they met a nurse who took them to a special room and visited with them. She helped them have a telephone where they could call long distance to tell their family what was happening. She helped them find a number to call the funeral home to make arrangements and even called the taxi when everything was finished at the hospital and it was time for them to go home. What a blessing it was for this person to have done this; so they wrote a letter of thanks to the hospital administrator and said, 'Thank you for (this person) and for this wonderful service that you have,'

"The hospital administrator wrote back and said, 'Thank you for your letter, but we have some questions. Number one: We don't have anyone on staff by that name. Number two: The room that you were in is a storage closet and always has been. It isn't the kind of room that you describe as a place where you could relax and do all these things. Number 3: There is no phone in that room. Number 4: We got these long distance phone bills that we didn't know who had placed them, and we got a charge from a taxi which we did not know how it got there.' All these things had happened, through the ministry of angels, to even change a room so it looked different and had different facilities than were available there. I guess the last thing the administrator said was, 'We don't have these services but maybe we should!' That letter should be in the family Ark of Testimony along with the testimony about it so that down the road the rest of the family for generations to come can know of a God who loves you so much that He can do this for you in a time of need.

"Mom shared a testimony this morning about Dad last Wednesday night. Some of you weren't here, so I will share it again. One of the parts that I didn't share and that she didn't share was that not too long ago I administered to Dad and I asked that somehow the gift of tongues would be available that we would be able to understand him or at least he would be able to understand us and we would know that we were communicating. And so Wednesday night, after the service, Dad was in the piano room and Ron and I were visiting with him. Ron came in and asked Dad if he could have a Father's blessing before he went to Nigeria. Dad began whistling a tune. At first I didn't recognize it, but as he whistled, I recognized what he was whistling.

Send Me Forth, O Blessed Master. There are souls in sorrow bowed.

Send me forth to homes of want and homes of care.

And with joy I will obey the call and in Thy Blessed Name, I will take the Blessed Light of the gospel there.

Send me forth to active service, and my prompt response shall be,

Here am I. Send me! I am ready to report for orders.

Master, summon me, and I'll go on any errand of love for Thee. What a blessing!

These are Times When Testimonies Will Be Needed

"We are living in the days, I believe, where a testimony and sharing it with one another is going to be very important. Here's what Jesus said about these times in Luke 21:9-14: 'And when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for these things

Truth is Consistent- Chose to Live by It

must first come to pass; but this is not the end. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights, and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these things shall come, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you; delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons; being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. Settle this therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer; For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And it shall turn to you for a testimony.'

"The Lord is saying, no matter what's ahead for us, if we will try to do what He wants us to do, however we are persecuted, whatever may come, the promise is that we will have a testimony. It will be a testimony to you of how He gives us the words that we need at the moment we need them - how He will help us in those times.

And this is a time of testimony, the testimony from Enoch (Genesis 7:66-72): 'And Enoch beheld the Son of Man ascend up unto the Father; and he called unto the Lord, saying, Wilt thou not come again upon the earth? for inasmuch as thou art God, and I know thee, and thou hast sworn unto me, and commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace; and wherefore I ask thee if thou wilt not come again on the earth?

And the Lord said unto Enoch, As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfill the oath which I made unto you concerning the children of Noah. And the day shall come that the earth shall rest. But before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth. And great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve; and righteousness will I send down out of heaven, and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men.

'And righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine own elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare; an holy city, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion; a New Jerusalem. And the Lord said unto Enoch, Then shalt thou and all thy city meet them there; and we will receive them into our bosom; and they shall see us, and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other; And there shall be mine abode, and it shall be Zion, which shall come forth out of all the creations which I have made; and for the space of a thousand years shall the earth rest.' When the Lord is sending His truth forth on the earth and His righteousness to be a testimony of His Only Begotten Son, I believe that He called me to be a part of that work.

"I hope that as we share in remembrance of Jesus this morning, that it will be an Ark of Testimony to you that no matter what we face ahead, God will be with us when we seek to be His people. We have covenanted to follow Him, and He promises all the blessings of His Spirit if we do. Our Ark of Testimony in each of our lives reminds us of this.

"Truth is Consistent - God is Consistent" was the message Seventy George Knotts wished to convey to the congregation on August 8. He had it written on the white board in the sanctuary as we assembled. Accompanying it was a small cartoon with the inscription, the famous quotation, "Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely!" The scripture he chose was from Ether 5:28, "I give them weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me, and have faith in me; then will I make weak things become strong unto them."

As a kind of an aside, Brother Knotts announced that he had come across a statement in the sixth chapter of Ether that helped him understand when the New Jerusalem would be. He quoted Ether 6:8-10, "Wherefore the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built up upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance; and they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old; and they shall no more be confounded, until the end come, when the earth shall pass away. And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old, save the old have passed away, and all things have become new. And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the lamb; and they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel."

Our speaker then turned to what he called the "dry rot" that has invaded our culture during the past 30 years: the idea that all things are relevant. The teachings of Jesus are no more applicable. The scriptures are no more applicable. What you think is all important. "If it feels good, do it!" He told of a class on ethics that he was taking at the School of the Restoration at a time when situation ethics was first popular, and some of these ideas seemed to be accepted. One of the prominent persons in the class ended up saying, "Jesus' teachings, they are not pertinent to us today. That was written a long time ago." "And", George said, "the professor was not put off too much with that comment. Others were saying other things like it."

It was a Friday when the class closed. George continued, "I went home, and it bothered me a lot, and I started putting things down on paper in the shape of cartoons with quotes. By the end of the weekend I had 21 cartoons about that situation. The next day I thought, 'This is too many to put up on the bulletin board (the bulletin board was right outside our classroom and worship room), and so I put seven cartoons up in a row.

"When the professor came, it was John Darling, I said, 'This class bothered me a lot last week. Here's my response to it', and I pointed to it. He went over, I can still remember him standing there. He is a little guy standing there looking like that (he illustrated the stance) and he read all those cartoons and had no response whatever. I thought, 'This guy ought to get mad or something,' but he had no response whatsoever!' But in the early morning worship which we had each Monday morning, he came in and after awhile he told the men, there were fourteen of us going through training together, he said, 'This morning I have had a spiritual experience like you only have two times in your whole life!' And he changed his whole philosophy about that ethics class after that. One of the comments up there I can remember said, "Why call ye me Lord,

Lord and believe not My ethics?"

"In our culture, we have taken the scriptures with a grain of salt in that we don't take it seriously. If it agrees with us, then we go along with it. If it doesn't agree with us, well, 'It must have been Paul's interpretation, and he was a man anyway'. Or, 'Men wrote the scriptures so we can't believe what they say about women.' We have different loose philosophies and some of you might be buying into that. I don't know. Anyway, we need to take the scriptures seriously."

George's next concern was the coming election for which he felt too few committed Christians are committed to vote. He urged that commitment and referred to the Book of Mormon injunction, which he stated as, "If this nation chooses something besides following Christ, then we will be swept off or done away with." He added, "He's (God's) done that with the Israelites before, and we are not good enough that we think He is going to wink at us and let it go!" And he asked for prayers for the nation.

After making some pointed political statements reflecting his understandings of the seriousness of this election, George concluded with, "There is always more than one point of view. My wife is always reminding me of that."

And with that comment our speaker turned to the Twenty Third Psalm with a proposal of a way to remember it. Pointing to each of his fingers representing a phrase of it, he repeated the entire Psalm:

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

As he read 'Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.' he commented, "Some of you might not know what the rod and the staff are referring to. The shepherd had a staff that he walked with and he gathered and guided his sheep with it. And also he could defend with it. And also the rod was like unto a shelalia that he carried in his belt. He could throw it and guide the sheep that way or throw it at animals that came in that were undesirable."

As he finished reading the 23rd Psalm, George commented, "I learned that when I was young, and I have it by my bedside and I read it every day before I get out of bed, or quote it, at least." Noting that the time allotted for the service was not all used up, George then turned the service back to Gordon Winkler who was presiding.

Brother Winkler noted that we need to keep in mind those of our congregation who are giving ministry in other parts of the world. Ron and his team in Nigeria were specifically mentioned. "And we need to understand and recognize that the work of the Lord is going forward into the world in far reaching places as well as in our own community. As much as we rely upon the testimonies of Ron and our brother Norman and Keston and Thoric and Heidi and Cessaries who have had opportunities to provide missionary work in Mexico, we need to also be mindful that in our blocks and in our neighborhoods, in our communities and in our places of work, we have opportunities to provide that testimony about the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the difference He can make in our lives. And I know that has been heavy upon our Brother George's mind as he has kind of previewed. He has concerns over our nation, and I know in our prayer services he prays that our leaders might have wisdom, discernment and courage, and I think those are important factors that we try to align ourselves and elect those people that can have the same beliefs and value systems that we do and that are aligned with the workings and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ". He called attention to the writings on the white board commenting, "I guess that would be your parting message from George this morning, "Truth is Consistent - God is Consistent", "Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely!"

Praise the Lord! Praise His Holy Name!

Priest Rodney Bastow opened his sermon reading the 145th Psalm.

"I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name forever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

"The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his

works. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him; but all the wicked will he destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.”

Brother Bastow spoke of his dependence upon God for direction for his ministry. “As you know, without the blessing of God’s Holy Spirit, there is nothing I can say this morning that will be of any benefit to any of us here. I pray that He will bless us here this morning that His Spirit will touch our lives that we might be changed - that we might become better builders of His Kingdom, and I ask that all the honor and all the glory would also go to our Heavenly father.

“Last week when Gordon was presiding, he said his theme was praising God. When he mentioned that, it struck me. Wow! What a great idea! And that’s what I have thought about all this week. So my thoughts this morning are centered around praising the Lord.

“Tomorrow Debbie has to go back to her teaching job. Unfortunately,” and he smiled knowingly, “I have to wait another week before I get to do that. I have wondered how time could go by so fast. Where has the summer gone? As I have reflected on it, it has been a really great summer. I cannot remember a summer in which farmers like myself have been so blessed. If you have mowed yards, you know that grass has been growing all summer long. It stays green and keeps growing and keeps growing, and for me that has been great because that means that I have lots of hay. There has been a lot of hay put up and the cows have had a lot to eat. They are fat and slick and their calves are doing well, and that’s really great. And my corn is really tall and the ears are really big, and everyone’s corn fields look like it is just going to be a bumper crop. So it has been really good! It gives me a lot of reasons to praise God. The weather has been warm. It hasn’t been extremely hot like some summers. The rains have come when we have needed them. Especially in this area, we haven’t had a lot of real heavy rain. We haven’t had any really bad storms like they have had in some other places. It has just been really timely. So a lot of things there say, ‘Praise the Lord!’

“For me, what I really enjoy is watching how things grow. I love going out and looking at calves and seeing how they change from day to day - how much they have grown. I watch the corn as it grows, and to me that’s the blessing. I know that ultimately you think the blessing is how much money you take in in the fall, and I am sure that’s important; but I think sometimes when things are good like this, we forget where these blessings have come from. We forget that it is God who has given us these things. It is through His love for us that we have these blessings. And it’s not just the farm. When people make money or when they have things, when things are going really good for them, sometimes they have a tendency to think more about what they have and how much more that they want than they think about staying close to God.

“I remember when I was in grade school and we studied the Book of Mormon in Florence’s class, we kept reading about the Nephites. They came to this land and they would do well. They would prosper, and then they would get proud and forget about God and just kind of try to do their own thing. In would come the Lamanites and wipe them out! Then things would be not so good for them. And they would be hurting. Then they would become humble and finally they would turn to God and ask Him for help. He would bless them. They would prosper, get proud and the whole thing would keep repeating itself. And I kept wondering, ‘How could people let that happen? How could those people be like that?’

“But this morning, I wonder, ‘Are we any different? Are we any different than those people were.’ I remember - it has been many years ago, that we had a family in the congregation who had a daughter who got very sick. This was their baby girl, their pride and joy, and they loved her very much. She got very, very sick, and there were a lot of prayers for her. The family got very close to God and were doing the things that they should do - the things God wanted them to do - and their little girl was healed. Her life was spared. But it didn’t seem like it was very long after they received that blessing that they quit coming to church. They quit doing the things that I felt like God wanted them to do. I don’t know why we are like that!

“I read in Jacob 2:14-24 these words: ‘And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you, and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; And because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren, ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks, and high heads, because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren, because ye suppose that ye are better than they.’

“And now my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things, his judgments must speedily come unto you. O that he would shew you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye, he can smite you to the dust. O that he would rid you from this iniquity and abomination. And, O that ye would listen unto the word of his commands, and let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls. Think of your brethren, like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all, and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you. But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ, ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them, for the intent to do good; to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick, and the afflicted.’

“I know sometimes it is easier for us, when we are praying for rain or for a job or for some other need that we have, it’s easier for us to stay close to God during that time. But I think what God is saying to us is that when times are good, we need to stay close to Him. We need to praise His name. We need to do the things that He wants us to do. We need to take care of our brother and we need to have love for those around us and those who have need. We are supposed to help with them and do the things He has instructed us to do.

“This summer has been the first summer since our boys were born that we have not had one of them on the farm. When I thought

about this before the summer began, I thought, 'How am I going to make it? I have extra land here that I am going to put up hay on.' And I thought, 'I've always depended on one of them.' The youngest who is sitting there (Brock) is probably the one I have depended on the most. I depended on them to get the work done, and I didn't see how that was going to happen. And God blessed me, and somehow, even with the bumper crops and things, I have been able to do the work.

"But it's different. It's a real change for Debbie and me to have one boy who is away off in St. Louis - that sounds like a long way to me, but maybe not to you - that we don't get to see very often. We have been fortunate that the other two have kept in fairly close to home so we still get to see them on a regular basis. But I know that the time is going to come when they are going to probably be further away from us and the associations we get to have with them are going to be less and less. Once again, I don't know where the time has gone! I don't know where the years went that we were all together in the family.

"We did have one special weekend this summer when all three of them were here together, and it seemed so good. I felt like the Lord was really blessing me. He blessed me by giving me three sons. I need to praise Him for that blessing and I need to praise Him for the years that we were all there together. I hope I have raised my sons like God wanted me to. I think all of you hope that same thing with your children. I hope that my sons will remember what is really important in life and live their lives as God wants them to live. There just seems to be so many things in our world that can lead our children away from Christ, and I hope Jesus will always be important to our children. I hope they always remember to praise the Lord.

"A week ago, I spent some time with my older sisters and brothers and their families. We don't get together very often, so I don't get to see them very often. It was really good to be together because there has been a new generation of Bastows born - a kind of a baby boom in our family. We have had three babies born recently and we have five others that are older in this next generation. It was really good to be around those little ones for a few days. I praise the Lord for that blessing as well. I remember my aunts and great aunts and uncles and great uncles were such special people to me, and they helped me to become the person that I am. And I hope that my nephews and nieces may remember me with fondness. I know it will be hard because we are so widely scattered, but I pray that I can be an influence even on the lives of these little ones. I hope this generation can also learn about God and about Jesus, about His ways; and I hope they will learn to praise His name.

"I guess why this means so much to me is that when you read in the Book of Mormon, and I have read it lots this week, after Jesus had established His church here in this country, there was a Zion condition that lasted for a long time. It seemed like the first generation that knew Christ kept that. They stayed close to Him and did the things that He wanted them to do. And the second generation did the same thing. But as the generations came on and on and on, eventually they lost that Zion condition. And it worries me what our young ones will do. Where would our congregation be? Imagine what it would be like if we didn't have the younger people. Think of the vitality and the life and the spirit that they bring to this congregation and that they bring to our lives because they are here. And I just hope that we can teach them and that they can learn what the Holy Spirit is all about and what it's like to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

"This summer I attended my thirty-fifth class reunion. I know a lot of you don't think that I look that old, but it's true. I really am. It has been fifteen to twenty years since I had been to one of those, probably because I didn't want to face the fact that I was getting older. But I hadn't been to one for a long time, so there were a lot of people that I hadn't seen for fifteen or twenty years - people that I had been close to during my early years of life, people who were really good friends of mine. So it was a really pleasant experience, and it seemed like the people who came back were all the people that I wanted to see. And the people I really didn't care about seeing or just as soon didn't see, didn't come back to it. I thought that was a real blessing and I praised God for that.

"From that get together, there were several things that were made apparent to me. We went around and introduced ourselves and talked a little bit about ourselves. One thing that I noticed right off was that a lot of my classmates had been married thirty years or longer. You know, I feel really blessed that I have been married to the same woman for over thirty years - that she has put up with me for that length of time. We don't realize how much our life changes depending on who we pick for our helpmate and what a blessing that is to us, especially when we have allowed God to guide us to that person. I really thank Him that He helped me find Debbie. It just seems like in our society right now, that's not the case. You don't find people who have been married and stay married for that length of time. I don't know why that happens, and I really feel sorry for those people that have that happen to them. For me, that would be really difficult.

"There were a few of my classmates who had lost a spouse. I felt really sorry for them, for I don't know how I could deal with something like that. Probably even worse, there were a few who had lost a child. That must have been very difficult for them, too; and there probably would have been a time when they needed help from others and help from God. As I thought about that, I praised God that I haven't had to experience that, but I also asked Him that He might help me to reach out to those people that are experiencing those problems that I might help them to meet their needs and do the things I need to do during that time.

"Probably the thing that had the most impact on me at my class reunion was they had a table set up with pictures of classmates who had passed away. That really struck me. We were in a class of about one hundred, and nine of them were gone. That didn't include several others who had been in my class at one time or another and they were also gone. It just made me realize how temporary this life really is; and I really need to do a better job of letting those that I love know how much I do care for them. And I need to do a better job of letting them know how important the love of Jesus Christ has been in my life and what it can mean to them. They need to know that God is always there for them. They need to know that He's there when times are good and during difficult times.

"We have gathered today as members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and for that we should praise His name. I am fortunate in that this is all I have ever known. Mom and Dad raised me as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, so I didn't have to experience any other way. So I have really been blessed in that regard. We have been blessed with a clear understanding of the love of Jesus Christ, and we know that Christ will soon be coming to restore His kingdom here on this earth. Will we be in Zion when He comes? Will we be there to praise His name?

"I would like to close with Doctrine and Covenants section 65: 'Hearken, and lo, a voice as of one sent down from on high, who is

mighty and powerful, whose going forth is unto the ends of the earth; yea, whose voice is unto men, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth; yea, a voice crying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, prepare ye the supper of the Lamb, make ready for the Bridegroom; pray unto the Lord; call upon his holy name; make known his wonderful works among the people, call upon the Lord, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth; that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth; wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, may be glorified in heaven, so on earth, that thy enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Remember, The Worth of Souls Is Great

Seventy Ronald K. Smith read Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c-f. "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; for, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him on conditions of repentance. he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him on conditions of repentance. And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth. Wherefore you are called to cry repentance unto this people. And if it so be that you should labor all your days, in crying repentance unto this people, and bring save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God!" he repeated, emphasizing the word great.

Ron and Di sang, "Have You Seen Jesus My Lord" and Ron brought his guitar to the pulpit with him preparing to lead the congregation in singing, as the Nigerian congregations from which he had just come would sing, the words that he had placed on the white board in the front of the room. Then he spoke: "It's good to be back with you and to have an opportunity to share some of the things that the Lord has done, and to share the gospel. There's hardly any place where the gospel is said better than it is in Section 16 of the Doctrine and Covenants, paragraph 3 - 'Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Wherefore the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh ... (He) suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him on conditions of repentance. And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!' So we are called to cry repentance to all people.

"I would like to share a Nigerian song with you this morning. This is one with the English words of which you are familiar. In English it says, 'Jesus. He died, He rose, He lives. Jesus!' In Nigerian it is, "Jesus, Onwuru, Obiliri, Onadi ndu. Jesus." Brother Smith explained that this is the Ibu tongue. Although Nigeria is technically English speaking, there are tribal languages which the

people speak, and Ibu is one of the three most common ones. After teaching the congregation to sing in Ibu, we again sang in English with the additional phrase, We live in Him, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!"

"The Saints from Nigeria send their greetings. Hensley Mbanasso and his wife Gloria and their children are most anxious to greet you. Many of you have met them and they called a lot of you by name and wanted to make sure that I passed on their greetings. Those who don't know you personally but are your brothers and sisters also send greetings and would like you to know that they are thinking of you and are praying for you.

"I thought we would start off today with a recitation of the gospel - Jesus died, He died for our sins because our sins are the things that separate us from God. He rose because He has power over life and death, and He rose because He wants all of us to have immortality and eternal life. We, too, shall rise again, and when we rise, we will see God and will see each other as He sees us and we will know as we are known. We will see all the things that we have ever done - ever done! And those things which Jesus has taken on Himself to suffer for us we will see, too; but we won't see those in ourselves but will see those in Him! We will stand before our God some day, and He says, 'How great will be His joy if we have repented and are in the kingdom along with Him. That's what He wants for all people.

"There are so many different voices out there. If you go to Nigeria you will find it a lot different than in the United States. You always have time to wait in the airport and my guitar is small enough that I can carry it on the plane with me, so I pulled out my guitar in the airport in Chicago and sang a little bit, but it was basically playing and singing to myself. There was another family that I was sitting by that showed some interest. It was about that time that I found I was sitting in the wrong terminal and had to rush off, and still nearly missed my plane.

"In Nigeria, we flew from Lagos to Owerri. It would be about a ten hour bus ride, and I said, 'Why, I can ride a bus for ten hours!' But Hensley wouldn't let us ride the bus, not because of the ten hours but because of his concern for our safety. He said, if they see the white guys on the bus, both the police and the robbers think that the bus is full of money. He said they have been known to shoot people for not giving them 20 nira, about a 15 cent, bribe. So we had some time in the airport in the country. While we were sitting in the Lagos airport, I started to play. Pretty soon there were people sitting over at the bar who were singing. There were people on my left and on my right, and they were all singing the hymns. A nun came over and sat down beside Hensley, and the people started making requests. If I had gotten up and started preaching, that would have been fine! It's a little bit different than here in the United States where everything has to be private and personal and it's fine to have your religion, but just don't tell me about it! It was quite nice and when we had to leave for the plane, the nun said, "You just made my day!" It was just fabulous!

"We have there a situation where people are preaching Christ everywhere you turn. You turn on the TV and there is a crusade. There is a lot of preaching that talks about repentance, but they don't see repentance as essential to the gospel - as an essential part of partaking in what Jesus has done as we understand the fullness of the gospel to be. We have to cease doing evil and learn to do well to have the blood of Jesus cover us, as they would say. And repentance is so important! Jesus said, 'Why do ye call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?' And He said, 'I'll tell you what it is like. If a man hears me and doesn't do the things that I say,

he is like a man who builds his house upon the sand.' Now, this person is going to build a house and it will look nice, maybe mighty nice, but he is going to have to build it twice because when the storms come, it is going to be flattened.

"But, Jesus says, 'The person who hears My voice and does what I say, I will liken him to a man who builds his house on a rock, and when the storms come and beat on it and the floods press against it, it's not going to fall!' Repentance is like that. While we were in Nigeria, we met many, many people who longed for Zion and who longed for the time when we will all be of one heart and one mind and dwell in righteousness together, and there will be no poor among us. Many, many of our brothers and sisters who have that desire, pray for it. They have what they call Friday night vigils where they stay up all Friday night and praise the Lord and pray. They meet on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night, Thursday night and for Friday night vigil. I have come to appreciate in a way I had not before the meaning of the gospel in their lives. They want to get it straight. They want the fulness of the gospel. They want to hear it. They want to know it. They want to have the scriptures. They want to have the gospel as we understand it, and they are willing to listen and to hear whatever we have to say, which is kind of scary sometimes, but that's just the way it is!

"On my recent missionary trip to Nigeria in August of 2004, I had two powerful experiences regarding the order of the church. I would like to relate them to you and give my interpretation, and I pray that the Spirit will bear witness of that which is true. The first occurred during a class I was conducting with Priesthood. Some were nonmember Pastors." Ron explained, "In Nigeria we have a situation where a number of the people who have responded to the gospel are men who were friends with Hensley from the time he was in Bible School studying to be a Methodist minister. Many of those have responded to the gospel and some have been baptized but not all. Whether they are Priesthood members or not, they still have their congregations and lead their worship. They understand what Priesthood is about and so it is not a matter of not understanding, but it's a different cultural situation. I believe that the testimony of the gospel is sure and eventually things will be in good order in the way we would understand good order; but it's something that has to be struggled with because these pastors are going to church all of the time. They are trying to meet the spiritual needs of the people. So we had not only the Restoration Priesthood but also some of the pastors who are interested in the gospel who were there listening to the things we had to say in this class as well. Some were nonmember pastors of other denominations of the Restoration branches in Umuahia, the town where Hensley has the church. There are five different Restoration congregations in Nigeria, one in Lagos, one in Umuahia, in Ugweke, in Owerri and one in the Farm Settlement which is not far from Umuahia.

"We were at a youth retreat. Anybody who is not married is youth, whether they are forty years old or five. So we had all the way from five to forty all in one class in this youth retreat, and they all sat there for several hours to listen to the things that we had to say. I would have broken them up into smaller groups if I had had some warning. We did split off the pastors and have a class with them.

A Class for the Pastors

"I presented the New Testament church and its offices using the body of Christ as an analogy. Many of you have seen the slides where the church building is the analogy with the Priesthood as the foundation and the love as the cap, and stewardship and all the other things on the church. The other way to do that, and many of

you have seen this, is with the body of Christ as the analogy. Jesus is the head and the prophet is the neck that connects the body to the head and speaks. You have the Apostles who are the right shoulder and the Seventies who are the right arm. You have the High Priests which are the left side, and the Bishops the left arm. You have the Evangelists and the Pastors, which are the middle, and the legs are the standing ministry which are the Elders and Priests, Teachers and Deacons. So you have that analogy of the body of Christ. I presented that and went through the various offices. All of these offices are talked about in the New Testament church, but there is no indication of what such offices should do. So we have to go to the Doctrine and Covenants, to Section seventeen to find out what those offices are for. I went through each one of the standing ministers and talked about what each one of them did. Then there were questions that were particularly pointed questions for those of us in the Restoration. Do we expect a prophet soon? Do we have Apostles in the Restoration? How many Bishops are there? Is there a store house? Is it realistic to expect this type of organization, given the state of the Restoration branches today?

"Those are questions coming from people who are very acquainted with our history. They are committed to the Restoration. They are committed to the gospel. Some of them know Grant McMurray and others personally because of their connections with the Community of Christ church in times past. So we are talking about very pointed questions. Our answers sounded a little bit lame to me. 'Well, we still have people who speak prophetically.' 'No, we don't recognize Apostles in Restoration branches. We have a few Seventy. I know a couple of Bishops. I know there are store houses in individual congregations, but not in any larger organization than that.'

"We went on trying to answer their questions, and they were not mean spirited questions. They just wanted to know they were questions that I had, and questions that perhaps you have as well. While I was sitting there, the Spirit of God brought to my mind Section 58 of the Doctrine and Covenants. While it's not directly related to answering the questions that were being asked, I was prompted to read it then, and I would like to read Section 58, paragraph 3 to you now. 'Remember this which I tell you before, that you may lay it to heart, and receive that which shall follow. Behold, verily I say unto you, For this cause I have sent you that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come; and also that you might be honored of laying the foundation, and of bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand; and also that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. Firstly, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble; and after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come. Behold, I, the Lord, have spoken it.'

"I read that verse and under the influence of the Spirit I bore record of the land of Zion. This land is where the Zion of God will stand! And there is a feast of fat things which the Lord has prepared for all nations, which is the gospel. And all nations are invited to that feast, firstly the rich, the learned, the wise and the noble. Where did the gospel first go? It went to the United States, to England, to the British Commonwealth, Canada, Australia - all of those rich,

learned, wise, noble - the first nations of the earth. And then He says, comes the day of My power. And then the invitation will go to the blind, the lame, the halt - the third world nations. And I said, 'That's where the gospel is going, and this is the day of the Lord's power, and this is being fulfilled in your ears.' We ended with a prayer that was heart felt - praying that the day would come when Zion would be - when we would be of one heart and one mind and dwell in righteousness and there would be no poor among us.

"The next day, the same group of men asked for another class on church growth. I had nothing to say on the subject, but John Larson was anxious to teach the class 'I'll teach that class'. So John taught the class. He pointed out a really nice correlation between the standing ministry - the offices of Deacon and Teacher, Priest and Elder- and how those are intended to fulfill the needs of the families within the congregation - and the ministry of the Seventies, High Priests, Bishops and Apostles and how those fulfilled similar needs between congregations. And he talked about Stake organizations where a Bishop had a storehouse where these needs between congregations could be met in the church organization as a whole. He gave a really good class talking about those things. He got about half way through his presentation, and he was pressed with the same questions with which I had been pressed the day before.

"John took a piece of chalk. He had drawn the Elders, Priests Teachers, Deacons and Pastors at the bottom of the board. The Apostles, Seventies, High Priests and Bishops were up above. He drew a horizontal line between the two groups and said, pointing to those below the line, 'This is the organization we can offer you at this time.' Pointing above the line he said, 'We are not here at this time.'

"At this point there were a number of insightful questions, a couple of which I would like to try and quote. I don't have the exact quotes with me. Brother Mbanasso, who I told you this morning is a man whose choice to go with the Restoration nearly cost him his life. His father was sharpening his knife to kill him. He said, 'We don't want to be a church that is disconnected from the head. We want to have the Prophet and Apostles. We need the ministry of the Bishops. We need the storehouse. We need these ministries!'

"Prince Obioma who is also an Elder and in the pastorate at Umuahia said, 'You guys are always worried about us. You don't have to worry. The foundation of the gospel is sure. It's the structure that needs work. We need the ministry of the whole body of Christ!'

"At this point, the whole class just exploded with animated agreement and questions. In our classes we tend to just sit and let somebody talk, but not there. You can tell when people get excited because it just comes from everywhere all at once. And they started talking about the possibility of sending missionaries to Zion to plead with us to get our act in gear so they could have the ministry of the fulness of the gospel. And I never thought about it quite like this before, but these Saints are keenly aware of the need to organize at a higher level than branches as is required by the law of the church. And they desperately need Bishops and a storehouse in operation. And they need High Priests for interpreting the law, and Prophets and Apostles and Patriarchs. At present they are forced to concoct a national council which tries to deal with the lack of these ministries. That is exactly what they are dealing with - How do you handle tithing? What do you do with the funds that are there, as meager as they are? They have every Sunday a tithing gathering, and then they have their regular offering. Then they have their regular offering again. Everybody comes to the front and they have their dancing as they put their gift in, which might not go big here,

but they are serious about this stuff!

Cause to Repent

"It occurs to me that the Restoration branches in the United States have great cause to repent! And I have great cause to repent. We have grown content to live without the ministry of Bishops and without a storehouse because we are rich - because we have the things that we need. And if we have the things that we need, why do we need the storehouse to go to for an inheritance? But the poor need that, and it is the rich who can set it up. And why didn't we set it up while we were rich? The time will come. Jesus tells us in Third Nephi, 9:101-103, "Yea, wo be unto the Gentiles, except they repent, for it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Father, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots, and I will cut off the cities of thy land and throw down all thy strongholds; And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy hand, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: Thy graven images I will also cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the works of thy hands;"

"He promises that He is going to cut off our chariots. What are our chariots? Our cars. That's how we get around. Jesus says, 'I'm going to cut that off and it's not going to be there for you.' Now, what's going to happen to us when we are in that kind of situation? Will we need the ministry of Bishops? Will we need a storehouse? Yes, we will. And if we don't repent pretty soon, we aren't going to have it, because we have been content to just let it go! You see, the gospel is not just for us. It's for the world. And the fulness of the gospel is for the world - not just half of it - not just the half that we have been content to keep.

A Plea To qualify as the Patriarchs have Requested

"So now, you may ask, 'What's the answer?' 'What big thing does Ron have up his sleeve?' Well, I don't have anything up my sleeve. I am pleading with you to join with the request of the Patriarchs to fast and pray and ask for God's direction in this. I believe that it is within the law to have a conference that would be a conference where anyone who feels like they have been baptized into the covenant and are a member of the church should be invited. And I think we should invite everybody. I don't think we should say, 'Oh, just if you are in a Restoration branch and you believe this and this and this should you come.' I think we should invite absolutely everybody and talk about what's to be done. The Lord says that in the last day there will be two churches. Some people have had a narrow construction on that and believe that, 'It's going to be my branch against everybody else!' Well, that's not how it's going to be, folks. It's going to be just two churches, and we need to decide that we are big enough to be part of the church of Jesus Christ. He says we can't be that if we are mistrusting everyone. We are going to have to trust people somehow, and we are going to have to trust the Lord. We are going to have to come together at a conference, and I believe that even if we didn't organize at the church level where there are Apostles and a Prophet right away, because you know the church dealt with that back in 1852 when they organized when there weren't a Prophet and Apostles to begin with. Those quorums weren't full.

"I believe that we could as a body authorize a stake in that the Lord has told us to have stakes, and I don't think He ever rescinded that instruction. And I believe that we could have a Stake President and we could have a High Priest quorum, not the standing high council for the church but a High Council for the Stake. And I believe that at least all of the offices up through the High Priests and the Bishopric could be salvaged. And I believe we could have

storehouses that would work where we could take our tithes, and that would restore again that ministry to us. I think this is within the law. There are those who don't agree with that, but we need to talk about it. We need to have the discussion.

"And I think that if there is another reorganization - if the Lord allows that - it is going to be bigger than just the Restoration branches that perhaps we recognize. I believe that there is power, that there is Priesthood authority in some other people besides the Restoration branches. Now this is the part I am worried about having recorded here. But I want to just talk to you for just a second about an experience I had with Brother Joseph F. Smith.

"I was over at Woodbine. Di and I had just gotten in on Sunday night. It was late and the service was just starting. They showed us the trailer where we were going to be staying. We didn't have time to move in our stuff, but we ran up to be with the congregation for the service.

"After the service we ran back down so we could get our stuff moved in before it got dark. We didn't quite make it, but while we were moving in, a young man came and asked, 'Could you come and administer to my sister?' I said I would be glad to do that and asked whether he had anybody else in mind. He said, 'No, I don't. I don't care who else. Just get somebody.' So I began looking for an Elder. I only knew where one other Elder lived on the camp grounds and I went to his trailer. He wasn't back from the service yet. So I went randomly from trailer to trailer, knocking on doors. Nobody was down from the service as yet. And I said, 'Lord. I can administer by myself. I have done that before, but if You want somebody else with me, You are going to have to send them.

"Just then I saw a car that I believe just drove up at that time. I saw in profile this man's head and I thought it was Vince Argotsinger, and I said, 'Oh! Thank You, Lord! I have somebody to administer with me.' So I went over and knocked on the glass. I still couldn't see his face because he was looking for the thing to roll down the window. I said, 'Can you come and administer?' He turned to me and said, 'Yes'. Then I realized it wasn't Vince Argotsinger. I didn't know this person, and I said, 'Oh, are you an Elder?' and he said, 'Yes.'

"I said, 'I'm Ron Smith.' and he said, 'I am Joseph Smith.' We shook hands. I knew who he was then, and I thought, 'Well! Joseph Smith? I wouldn't have asked him if it had just been me, but it seemed like I had prayed and the Lord put him there and he said he was an Elder and was ready to go.' So I took him over and we administered. The next morning we were asked to administer again during the prayer service, and the young lady walked around all day and was fine. I assumed that the administration had some power in it. From that and also from the Spirit I had felt when we administered, here is a man from the Church of Christ. I believe that he has the power, the authority to baptize as well.

"So I am telling you that we at least have under the law, I believe, the authority to have a conference, or at least a representative conference, it might have to be representative of some kind, as long as it's open to all members, that we could authorize Stake ministry. Do I know that this is the right way to go? No I don't. Do I know that we have to do whatever we do with one heart and one mind? Yes I do. Do we have to come to common consent about whatever we do? Yes, absolutely!

"And so I am not doing this as a prescription. I'm telling you that there are people in Nigeria, Saints who need the ministry of a more organized church, and we don't have the right to sit on the gospel and say, 'OK. we've got the fulness of the gospel. We will

be glad to tell you about it, but you can only have about half of the ministry because we don't have it because we don't trust one another.

"So I have come to a different point of view over my trip, and I wanted to share that with you. And I wanted to share with you that our hope is in Jesus Christ and that as we will be willing to fast and pray and ask, I believe that this is still Jesus' church. This is still the church that Jesus built, and I believe that He's willing to help us if we will come together and listen for His voice and for what He has to say! Will He cut off our chariots? I think so. No matter how many wars we try to fight, I think the time will come when the chariots will be cut off. Will we need to have the full gospel in place? Yes, we will. Do we need Zion? Yes we do! You and I need it. Our brothers and sisters in Nigeria need it.

Why Do We Need All This?

And why do we need all this? We need it because the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. God wants us to be a people that He can live with - a people of one heart and one mind who dwell together in righteousness. He wants us to be a people where there is no poor among us. And He has given us the means whereby we can do that. He has prepared a feast of fat things and He has invited all nations. And the time has come for the day of His power. This is the day in which all of the prophets longed live. This is the time, this is the generation when Jesus is coming back. I can testify under the Spirit of God of that to you, and I will put my reputation on the line for that one because I really believe that this is the generation when Jesus will return. And we need to have the church in good order.

"I was reminded just now that during this experience I also turned to Matthew the twenty fourth chapter. Right near the end Jesus asks, 'Would the good man of the house have watched if he had known when the thief was coming? If he had known he would have watched, and he would not have allowed his house to be broken up.' Jesus is talking about our day, and I believe that he understands that the church is going to be broken up when He comes because the good man of the house wasn't watching. But he says, 'Blessed are those who are watching, and that servant whom He finds watching when He comes.'

"So I am praying that we will be watching and that we will be willing to do whatever it is that the Lord tells us to do as we go from here that the gospel might be carried into all lands as the Lord intends, and the feast of fat things might be offered to the blind and the lame, and the halt and the poor. And I believe that you and I are going to see those things happening in our life time. And I have begun to pray that I will be able to minister until the time He comes if that's what He would like for me to do! May God bless you all!" Sherman Phipps, in charge of the service, added his brief testimony to what Ron had said. "There are several scriptures that deal with whether we are willing to lay down our life for Christ or for our fellow man. I have been really impressed lately, and I think this fits with what Ron was sharing with us, that when Christ talked about that, He probably wasn't talking about it in terms that I have always thought about it. I have always thought, 'Am I willing to die?' But I have been impressed lately that it has more to do with, 'Am I willing to lay down the life style that we have? Are we willing to give up the life that we have lived and grown accustomed to in order to have Zion? Are we willing to do that?'"

Music Service

Ministers Again

When there is a five Sunday month, we worship in music at Mount Ayr. August 29 Steven Smith was in charge of the service and began with prayer and then an account of his recent experience with Thoric assisting to build porches on their home. At first Thoric could only set the screws slowly, about a third as fast as his father. But instead of having him stop, he was allowed to continue and in a couple of hours was able to set them as fast as his more experienced father. Our Heavenly Father does not say to us, "Stop! You are doing it too slow!" He is glad to have our help. In Doctrine and Covenants, Section 10, He talks about our thrusting in and helping out."

With that Elder Smith introduced the first participants. Robert Rolfe sang the story of Jairus, the ruler of the Synagogue whose little daughter died and was raised from the dead by Jesus. The story is recounted in Mark 5 and Luke 8 but never with quite the pathos Rob expresses of a father who has experienced all the emotions of watching his child near death, seeking help for his daughter from one whose reputation gave him hope, being told she is dead, seeing her brought back to life and then being told not to tell how it happened. The song ends with the plea, "I gotta tell to tell somebody! I gotta to tell somebody! I've got to tell somebody!"

Aquila Galusha accompanied his mother, Yvonne as she sang the familiar and beloved, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in three tempos with the final, "Thou wilt find a solace there" pronounced with grace and assurance.

Sue Beck, sang without accompaniment, the song we know and love that speaks of "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine! Oh what a foretaste of Glory Divine," then affirms sincerely, "This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long!"

Diane Anderson's contribution was a patriotic one expressing our faith that God has a place in the future of all nations. On her flute she played a medley of themes: "America the Beautiful", "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and Canada's National Anthem, "O Canada!" each of which expresses dependence on God for a future with hope.

Rex Lin accompanied his brother Titus and his cousin Jimmy as they all three sang a song of Taiwan in their native language. Rex learned the guitar under the instruction of Ron Smith during last Winter term at Graceland.

Our presider read from Doctrine and Covenants 10:3-4: "Now as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, Keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion. Seek not for riches, but for wisdom, and, behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich; behold, he that hath eternal life is rich.

"Verily, verily I say unto you, Even as you desire of me, so shall it be done unto you; and, if you desire you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation. Say nothing but repentance unto this generation. Keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed."

While waiting for the ushers who were to take their place to receive the monetary offerings, Bother Smith commented, "As I was hearing the Battle Hymn of the Republic, I was thinking, 'It's interesting to remember that that hymn was written in the South and it became so popular that it became the hymn the northerners used;

whereas 'The Land of Cotton' was written in the north and became so popular that it was used in the south.' Sometimes we don't know where our gifts are going to go when we utilize those gifts."

A prayer of thanks for our opportunity to share in our offerings of every nature was offered and the offertory was played by Jan Jordison.

Jazmyn Galusha sang, with power and conviction, "Our God is an Awesome God" backed by a recorded orchestra and chorus. She signed along with the song.

Beth Knotts, accompanied by Pat Bolingbroke at the piano, sang with deep compassion, a prayer that we may have our hearts softened as we learn to concern ourselves with the needs of those about us: brothers and sisters of mine who are hungry and/or homeless - strangers and neighbors whose anguish should concern me. People are they, persons, who like me are made in God's image; "so what shall I offer them, bread or a stone?" (Hymn #388 in the Hymnal.)

Alan and Valle Smith harmonized as they sang the praise hymn that begins, "Teach Me God to Wonder. Teach me God to see. Let your world of beauty capture me." and goes on to pray for greater perception of the beauty and love of God and greater participation in His purposes on the earth. (Hymn # 176 in the Hymnal.)

Michael Jordison sang the story of Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to the cross asking over and over, "Oh, why didn't He lie?" From the time Judas kissed him on his cheek, He could have saved Himself. but he said, 'I am the one you seek. Let the others go.' Before the Highest Priest who asked Him "Are you the Christ?" He said, "I Am." "Oh, Why didn't He lie?" When they said He should be crucified, "Oh, Why didn't He lie. Why, oh, why did He have to die? Why didn't He save himself?" Then comes the answer. "I'll tell you why. He loved you and I!"

Again our presider turned to Section 10 reading verses 5 and 6: "Behold, thou hast a gift, or thou shalt have a gift if thou wilt desire of me in faith, with an honest heart, believing in the power of Jesus Christ, or in my power which speaketh unto thee; for, behold, it is I that speak; behold, I am the light which shineth in darkness, and by my power I give these words unto thee. And now, verily, verily I say unto thee, Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit."

Jan and Barbra Jordison sang in mother-daughter harmony the poignant question: "The Savior is waiting to enter your heart. Why don't you let Him come in? Time after time He has waited before. And now He is waiting again to see if you're willing to open the door. Oh, how He wants to come in!"

Ammon Horn, accompanied by Pat Bolingbroke at the piano, sang a prayer of praise for all the things that we enjoy as expressed in the hymn that begins, "For the Beauty of the Earth" and ends each stanza with the words, "Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise."

Ron and Di Smith sang, in a manner sometimes reminiscent of a round, of the worthiness of Jesus, the Lamb of God, to bear God's name. "He is our strength when we are weak", "when we fall, he picks us up, when we are dry, He fills our cup". "He is the treasure that we seek." To us "He's like a precious jewel, To give Him up we'd be a fool! He is our all in all."

Steven concluded the service with a statement summarizing the scriptures he had read from Doctrine and Covenants 10, "The Lord has told us He has a work for us to do. He told us not to seek for riches but to keep His commandments. And He told us that we

have a gift, and if we don't have a gift, we can ask Him for that gift. And if we put our trust in that Spirit which leads us to do good, to do justly and to walk humbly and to judge righteously, He promises,

"Verily, verily I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy, and then shall know, or by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which is pertaining unto things of righteousness, in faith believing in me that you shall receive."

We have a work. We have a gift. So I would like to end with a song benediction:

"May your love embrace even your enemies, and joy be the spark in your eyes. May the shiver down your spine be not anger or fear but peace and contentment inside.

"May you long allow those who don't get it time to learn wisdom from sin. With patience that honors their agency, forgive, pray for and teach them to win.

"May all that you do be good in God's sight, and your warfare be gentle, too. May desire to believe grow into hope 'til faith guides all that you think, say and do.

"Then in your greatness, may you be meek. With strength tempered medal will give. 'Til the Spirit of God becomes one with your spirit, and nourished by its fruit you shall live."

With that benediction we slowly dispersed thanking God for once again blessing us with the gift of music.

Angry With God!

At family worship, August 29, 2004, Lynda Rolfe shared her testimony.

As a young woman, Lynda was angry with God! Rob had decided to go back to school to study law. Lynda went looking for a job that would keep her in the area near Des Moines. At Menlo she interviewed for a school position as an art instructor. The school needed two, one in the high school and one in the elementary school. Lynda thought she should have the one in the high school, but she was offered the one in the elementary school; and she was told she had to take it right then and there. She prayed briefly and took it, but was angry with God that He had not seen to it that she got the one she wanted.

During the school year, Lynda became ill. She had a three pound tumor from which she bled through the sheets to the mattress. She tried to work and fainted in the arms of her principal. She had to be out of school, but her pay checks kept coming even after she no longer had sick leave days.

It was different for the girl who got the High School position. She became pregnant and her principal refused to give her time off for illness. Her husband died, and he would not even give her time off for her husband's funeral! Lynda said, "The Lord picked the right place for me!"

News and Notes

Opening of Universities Brings Changes

With the opening of colleges and universities, Mount Ayr Restoration Branch is again experiencing changes in the number of young people participating in all their activities. Heidi Winkler is a freshman at William Jewell in Liberty, Missouri. Melissa Winkler is in her senior year at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Brandy Anderson is a freshman at CMSU, Central Missouri State University at Warrensburg. Cessaries Galusha is in her second year at the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri, K.C. Keston Smith is a sophomore at the University of Missouri, K.C. Ammon Smith is in his final semester in Graceland. Cara Smith is in her second year of graduate school at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Rex Lin who was graduated by Graceland last spring will soon be returning to his native Taiwan; but his brother Titus and his cousin Jimmy are entering Graceland and are already participating with the congregation along with Anan Smith who returns to Graceland after a summer of work. We look forward to welcoming them each home from time to time. Our prayers are with them. We are thankful, as we heard one youth at the Reunion say, "They are all under the witnessing protection program - Angels are watching over them every one!"

New addresses are:

Brandy Anderson, 331 Nattinger, Warrensburg, MO 64093

brandeyez@hotmail.com

Heidi Winkler, Box 2929, 500 College Hill, Liberty, MO 64068

heidimarie35@hotmail.com

Cessaries Galusha, 5000 Oak St., Apt. 426 No., Kansas City, MO 64112

clgxv3@umkc.edu, Tel. 816 561 1725

Keston Smith, 16602A Gudgeall, Independence, MO 64055

Tel. 816-507-7842

Congregation Chooses Officers

Sunday, August 29 the congregation assembled at 6 PM and chose the following officers for the coming year:

Presiding Elder - Robert Rolfe who chose Alan Smith and Gordon Winkler Counselors at Mt. Ayr, Gerald Bolingbroke and Ronald Smith Counselors at Lamoni. His choices were approved by the congregation.

Caring Coordinator - Jan Jordison

Christian Education Coordinator - Barbra Jordison

Evangelism Coordinator - Michael Jordison

Fellowship Coordinator - Di Smith

Stewardship Coordinator - Gerald Bolingbroke

Worship Coordinator - Patricia Bolingbroke

Worship Center Coordinator - Sue Beck

Youth Ministries Coordinator - Junior- Senior High, Ed & Diane Anderson

Youth Ministries Coordinator - Juniors & Younger, Alan and Valle Smith

Secretary - Kathy Akers:

Recorder - Harold and Kathy Akers

Historian - Mildred Smith: Newsletter - Alan Smith

Building Committee:

2 year term - Gordon Winkler, Sheryl Phipps, Jim Barber

1 year term - Jan Jordison and Tim Mitchell

Women's Leader - Cathy Nelson

From the Pastor's Desk

Continued from page 1

on thee, henceforward, forever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw this, they marvelled (wondered) and said, how soon is the fig tree withered away."

Jesus was hungry and looked at a fig tree that had lots of leaves. When he got to the tree, there were no figs, so he cursed the tree. The tree died within a day. (Mark 11:21-23) His disciples were troubled by his action. Why should he blame the tree? Without getting into a discussion about the "why" possibilities, I will simply presume Jesus acted correctly. His actions are not based on whim or mere emotion. He expected fruit. There was no fruit. The tree was cursed and died. (The fig tree itself is a parable applicable to our time.)

We have a lot of beautiful people in the Restoration. In some ways, these people are like the fig tree-- No fruit and nothing but leaves. These people don't live outwardly bad lives. They just don't produce fruit. Nothing "spiritual" happens in their life. As a result, they have no testimony to give. In short, they are not doing what the master expects, or "producing fruit". How can we be valiant (brave, courageous, bold) in our testimony if we don't tell any? (If we don't have any testimonies, that may be worse) We don't gather figs from thorns, and testimonies don't come from a inwardly turned life. Look at your life. Do you see fruit, or nothing but leaves? Jesus said, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree...(Mark 13:45)

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
Mount Ayr Restoration Branch
607 E. Madison
Mount Ayr, IA 50854

News and Notes

Continued from page 13

Facilities Coordinator - Tim Mitchell

George Knotts requested an item of new business: the appointment of a committee to look into establishment of a mission in Lamoni or removing the congregation to Lamoni. The Pastor acknowledged the timeliness of such a request and asked for time to consider such an appointment prayerfully.

The meeting was closed with the singing of "This God Is The God We Adore, Our Faithful, Unchangeable Friend" and prayer for the Will of God to be done in all our congregation's activities.

Youth Compete at Iowa State Fair

Gabel Galusha advanced to the semi-finals in the Bill Riley talent competition for his age group at the Iowa State Fair. Gabel played Brahms' "Minuet Number 2" on his violin with Cessaries at the piano and Jazmyn on her violin accompanying him. He was asked by Bill Riley to play on another stage for Channel 8 TV. Since there was no piano on that stage, only Jazmyn accompanied him there.

Jazmyn with her fiddle and Akela with his guitar, were featured playing the "Millionaire Hoe Down" on one Channel 8 evening news broadcasts, during the fair. Cessaries also competed in the Senior division for piano.

Missionaries Return From Africa

Seventy Ronald Smith and Priest John Larson returned from their three week missionary journey to Nigeria on Wednesday, August 18. Ronald shared some of his testimonies in both the family worship and the sermon, August 22.

Fall Retreat Imminent

The Fall Retreat for the south and east Iowa Restoration congregations will convene at Jericho Hills at Lucas, Iowa, Friday evening, October 1-3. Lucas is just off of highway 34, sixteen miles east of Osceola. To reach Jericho Hills, drive directly through Lucas, following the main street to the north edge of town, and you are there! We understand that some western Illinois congregations also plan to join us.

This retreat will be different in that there will be no KP required. The host, Jericho Hills, provides all of the food without our assistance. Their representative said, "You pray and eat! That's it!" Of course, we pay as well, but their charges are really reasonable and will be paid, as usual, from the free will donations of the participants either directly or through their participating congregations. Please let your congregation's representative or the registrars, Bud or Mary Drummond, know if you plan to attend so our hosts can plan the food supply adequately, and our teachers can be well prepared, especially for the children.

The Drummond's address is: 4005 No. W. Hidden Points Dr, Independence, Mo 64015; telephone number 816 678 9015. You will need to bring your own bedding, towels, etc. as usual. The dorms and meeting facilities are heated for comfort.

The theme for the weekend is: Thankful Living with a Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit. Guest ministers will include Patriarch Vernon Darling, Seventy Neil Simmons and Elders Dale Godfrey and Douglas Smith. The Mount Ayr congregation is in charge of preparing for the Lord's Supper. Seventy Neill Simmons is planned to be the speaker for that service. Dave Drummond will again be in charge of the healing service. Children and youth workers will include Alberta and Suzie Cunningham, Mary Drummond, Beverly Walker, Robert and Amy Gillam and a host of volunteers.