

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Then I Saw His Face -- Now I'm A Believer!

I remember listening to a sermon in my home church by Apostle Davies. When the sermon ended, I thought to myself, "Why did he stop so soon"? A look at my watch indicated his sermon alone went for 80 minutes. It seemed like it was only 15 minutes.

I have, and continue to have, the privilege of associating with many Godly men. Two men, out of the many, that had a good effect on my life were John Grice and Almer Sheehy. I am including these two ministers as I heard them both give a message through the "gift of tongues", within a year or two of each other. I recall that when Almer was presenting the message in tongues, for some reason, I timed the message. At a certain time, while speaking, he made a very emphatic gesture. I noted the elapsed time of the gesture, during the total message, which lasted about 15 minutes.

When the interpretation was given, he made the same gesture at exactly the same elapsed time as the previous one. There wasn't any question in my mind that this "gift" was a bona fide expression of the Holy Spirit. The power of message and the miraculous insight given, bore testimony to me of its validity.

We have talked about the absence of "spiritual gifts" in the church today. The "gifts of the spirit" are not totally absent, but I have not experienced the "gift of tongues" in a long time. Why is that, do

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TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Today We Give Up Our Sins!

Priest Ed Anderson spoke before the emblems of the Lord's Supper were served on September 5. "It is so great to see so many people who have come to kneel before your Lord and to surrender your sins. Literally, we give them up today! We say we are not going to do them again! This is the day. This is the beginning of the first day of the rest of our lives. This shows to those around us where it is important. When we say we give our sins up, that means tomorrow we don't do them! Somebody out there, somebody close to us should see a difference in us, shouldn't they? If we have given something up, somebody should see the Spirit of God working through us. Somebody should see that little halo. You see that in pictures.

"I remember when we were going down to Warrensburg as students, I got to talking to a girl, a lady now, in the book line. (Then you rented your books for ten bucks. You got them all. Now they cost Brandy four hundred dollars!) I invited her to Liahona, and she went -- probably a month after school started. And she says, 'Hey, I saw this girl in one of my classes and I saw this guy in one of my classes. I knew there was something different about them, but I didn't know what it was; but now I do know. Now I know why these people are different. It's because they have hope and they have Christ in their lives. They are different. They adhere to and practice what they believe in.

"I've been kind of busy this week. A lot of different kinds of things going on - a lot of kind of life changing situations. First of all, mother just signed herself into the nursing home in Lamoni. Just out of the blue, she said, 'I'm going to go to the nursing home.' She didn't ask anybody, didn't consult anybody. My nephew came by and says, 'Your Mom's in the nursing home!' 'Really?' But I remember the strength and the teachings that she gave me as a kid. I remember the things we did together, and I think, 'Has it been that far off? Has it been that long ago?' 'Have any of those feelings changed since then for my Mother and for her for me?' And I'm thinking, 'I hope not!' It made me think, 'What is important?' We are so involved in our minute by minute events that we lose sight of 'The Force', as they say. If we get so involved in ourselves and the

events in our lives do we take the time - or do we have the time to look around us?

“There are a lot of people here today who are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus the Christ. There are another 249,000,000 people in the United States who don't know, don't care, don't understand. For whatever reason, they are probably not attending church this morning, not making that commitment. God loves them just as much as He loves us. We're not perfect. We have nothing on them other than more responsibility to spread the gospel - to tell the gospel to bring those people to the knowledge of the gospel that their lives might change.

“Anybody remember Enos - the young man who went out into the forest hunting, and the things his father had taught him about Christ weighed heavily upon him? He sought repentance for a day. He prayed for a day for forgiveness and he received it. What was his first thought afterwards? His thought afterwards was, 'I have got to share that!' He then prayed for his friends and relatives.

“We kind of get what we pay for. How many like to go shopping?” Our speaker noted that not many men's hands went up; and he described himself as one who doesn't mind shopping for something he needs but wants to go in, buy it and walk out. “I get what I pay for. If I see two items that perform the same function. One will only last the first time I use it. The other will last months. The first one costs fifty-nine cents. The second one costs seven dollars and thirty-five cents. I would like to pay the seven dollars and thirty-five cents to know that I have it available when I need to use it the second time.

“That's the way with the gospel. What have we put in it? How much have we given? How important is it? Is it something we just want to use on Sundays and maybe Reunion week?, Camp? Liahona meeting? Or is it a full gift that we are purchasing?

“I do some volunteer coaching. Athletes say, 'I am going to be a professional baseball player.' 'I'm going to be a basketball player'. But that's as far as it goes. There is no practice like going out to play catch. There is no lifting weights. There is no mental preparation. There is no short cut here. There are no short cuts in salvation. Sunday Christians probably have the same attitude. 'I'm a Christian. I believe.' What does Christ say about that? 'Not all that cry unto me and say, 'Lord, Lord', are going to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'

“There is no short cut. We have to pay the price. Christ has come and died for us, and we have to pay the price. And the price is surrender unto Him. His will is our will. His desires are our desires. The way is prepared. Salvation is there free. He's already given it. All we have to do is accept it and act on it.

“Today there seems to be a craze out here somewhere, in the legal system in particular, to make everyone accountable. What they mean by accountable is not what is acceptable to me. Carried to the extremes, their accountable means that there is no repentance or forgiveness. When we pick a person apart because of the small stuff, we are trying to deny them the ability to repent. Those 249 million people that are out there are sinners like us, and it is our responsibility to bring them to repentance - bring them to understand. Our responsibility is not to make them perfect. Our responsibility is to accept them and love them as Christ loves them. That's a tough one! Some of them have some pretty bad habits that are totally unacceptable to our sensitivities of righteousness; but how can you minister to somebody for whom you can't get by those sensitivities - really can't reach out? The scriptures say, 'Judge not lest ye be judged.' Again this is part of righteousness. This is a part

of the Kingdom of God. This is part of when we kneel down before Christ and accept Him and partake of the Sacrament, judging unrighteously is a sin.

“There are so many ways that we as a people need to respond to Christ -so many angles to the story. I see it in court cases and things like on television. The people are saying one thing. The accuser says, 'What about this? You didn't say anything about this.' And the stories about Joseph Smith as far as his account of what happened in the grove, Each one is different. Well, I tell a story differently every time I tell it. It depends on the people to whom I am telling it. Let's not hold people accountable to the extremes that we don't accept them. Let's not hold them accountable to the point that we deny them the right to repent. We have no right to demand that of anyone - to say, 'You are such a sinner that you can't be accepted by Christ.' That's not true. Life is a learning experience. Christ calls us that we must give Him our best effort. That's what required. What's the rest of it? The rest of it is His grace which comes down and forgives us for those things we don't seem to be able to handle. As long as we are trying, His grace is sufficient for us. And as we partake of the Sacrament, that is a step in trying.”

The Conversions of an Atheist and a Protestant

On Sunday, September 12, Elder Gerald Bolingbroke brought the morning message to the congregation. He began his sermon with a scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants Section 85:21 b-e.

“And I give unto you a commandment, that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the Kingdom; teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principal, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that is expedient for you to understand; of things both in heaven, and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been; things which are; things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home; things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nation; and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries, and of kingdoms, that when I shall send you again, to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you. and the mission with which I have commissioned you.

Brother Bolingbroke went on to explain that he had recently read a book called *The Case for Christ*. by Lee Strobel. He was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune. At the time he was a journalist, he considered himself an atheist. He received a call from his wife in the autumn of 1979 saying that she had become a Christian. He rolled his eyes and braced for the worst. He expected her to be a fanatic Christian, but he was surprised when Leslie changed her character, her integrity, and her confidence. He decided to see what was at the bottom of the significant shifts in his wife's attitude. He decided to launch an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity. He was searching for an expert who had integrity, who spoke authoritatively. He was told that Craig L. Blomberg, PH. D., was the person to see.

Craig Blomberg is widely considered to be one of the country's foremost authorities on the biographies of Jesus, which are called the four gospels. He received his doctorate in New Testament from the University of Scotland. For the last dozen years he has been a

professor of New Testament, the highly respected Denver Seminary. Blomberg's books include *Jesus and the Gospels*, *Interpreting the Parables*, and *How Wide the Divide*. Lee expected Blomberg's office to be dominated by dusty books from ancient historians, but it was dominated by artwork from his young daughters. Blomberg spoke with the precision of a mathematician. He had taught mathematics, earlier in his career.

Lee asked Blomberg this question: "Is it really possible to believe that the four gospels were written by the names attached to them?" Blomberg answered, "Yes." He went on to say that the uniform testimony was that Matthew, also known as Levi, the tax collector and one of the twelve apostles was the author of the first Gospel in the New Testament, and that John Mark, a companion of Peter was the author of the Gospel we call Mark. Luke, known as Paul's beloved physician, wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. "What about John?" Lee asked. Blomberg answered, "John is the only Gospel about which there is some question of authorship. The name is not in doubt, it is certainly John. The question is whether it is John the Apostle or a different John. You see, the testimony of a Christian writer named Papias, dated about A.D. 125, refers to John the Apostle and John the Elder, and it is not clear whether he is talking about one person from two perspectives or two different people. But granted that exception, the rest of the early testimony is unanimous that it was John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee who wrote the gospel."

Brother Bolingbroke expressed his belief that from the point of the Restoration Gospel it seems as if Papias was talking about the same person when he mentioned John the Apostle and John the Elder.

Lee asked Blomberg if he believed John was written by the Apostle John. Blomberg replied that he did believe that it was the Apostle John and went on to say, "However, if you read the Gospel of John closely, you can see some indication that its concluding verses may have been finalized by an editor. Personally, I have no problem believing that somebody closely associated with John may have functioned in that role. But in any event," Blomberg stressed, "The gospel is obviously based on eyewitness material, as are the other three gospels."

A scripture from John 1 expresses Apostle John's understanding of the purpose of Christ. Brother Bolingbroke added it for our understanding as well: "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made. In him was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men; and the light shineth in the world, and the world perceiveth it not." And also from John 8, "Then spake Jesus unto them again saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Lee, the atheist, challenged Blomberg by saying, "Look at Mark-- he doesn't talk about the birth of Jesus or really anything through Jesus' early adult years. Instead he focuses on a three year period and spends half his gospel on the events leading up to and culminating in Jesus' last week. How do you explain that?"

Blomberg held up a couple of fingers. "There are two reasons," he replied. "One is literary and the other is theological. The literary reason is how people wrote biographies in the ancient world. They did not give equal proportion to all periods of an individual's life. Ancient Greek and Hebrews didn't even have a symbol for quota-

tion marks. The biographer wanted to dwell at length on those portions of the person's life that were exemplary, that were illustrative, that could help other people, that gave meaning to a period of history."

"And what is the theological reason?" Lee asked. Blomberg answered, "Christians believe that as wonderful as Jesus' life and teaching and miracles were, they were meaningless if it were not historically factual that Christ died and was raised from the dead and that this provided atonement, or forgiveness, of the sins of humanity."

Another thing that Blomberg told Lee was in reference to the verse from Matthew 14:22-23 where the apostles were on the boat, and they saw a man walking on water, and they were afraid. In the Bible it says "Be of good cheer, it is I." Blomberg told Lee that in the Greek language the scripture reads "Be of good cheer, it is I am." This is the same expression that God said to Moses in Exodus. This led Blomberg to believe that the God of Israel was Jesus. This is significant as most protestants believe that Jesus only came in the meridian of time when he came as a baby.

The third interview Lee had was with Edwin Yamauchi at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Lee walked under a stone arch bearing this inscription: Ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Edwin Yamauchi was born in Hawaii in 1937, the son of immigrants from Okinawa. His father had died just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, leaving his mother to earn a meager living as a maid for wealthy families. His academic accomplishments were impressive. After earning a bachelor's degree in Hebrew and Hellenistics, Yamauchi received masters and doctoral degrees in Mediterranean studies from Brandies University.

He was awarded eight fellowships. He has studied twenty-two languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Egyptian, Russian, and Comanche. He has delivered seventy-one papers before learned societies. He has lectured at more than one hundred seminaries, universities, and colleges. including Yale, Princeton, and Cornell.

Though born into a Buddhist background, Edwin has been a follower of Jesus since 1952. Lee found Edwin to have a gentle and unassuming demeanor. The first question he asked Edwin was, "As a historian, could you give me your assessment of the historical reliability of the Gospels themselves?" Edwin answered, "On the whole, the Gospels are excellent sources, reliable, trustworthy, and complete."

Lee said one of the most problematic references in the New Testament is where the gospel writers claim that the earth went dark during part of the time that Jesus hung on the cross. He asked Edwin if there wouldn't be at least some mention outside the Bible of this event. Edwin told him that Dr. Gary Habermas has written about a historian named Thallus who in A.D. 52 wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world since the Trojan War. Although Thallus's work has been lost, it was quoted by Julius Africanus in about A.D. 22---and it made reference to the darkness that the gospels had written about! Africanus says, "Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun, unreasonably, as it seems to me." So Thallus, apparently was saying yes, there had been darkness at the time of the Crucifixion, and he speculated it had been caused by an eclipse of the sun.

Yamauchi reached over his desk to retrieve a piece of paper. "Let me quote what scholar Paul Maier said about the darkness in a footnote in his 1968 book *Pontius Pilate*. He said, reading the words, 'This phenomenon evidently was visible in Rome, Athens, and other Mediterranean cities. According to Tertullian....it was a

“cosmic” or “world event.” Phlegon, a Greek author from Caria writing a chronology soon after 137 A.D., reported that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympian (i.e., 33 A.D.) there was “the greatest eclipse of the sun” and that “it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.”

The scripture from Luke 23 was included by Brother Bolingbroke. It that tells us about the darkness that came over the earth at the time of Christ’s crucifixion: “It was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. And having said thus he gave up the ghost.”

Lee Strobel interviewed six experts on the Gospels and finally became convinced that they were reliable. He became a Christian and today is a teaching pastor of a nondenominational church in Chicago called Willow Creek. This church has 15,000 members. The budget for this church in 1991, the last year in which figures were available, was \$16.6 million, including \$14.2 million from member contributions and \$1.8 million from audio tape and book sales. Its \$10.3 million operations budget included \$85,000 just to control traffic. Its annual utility bill was \$388,000. The budget includes \$5.5 million just for salaries, as the church employs a vast number of employees who are hired to help with the needs of the congregation. While the church’s huge following affords enormous resources, it also keeps much of the congregation from getting to know each other and from having a personal relationship with the senior pastor. At Willow Creek there are no prayer books, no crosses, no vestments and no candles. The altar is a bare stage. At the heart of the church are two different kinds of services held every week on Wednesday and Thursday nights called New Community, for members of the faithful who prefer to pursue a more traditional approach to worship, and two each on Saturday night and Sunday morning, called seeker services. The weekend seeker services start with music. But the choir has given way to a pop singer, and the organ to a ten-piece rock band. Instead of a ceremony, actors present a skit in which they illustrate contemporary problems such as grief and workplace stress. People are looking for easy places of worship which entertain them. Lee’s commitment to bringing others to a knowledge and belief in Christ are evident.

Next Brother Bolingbroke told the congregation a testimony about a member of the Restoration Gospel as he also searched for the truth. The testimony is titled “He Honored the Truth” by Mae and Ralph Fishel. It is about the conversion of Edward Roff.

The Vancouver, Washington, Church Reunion was held during this story. The story is about the search for truth by a man named Edward Roff. Ed was small in stature, had a dark beard, and searching blue eyes. His Bible was his constant companion. He told many people that the Lord had sent him to this Reunion. When he told this to Ralph Fishel, Ralph responded, “Yes, I know you were sent here by the Lord, but there are two sides to his question. Were you sent to prove that the Restoration is false, or were you sent that you might learn the truth of the Restoration?”

Ed gave some the impression that he was there to set them straight, because he was quite vocal about the Bible being the only book needed to live by. Ed knew his scriptures very well, as far as the Bible was concerned, and he prayed and studied a great deal. He had been to different Protestant churches. He had evidently joined

at least two of them, because he had been baptized at least twice. It seemed plain that something was still lacking in his life. He was full of concern and full of questions. He was quick to supply Bible quotes during class sessions and even at times during a sermon. All during the Reunion, before classes or sermons, at rest periods, even at mealtimes, he had two or three, sometimes more of the priesthood, and sometimes women, involved in sessions with him about the scriptures. The discussions were so intent and lengthy that sometimes those involved missed their meals in order to try and satisfy his hunger for knowing what our church was all about.

The Lord was on the job through the duration of the Reunion, as patience seemed to be an outstanding virtue in all of the discussions with Ed. During the week, Edward witnessed a call to the priesthood. He saw people administered to for illnesses or problems. He also heard messages given to individuals, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He heard sermons from servants of God where scriptures were used right from the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants along with the Bible. They were sure that Edward was slowly but surely absorbing this information and questioning and praying about it earnestly. Sometime after a sermon you would see him leafing through the hymnal, or looking up Scriptures, or sitting like he was at loose ends and didn’t know where to turn.

Saturday came and there were to be baptisms for that day. There were eight baptisms on the list: two eight year olds, other young children, two teenagers and one young married man. By this time Edward was convinced that he should be confirmed, but didn’t need to be baptized because he had already been baptized two times before. He was truly disappointed that the priesthood couldn’t see it his way, so of course, he was still out of it as he sat through the baptisms. At the close of the confirmations, Ed was heard to say, “I want that Holy Spirit. I want to be confirmed.”

Saturday night, Edward had a dream or vision. He saw an altar before the throne of God, on which he saw three books. He didn’t really understand what it meant, but he thought one of the books represented the Bible, another God, and the other the Holy Ghost. The strange thing about it was that the leaves of the books were crumpled, and he didn’t know what it meant at all.

On Sunday morning he was on hand bright and early. It was to be a full day, with prayer and testimony service, confirmation service, and also a sermon. During the morning prayer service, Edward bore his testimony about the three books with the crumpled pages. George Allen responded to him with a message from the Lord that the three books Edward had seen in his dream represented the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. The crumpled pages meant that all three books had truly been trampled on by the world at large.

This message for Edward clinched his decision. All doubts were swept away, and he asked to be both baptized and confirmed. Since Edward had been such a diligent student and had listened to hours and hours of doctrine from all the three books, the priesthood decided he was ready for baptism. Never before had many seen such a vast knowledge acquired by one person, in such a short period of time.

Although the Reunion was to end at noon, the fount was refilled and a special baptism for Edward was planned for Sunday afternoon. He requested that Paul Fishel baptize him. George Allen and Jack Hagenson confirmed him. His last remark, when it was all over was, “Praise the Lord! At last I have a family!” The last they heard of Edward, he was reading and studying the Book

of Mormon.

Elder Bolingbroke concluded his sermon by saying that he thanks the Lord every day for this gospel. He believes that the good Christians of the world, like Lee Strobel, have been led by God to come to the understanding that they have. Just as Edward Roff was led to the true gospel of the Restoration. Lee Strobel has come a long way from being an atheist to being a pastor of a large congregation. Through his desire to know the truth, he discovered much of the truth. His journey is not over, as there is much more truth out there that he has not yet discovered, but at least he is a believer in Christ. Edward's life of thirsting after truth and knowledge eventually led him to the true Restoration gospel where he feels a joy beyond any joy he had felt before. Those who ask the Lord, those who desire to seek and know the truth, will be rewarded by our Heavenly Father. Matthew 7:12-13: "Say unto them, ask of God; ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it will be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Brother Bolingbroke expressed his prayer that none of us will be lost, and that we will remain faithful.

Your Journey - To the Tree of Life or To the Great and Spacious Building?

Elder Alan Smith read 1 Nephi 3:26-32 to introduce his sermon September 19. "I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men; For he is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him; For he that diligently seeketh shall find; And the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in this time as in times of old; And as well in times of old as in times to come; Wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round."

Brother Smith introduced his topic by saying there are a lot of people talking about different goals in life and different paths to take to reach those goals. Because our view of what we want out of life and our journey to reach our goals can lead us into such very different paths, he declared, that view becomes extremely important.

"I think the vision that Lehi and Nephi had, their vision of what our goal is and how we get there, as we look over the broad view of our life, is really a good one, an important one. There are a lot of different people talking about a lot of different paths and different roads and different goals in life than the one that Lehi and Nephi shared with us. So I would like to run through the vision just a little bit today and talk about what they saw, what that means for us, how it influences the choices that we make in our lives - where are we going and how do we get there? Let's talk about some of these questions.

I know it's easy for us to get caught up in doing what we have

to do today, getting a deadline met. At least that's my life - getting the next paper out - that kind of thing, maybe not stopping and looking again at the broad picture of where we are going and what we are doing here.

You remember in Lehi's vision he prayed to the Lord and he had this vision opened up to him where he saw a number of different things. I would just like to read a part of his words to us and then talk about those a little bit. 1 Nephi 2:48- 88 - "And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord, I beheld a large and spacious field. And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceeding great joy; ..."

In Lehi's vision, he saw this tree. And what did the tree bring him when he ate the fruit? Happiness and joy beyond anything he had ever understood before. Is that kind of what most of us are looking for in our lives -- to find happiness and joy? Lehi talks about it as a goal for us and tells us what kind of things we need to do to get there.

So what is Lehi's first response when he sees the tree. He sees this beautiful fruit. He eats it and has this wonderful experience of joy and happiness? Was it to say, "All Right! Give me some more. I'm going to just sit here and eat this all the rest of my life -- all by myself!" No. His first response was that he wanted his family to be able to find that joy and that happiness as well. And so he sees the family. They are afar off, and he says, "Wherefore I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit. And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit. And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; And at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go. And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit. And it came to pass that they did come unto me, and partake of the fruit also."

"And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; Wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them. And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me, and partake of the fruit."

Lehi invites the whole family to come but only some of them will respond. Lehi looks around and sees some more scenes: "And I beheld a rod of iron; and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. And I also beheld a straight and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood;..." Here's the tree and here is the river that runs along beside it, and it has a straight and narrow path that brings you to the tree. "And it also led by the head of the fountain unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world; And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. And it came to pass that they did come forth and commence in the path which led to the tree." In the large and spacious field, he saw a world. Many of the people were trying to find the tree. Isn't that the way the world is? Aren't a lot of people searching for happiness

and joy in their lives - trying to find this kind of fruit?

There Is a Way through the Mist of Darkness

“And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.” So along the way here, a mist rises up then, and people who are trying to find the tree can’t see it directly anymore, so they begin to wander off the path. They begin to be lost.

“And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron, And they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.” So there are some people, then, who have found this iron railing that is running along this side of the river. They grab onto it and they can find their way through the mist of darkness.

“And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed. And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld on the other side of the river of water a great and spacious building; And it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth; And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; And their manner of dress was exceeding fine; And they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at, and were partaking of the fruit. And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.”

There were others who, even had made the trip through the mist of darkness by holding onto the rod of iron, once they got to the tree and even partook of the joy and the happiness, were turned away by other people pointing at them, laughing and scoffing from this large and spacious building.

“And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father. But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.” So there are others who, when they had made the trip through the mist of darkness holding onto the rod of iron, came to the tree and fell down, partook of the fruit and shared in the joy and the happiness that were a part of that experience.

“And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.” So not everyone was even looking for happiness with the tree. Others were looking for the great and spacious building! “And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; And many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads. And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me, and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not. These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.”

So out on this great plain is a great wide world with its numerous concourses of people. Some are making their way to find joy and happiness. Others are making their way to the great building. Others are getting lost by wandering off on strange roads or drowning in the depths of the fountain. There are many people, though, who enjoy the fruit and are not turned away by the scorn of the world that comes to them as they share in that peace and happiness.

Lehi Pleads For His Family to Share His Joy

After Lehi had this experience, Nephi tells us that Lehi ex-

horted the family, “with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that, perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; ...” That’s what we have as the story of Lehi’s vision, as he lays out what he saw.

Nephi, his son, decided that he wanted to understand what the vision was all about and that he wanted to be able to have this special blessing. So he prayed about it, as I read in the opening scripture, feeling that the Lord would reveal it to him to let him know what was going on as well. So he has his experience where he tells us about what some of the items in the vision mean.

I’m going through the vision this morning because I feel that more and more it is an important metaphor for the life journey that each of us takes. There are many people out in the world today who take a very different view of what needs to be done to find fulfillment in life. They take a different view of what the journey is that we need to take. When Nephi then shares his interpretation of the dream and what was going on, Nephi tells us about the tree that he sees which is the same one his father saw, and he says, “and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.” It was a tree most precious above all! And he tells us that what the tree means is coming to an understanding of and experiencing the pure love of Christ -- experiencing that love in its depth in our hearts. Many people have talked about what that feeling is like - to actually understand and know the kind of love and the depths of love that God has for each of us and wants us to have for those around us. And it’s only as we come to have that love and that understanding in our hearts that we truly find happiness -- that we can truly find the joy which God wants us to have in our lives.

Nephi talks about the rod of iron that’s in the vision which leads to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life, whose waters were a representation of the love of God. And the tree of life was also a representation of the love of God. So we have both the river that is running along to the tree and the tree as representations of the love of God, according to Nephi. It’s interesting, of course, that there is a path along the side of the rod of iron which is straight and narrow and that leads to the tree. And it doesn’t look like the journey is necessarily a huge, long one because Lehi could see his family - see where they were. He could motion for them to come and they could see him. They could see the goal that they were going toward. They could see the straight and narrow path and know that it would lead them there.

Just as an aside it’s interesting, and of course you know, that in the scriptures we have two different kinds of straights. We have s-t-r-a-i-g-h-t and we have s-t-r-a-i-t. Straight with the g-h-t it means free from curves or bends. Directly, uninterrupted, straight forward, according to the dictionary. On the other hand the s-t-r-a-i-t is narrow, restricted, tight, strict or rigorous. Many times the way, the path, is talked about as straight and the gate, or the way in, is strait; but the scriptures go back and forth between the two. So it’s kind of interesting that Nephi calls the path that he sees in the vision a straight with a g-h-t and a narrow path - not one that is wandering right and left, according to him. Later on in Nephi he talks about a path and calls it a strait and narrow path with an a-i-t. One of the things I have always wondered is, how did the people who were transcribing for Joseph, when they came to a word like straight/strait know whether he wanted g-h-t or a-i-t. I know Joseph spelled out some of the other words when he came to them, but I don’t know how he knew which one was wanted in that particular case.

What Road, or Roads, Lead to Christ?

In any case, the reason I am talking about the way is because many people today talk about the journey of life in religious circles and say there are many different roads that lead to Christ. They say that life's paths are full of twists and turns. They say that we are on a journey where the destination is "over the horizon", and we really don't know where we are going. The vision of Lehi and Nephi gives us a completely different concept or a different view of what we are doing. Lehi's vision, in metaphor, says that everyone gets a glimpse of the tree before they start their journey toward it. In other words, we are all born with some understanding of what the love of God is in our lives. And according to Lehi and Nephi, there is a direct path that leads us from where we are to that tree if we will take it. But it isn't very wide if it's narrow. We don't know if it goes up and down, although it can't have enough hills that we wouldn't see the end from the start. In other words, sometimes we may be trying to make our path to the pure love of Christ harder than it really is. If we really follow the path that's straight and narrow and hold onto the word of God, it will get us there.

There's a contrast between the straight and narrow path and some of the other paths that are seen in the vision. Some of them are wide and lead a lot of people. Some of them wander off and we don't know where they are going. They don't lead to the tree. They don't lead to the spacious building, and they don't lead to the fountain. So we have a contrast between a straight and narrow path and a lot of different other kinds of paths pictured here in the vision.

We also have a contrast in the water sources. We have the water that runs along the rod of iron and the straight and narrow path, which, it says, is a representation of the love of God as well. Then we have a wider river which Nephi tells us, is filthy, and the depths of it are the depths of hell! And he says there is a great and terrible gulf that divides those finding the pure love of Christ and those that were in the great and spacious building.

Nephi also tells us what the mists of darkness are. He says those are, "the temptations of the devil which blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men". We have the contrast of the river as the love of God, and the other river as the filthy depths of hell in the picture. We have the contrast of the straight and narrow path and the broad roads that lead us to destruction. Lehi said that the mists of darkness came in as the people were seeking the tree of life, and the devil began to tempt them. Those who did not know to use the rod of iron, the word of God, to help them deal with the temptations, got lost.

Consider How Jesus Dealt With Temptation

Remember how Jesus dealt with the temptations of Satan early in His ministry? Of course. He responded to each with His understanding of what Satan was trying to do because of His knowledge of what was written in the scriptures. On the surface, Satan's temptations didn't seem that bad, did they? Jesus had fasted for a long time, and Satan said, "Why don't you turn some stones into bread and you can eat?" There's nothing wrong with eating, is there? There is nothing wrong with having some bread. Jesus, a little while later would turn water into grape juice for the wedding. He had the power to do it. But Satan was asking Jesus to trust in His own strength instead of remembering that God was His support. Instead of feasting on the words of His heavenly Father, he wanted Him to feast on the physical. Jesus knew what he was doing, and because He knew the scriptures, could quote the scriptures about needing to rely on His heavenly Father.

Satan came to Jesus up on the pinnacle of the temple telling Him to show His power by throwing Himself off and the angels

would catch Him. Jesus had that power, didn't He? If He had thrown Himself off and asked the angels to catch Him, all the people who were right at the temple could see it happening and believe in Him. It would have been maybe an easier, quicker way than going around all the countryside preaching and teaching in the synagogues and healing people and doing the miracles that He did do. So, Jesus showing His power to people wasn't necessarily a bad thing. But Jesus knew that it wasn't His responsibility to go around to show off His power for His own gratification. His power was to be used to make a difference in people's lives -- to bring ministry. And so Jesus was able to understand that Satan was asking Him to do something which He wasn't supposed to do.

Satan then tried to tempt Jesus with power and glory over all the world. Was that a bad thing? Wasn't Jesus going to have power over all the world? Wasn't Jesus going to be glorified? Yes He was. It wasn't bad except the way that Satan wanted Him to do it was to have Him honor Satan instead of God. And so Jesus recognized the difference in the temptations and was able to overcome them because He knew the scriptures and was able to quote them. It wasn't so much that He could quote the scriptures but that He knew the scripture and knew what it meant. Those who didn't try to find what the scriptures had to say about living life were lost in darkness, the vision tells us.

Vain Imaginings and Foolish Pride Destroy

Then there was the large and spacious mansion. Nephi tells us that the large and spacious building was the vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men, (2 Nephi 2:74 -76) "And their manner of dress was exceeding fine And they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come, and were partaking of the fruit. And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; Some of the people who were making this journey and even had understood and tasted of the pure love of Christ were able to be turned away because someone laughed at them for what they had found. It says, "and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost."

Some of the people making the trip were embarrassed away from their goal. They looked at the fine physical things that these other people had - their fine clothing, the spacious building that they were a part of, and they were led to try to get those things to bring them happiness and joy. Do we find that in our world today? Are we tempted to try to find our happiness and joy in the physical things of life -- by how much we have or if we just had one more thing, that will make us happy? The story of the vision of Lehi and Nephi tells us that doesn't work. That's not where we are going to find our joy and happiness.

Others were shamed into letting go of the word of God or the rod of iron as they traveled along by the people who were scoffing at them. I wonder if maybe some of the scoffers were saying, "We don't need scriptures today! That's old stuff. Those were written by people who had their own biases about what was right and wrong, and we know better today! God is a loving God! He wouldn't ever really punish anyone. We are advanced too far in our understanding of the world to have to believe in God or miracles." Have we heard any of those scoffings today, telling us that if we will just let go of the word of God, we can still find happiness - we can still find joy? And they, too, wandered away and were lost. In fact the scriptures tell us that as many people as made it into the great and spacious building, all fell away and were lost!

Others, of course, made their way to the tree of life, shared in

its blessings, and stayed there, not paying attention to the vain imaginations and pride of men and called others to come and share in the rich experiences which they were finding there. For others, the journey wasn't seeking the tree of life at all. The story says, "They felt their way toward the great and spacious building, And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; ..." They made it to the depths of hell in their lives instead of the depths of joy and love in the tree. Do you know anyone around you who has made it to the depths of hell in their search for happiness and joy? I know a few!

Wanderers In Strange Roads!

"And many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads." it says. People who felt that they knew a better way to find happiness -- people who are ever searching for the truth but never finding it -- people who say, "The destination is not important. It's the journey. The important thing is that the questions are asked, not that answers are found. Everyone has their own truth!" Have you heard anyone wandering away in strange roads trying to find joy and happiness, but even going clear out of the picture because they are not seen any more? Instead of having a glimpse of the pure love of Christ and looking for it fully, they are not quite sure what they are looking for because it is "beyond the horizon", but they are trying to get there none the less and are wandering along on strange paths.

I am reminded of Paul's letter to Timothy. (2 Timothy 3:1-7) "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Paul, too, said that the rod of iron was the way to respond to these kinds of things. As he was writing to Timothy a little later in the third chapter of his letter he says, (2 Timothy 3:14-17) "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The scriptures tell us that the Kingdom of God is what? Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.. Following the commandments in the word of God is the way we come to the Kingdom. Some today want to look at the Kingdom but want to leave out part of the formula. They say, "We want peace and joy." But they are not sure about righteousness. Some of the religions around in the world today talk about love and peace and joy, but they forget that righteousness is the way by which those things come. They want the Spirit, but they are not sure that keeping the commandments part is really necessary - really needed as a part of the deal.

I remember when I made my first whole wheat angel food cake. I lived in an apartment in Red Oak over a three car garage before Valle and I were married. It was also the first apartment that we had

after we were married. I got out the recipe and started working on the cake. The first thing it said was to separate the yolks from the whites of the eggs. So I started in and got the yolks and the white going, and I don't know, it was probably about egg number eight during my process when I broke the egg open and was moving it back and forth to keep the egg white apart and I broke the yolk. Just a little tiny bit - just a little yellow fell into that white. I put the rest of the yolk in the yolk container, and I thought, "Well, a little bit of yolk won't hurt anything, surely!"

So I went ahead and finished my dozen eggs and went ahead with the process. I was beating those egg whites trying to get them to peak as the directions in the recipe said they should; and I beat and I beat and I beat and I beat. They never did really get stiff! I thought, "I think when I've seen Mom do that before, they've got stiffer than this, but maybe I'm just not remembering right." So I started adding the other ingredients, and I got it all beat up and it looked OK only it was kind of runny. So I got out the two part angel food cake pan that I had there and I poured all the batter into the angel food cake pan and I started across the room to put it in the oven. I was leaving this big trail of stuff that was running out of the two part pan. I finally got it in the oven and got it cooking. I ended up with an angel food cake about that tall, (Our speaker measured off about three inches with his fingers.) Did it make any difference that I followed the directions? Did it make any difference that I had just a little bit of egg yolk in with my egg white? It made all the difference in terms of having a nice angel food cake. I mean, I had something I could eat. It still tasted OK, I guess, but it surely wasn't the way it was designed to be.

Who is it that calls us to feed our hunger for the kingdom with bread we make from a stone instead of feasting on the words of Christ? Who is it that causes us to want the power of God to make us feel good about ourselves instead of bringing ministry to others? Who is it that says we can have the Kingdom without worshipping God and keeping is commandments - that we can have the peace and joy without the righteousness? Jesus knew, and we should too!

Today we are faced with looking at the journey of our lives. Where is it that we want to go? Do we want to find the beauty and indescribable joy of the pure love of Christ, to call others to come join us through the mists of darkness; or do we want to take our own road because we don't like something about the straight and narrow one, and wander off in search of something we think is out there, but we are not quite sure what it is? Or are we going to decide that the things of the world are where we are going to find our happiness and head for that great and spacious building and the crowds there, even if it means that we fall into the depths of despair. Each of us is on a journey. How do you view yours? I think Lehi and Nephi's visions were shared as much for people of our day as for any day. Can their visions help us to find our way in the world today? I hope so!

Four Questions Urgent For Today

After a long moment High Priest Sherman Phipps read two scriptures, Matthew 25:34-47: "And he shall sit upon his throne, and the twelve apostles with him. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave

me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.”

3 Nephi 4:57-58: “Yea, O ye people of the house of Israel; ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not. O ye house of Israel, whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart”

After Anan Smith sang, “Let us praise God together on our knees!”. Brother Phipps commented, “Anan, I always thought it would be great to have an identifiable gift like that. It’s just as great, of course, to be able to identify it in those around me and to enjoy and appreciate it when they have them.

“The things I hope I have to say today may not seem to exactly fit with the scriptures that I used, but somewhere in my mind it all fits together. I hope it will for you by the power of the Spirit. I think last time I stood up here I said something to you about my thoughts being kind of scattered, and this morning I am kind of in the same condition, in a sense. When I came here I thought of what I would like to share this morning as, instead of a fine meal where you sit down and have one course after another, it’s more like a smorgasbord. Then I thought, well, I knew a lot of people in this group that like smorgasbords, so that’s not all bad. I hope, however, that as I present this in sort of a smorgasbord fashion, it won’t be anything like you can get at McDonalds, and I don’t mean to criticize McDonalds. I was just thinking that most of us, when we go to eat, and look forward to a smorgasbord, McDonalds is not what we think of. So I hope the cook will be someone other than myself, I guess is the bottom line.

Blasphemy? What’s That?

I wanted, this morning, to look at a couple of scriptures with you and maybe express a couple of thoughts that I’ve had. I guess there are a couple of things that have come to me lately that I wanted to run by you folks and see if it makes any sense to you - to see if it has any meaning to you like it did me. One of those is from Luke 12, starting with paragraph 8. And this is Jesus speaking. He says, “Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God. But he who denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.” Now here’s one of the parts that I thought was interesting:

“Now his disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men.”

You know, I must have read this, I don’t know how many times, and it never struck me before that the disciples, when they heard him were like, “Oh, my! He must have known what we said!” I never thought of the disciples of ever having said anything bad about Jesus or having spoken against Him, but apparently they had, and apparently they had been afraid to confess Him before other people.

I never thought of them that way before. In a way, it gave me hope. If even the disciples were weak sometimes, maybe there is still hope for me, too. Then it says, “And they reasoned among themselves, saying, He knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven.” They were afraid they couldn’t be forgiven because they had spoken evil against Him and they had not stood up for Him! Some of you know, I m sure, what happened next. “But he answered them, and said unto them, Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, and repenteth, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him who blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him.”

So even though they had spoken against Christ and had spoken evil of Him and they had been afraid to stand up for Him, He said, “No! That’s not unforgivable. If you repent you can be forgiven for that. But then He went on and told them that the thing that could not be forgiven them was to blaspheme against the Holy Ghost.

Do you know what that means? I know I am the guy on the list today, but I’m open to someone else telling me what their interpretation of blasphemy is, because I have had an idea in my head about what blasphemy means ever since I was a little kid, and I think was wrong! What does the word Blasphemy mean to somebody here today? Somebody help me out. What do you think of when you think of that word? (Diane Anderson spoke). “Doesn’t that mean that you think you are God?” Ultimately that might be a good definition. That could be the ultimate definition. Do you know what you find when you look in the concordance? Anybody? You know I always had the idea that blaspheming against the Holy Ghost meant like swearing or something like that. So I didn’t know what you would do against the Holy Ghost, but I went and looked in the Concordance, and I thought this might be important for all of us to think about; and ultimately, I think it ends up about where Diane is talking about.

Does anybody want to guess the basic word that you are going to find when you go to look this up in the concordance? (There was an exchange with the congregation during which Ron Smith said, “I don’t know what the basic word is, but I have always thought of blasphemy in terms of denying the power - saying that there is no power where there is.” Ricky Leonard made a contribution not recorded. Our speaker acknowledged all contibutions as valid then continued.) I would never have guessed the word. You people probably won’t be nearly as surprised at this as I was. As you know, when these are set up in the concordance, they give you a lot of different words, but, the basic word is trust. Those who trust against the Holy Ghost, which I think involves everything that was said here. Those who put their security in something other than the Holy Ghost. Those who are careless. Those who put their confidence or hope in something else.

I felt directed one night when I was reading that to go pull the concordance out and see where it came from. And when I first read it, “Those who trust against the Holy Ghost, I thought, “What? That’s not what I thought. I thought it was those who rant and railed

against; but when I thought about those who trust against, that scared me when I looked at my own life. And I started thinking about, what are all the ways you trust against the Holy Ghost? What are all the ways in which I look to other sources for strength or security. And all I can do is tell you little things that came up, and I'm not remembering them all right now, but the one that really sticks out in my mind, and I don't know why because it's not something I had worried about a lot in my life, but how many of us get real concerned about what are we going to do when we retire? What am I going to live on? And so we get all wrapped up in the ways of the world trying to come up with a retirement plan. I'm not saying that's bad, necessarily, but if we do that and think that's what's going to keep us and make us OK, I think that might be blasphemy if we are doing that instead of looking to the Lord and saying, "Lord, whatever You work out for me will be OK". And how many other places in our lives every day do we try to figure out the answer - do we try to anticipate and use the ways of the world to secure ourselves instead of being willing to say, "Lord, whatever path You have for me, I'm willing to follow it because I know that You will take care of me, and You will provide for me."

I'm going back now to the scripture that I read earlier where He said, "Inasmuch as you have seen me and I was hungry, etc., you responded to those needs. How many times, and I'm not picking on anybody except myself, how many times in my life, day to day, do I see a need and think, "Well, I can't respond to that because, if I do, I won't have the time to take care of some things I am supposed to take care of. I won't have the money - there are a lot of other things. How many times today, (and I'm not suggesting that people go out and do this - you need to be led by the Spirit and you need to use good judgment), but how many times do we drive down the road, see somebody that needs help and we are afraid to stop and help them because that's the kind of world we live in? I'm not saying you should stop every time you see somebody along the road, but I'm still inclined to unless the Spirit tells me not to.

The Mark of the Beast Here Now?

That leads me to another thing I want to talk about today. I hope I can say this right. I hope this will make sense. The mark of the beast. I've heard people talk about that. I've heard them try to figure out what it is, what it's going to be. I'm not at all convinced but that we don't already have it on us, and that it's not some device, some mark that we can look at and quickly identify. But I wonder if it has something to do with - you know it says without it you can't buy or sell. That's the one I remember. You can't buy or sell. How many of us live our lives in certain patterns because it appears to us that's the only way we can survive. And in doing that, we adopt the ways of the world. I want to be careful. I don't want to say that I know what the mark of the beast is. I'm not saying that, but as I looked at this, I thought, "I wonder if we are not already laboring with that. What do we feel like we have to do in our lives in order to pay the bills and this and that, that's contrary to the way the Lord would have us live. Maybe you don't have those problems, but when I look at my life, I think it's there.

In fact, I'll give you a little example. you may think this is just ridiculous, and that's all right. I'm not up here with a shirt and tie on. You may think this is really crazy, but part of my hesitancy in wearing a shirt and tie up here or when I come here on Sundays - and I have worried sometimes. I have thought that maybe that offends some, but part of my hesitancy is that for me, not for everybody, but for me, that's something I do every day because it is required of me in order to conform to the ways of the world; and when I come here,

I don't want to conform to the ways of the world. I think of the scriptures that talk about the finery and that, and so for some - don't take me wrong, those who are wearing shirts and ties today - for some that's a way of kind of cleaning up and respecting or expressing respect for the services and what goes on here. But that's how I live every day in order to conform to the world. And so when I come here, I want to get away from that. That was just a little example. Maybe you will go home and say, "I don't know what that was all about!" But I hope you will go home and think about, "What are the ways in which I, in my life, do not express confidence in the Holy Ghost but put my confidence somewhere else?" And does that subject me to this mark of the beast thing?

I'm not really so concerned about that as I am not blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. and living my life in a way that really does express confidence in the Holy Ghost so that God will be free, through His Son Jesus Christ, to take me through whatever it is that lies ahead of me. And I would like for each one of you to have that same confidence in the Holy Ghost to know that God's there every day in every little way. I know that you may get pretty tired of hearing me say that because I know that I have said that a lot of times, too. That's the God I know. It's the one who is there every day in every thing if I let Him be.

Steve (Steven Smith was in charge of the service.) said he put "testimony" in our bulletins instead of "sermon", which reminds me of something else I was going to say when I got up but didn't. I was going to acknowledge that you learned early on that I am not a singer. By now you know I don't really preach. Steve put testimony in there, so I don't want to let him down. Since we are talking about how God works every day, I have had several experiences since we last met.

I think it was a week ago Friday I decided I was going to ride my motorcycle back to court. I came into Leon and stopped at the four way stop. There had been a car following me ever since we left Decatur. They pulled out of the gas station - had a Wyoming plate or something like that. I had been watching them because when you are riding the bike, you are always nervous about somebody getting too close to you. We went two blocks. Down by the Dairy Queen I was going to make a left hand turn. I had my turn signal on. I am watching this car right behind me thinking, "I want to make sure they stay away from me, and I stuck my hand out as I was approaching in addition to my light; and the car behind me started honking! I thought, "What's that about?" And I turned to see why they were honking at me, and here came this white cadillac just flying past everybody in the left hand lane right down through town! I assume the guy behind me had seen them and was honking to try and warn me. I was so busy watching him that I hadn't looked in the left hand lane. So I slammed on the brakes and got stopped as they went by me. Really, I don't know that I was stopped when they went by. I might not have got that far, but I kept the bike from falling over. My initial reaction was, I was angry! I would have liked to caught up with them, drag them out of the car and all that stuff, you know. Wrong thing, I know! And I didn't. I did take off and get the plate number. Then I turned around and came back. And as I am coming back, I am thinking, "I don't even know why I did that, Sherman. You should just be glad the Lord looks after you and you didn't get hit! You should just be grateful for that!" But I'm still having a hard time getting past the anger.

I went back and I went to the court house and I went to the Sheriff's office. I was thinking, "I ought to go in there and tell the sheriff and have them stop that person if they have a car out

somewhere.” I went in and talked to the dispatcher and I said, “Do you know what just happened to me?” and I told her. I said, “I know you can’t do anything about it. Forget it.” She said, “Did you get a plate number?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “What was it?” So I gave it to her. She said, “Humph! I was just curious.” I said, “Yeah. Just forget it.” So I went upstairs and I kept thinking about it. I kept thinking, “Boy! That’s really irritating. Somebody like that could really hurt somebody!” But I kept thinking, “You should just be grateful. you should just be saying, “Thank you, Lord, and leave it up to the Lord what happens to the other person. Don’t think you need to take that upon yourself.”

Well, I don’t know that this would happen every time, and so I’m not suggesting it would happen like this every day. I did finally get to the point where I was thinking, “That’s fine. I’m just grateful that the Lord did that for me, and I was thanking the Lord that He had protected me once again. It seems like He does something like that for me every day. And I tell you this. It’s kind of funny in a way, but it may be a lesson, too. I finally had got to the point where I thought, “It’s up to the Lord. I can’t deal with all the problems in the world. I just need to leave it up to Him and appreciate what he does for me!” And about that time one of the deputies came in and said, “I hear somebody tried to run over you.” I said, “”Yeah!” And he said, “Plate number such and such?” I said, “Yeah.” and he said, “I just met him outside of town going 87, and I nailed him!”

That’s a little side light. I wouldn’t always happen. Anyhow, I didn’t mean to get way off on that, but there’s a lesson there. Sometimes when we learn to really turn things over to the Lord, then He goes ahead and takes care of it. Sometimes we won’t let Him. We insist on keeping that ourselves, and we just don’t let Him do the good work He can do.

How Do I Save My Life or Lose It?

There was another little thing I wanted to visit with you about briefly this morning. I mentioned this the other day, I think after Alan talked, I’m not sure. There’s another scripture in Luke 14:26, and most of you could probably quote this one, too. It says, whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, and then vice versus. I have always thought about that in a literal sort of way, and I guess it is literal. But I have always thought about it in terms of, “Would I die for my brother?” “Would I give my physical life for my brother?” But when I read that the other night, I was really impressed that that really was not what the Lord was talking about. That could become part of it, but what He was really talking about was, and this is in terms of where we are at today, and what’s to come yet, “Are we willing to give up the way we have lived?” We are comfortable with where we are a lot of times. We want the kingdom, we say, but only as long as I can still watch TV, at least 4 or 5 times a week - or as long as I can still - I don’t know what you guys do, so I won’t pick on you, but only as long as I can still have the things I have got and be comfortable, and all that!

I think what Jesus was saying to us is, “If there are places in our lives where we know we could do better - if there are things we could change in our lives that would allow us to reach out to others more effectively, are we really willing to change? Are we willing to give up our life style to live a different one for the sake of our brothers and sisters? How much time are we willing to spend fasting that the souls of others might be reached rather than just because we are in trouble? You know what I am saying. I won’t go on with that. Think about that, please. Are we willing to give up our lives? That doesn’t mean die. It could mean that, but it probably doesn’t for most of us. For us, it means, “Are we willing to change the way we

live?” Little things - things the Lord would prompt us to do that might require us to be a little uncomfortable - that might require us to adapt a little bit to a different life style than what we have?

Why “Commandments”?

One other thing I want to say this morning. I didn’t have this in mind until I got here. I don’t know why I feel this is probably directed more to the younger people than to the older, and perhaps not. When I was going to Graceland particularly, I thought it might be really important to read the scriptures as much as I did the text books. I am not going to pretend that I did it as much, but I had already read the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants - not the Bible. that one I just had a terrible time getting through. I finally did it while I was at Graceland. I wanted to know what the commandments were. The more I read of them, the more I decided and determined - (This is my idea . Someone else might have a different way of explaining this.) I became convinced that the word commandments was wrong. It was another one of those things that man had taken and applied in order to - (Maybe I read too much into this.), but it seemed like man had a lot to do with calling them commandments, because we don’t like to be commanded. We don’t like to be told what to do, and by using that term when they translated the words, it made it offensive probably to a lot of people.

But as I read them, I began to realize this wasn’t in terms of telling me, “You have to do this. If you don’t you are in trouble.” It was in terms of saying, “Sherman, here’s the truth. Here’s the way things work. Here’s what will make you happy and there’s what will make you miserable. And it was the Lord giving me counsel and guidance so that I could learn to be happy. It wasn’t Him saying, “You have to do this my way!” It was Him saying, “These things will make your life worth while.” I guess I felt like it would be important especially for the young people here this morning to know that as you make decisions. Know that the word of God is there, not because God wanted to force His way upon you, because that’s absolutely contrary to His nature. But it’s there because He loves you. He gave you these things to provide a guide to you so that you would know what would make you happy and what would ultimately make you miserable. Hopefully, all of us, not just the young people, can understand that and hunger and thirst after these things because they lead us to happiness and help us to avoid misery.

Our speaker’s parting thought was, “I didn’t quit as quickly as I had hoped I would, and I didn’t provide as much testimony as Steven had hoped I would, but I hope he will forgive me for that today.

News and Notes

Fall Retreat

One hundred and twenty five, or a few more, people from eleven branches in Iowa, Illinois and Missouri attended the fall retreat at Jericho Hills at Lucas, Iowa October 1-3. The theme of the retreat was "Thankful Living with a Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit."

Teaching ministry was brought to the children by members of local congregations including Beverly Walker, Alberta and Suzie Cunningham, Ron Smith, Henry Eppinger and for the adults by Dale Godfrey and Marlin Guin of the The Book of Mormon Foundation. Patriarch Vernon Darling counseled with the older youth and had one hour of presentation, questions and answers concerning the request of the Patriarchs for us to spiritually prepare for the general assembly requested by the Restoration Patriarchs sometime in the not too distant future. Rita Godfrey assisted with the recreation for the young, and Ron and Di Smith conducted the mixer and the two campfires. Paul Ludy spent one half hour discussing ways to more effectively share your testimony.

The Mount Ayr congregation was in charge of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper served Sunday morning. Douglas Smith was in charge of the evening prayer service and gave the Sacrament sermon Sunday morning. Dave Drummond and Patriarch Darling were in charge of the service that has come to be known as the healing service.

Facilities at Jericho Hills are excellent and the weather was as nearly perfect as could have been asked, after the rain and wind storm that heralded us there.

A Baby is Born

The Mount Ayr Congregation welcomes Liberty Editha Elyse Jordison, born Sept. 13 at Lutheran Hospital in Des Moines. She joins her sister Isabel and her two brothers, Samuel and Joshua in the home of Julia and Michael Jordison.

Youths Achieve

Two of our youth won honors on Saturday, September 25. Colleen Wilcoxon marched in the Creston High School band that took first place honors in the River City Round Up Parade Saturday, placing first over a college band; and Cessaries Galusha placed second in another Bill Riley Talent show during the Autumn in the Ayr Festival in Mount Ayr.

Jared Beck is the editor of Mount Ayr High School news for the student section of the Mount Ayr Record News. Jared's work was temporarily interrupted when he underwent an emergency appendectomy recently.

Cara Smith is accepted for her internship at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. She is working toward her Master's degree in Child Life.

Smith selected for Tansman Festival

Nathan Smith has been selected as one of 24 musicians from around the world to take part in the Tansman Festival competition in Lodz, Poland in mid-November. Alan Smith will be traveling with Nathan to the festival, where he will present a recital and compete for prizes including a \$12,000 first prize.

Book of Mormon Featured in Winter Term Plans

A trip to Guatemala to explore ancient ruins that may have been associated with the peoples described in the Book of Mormon is being planned for early January, 2005. Dr. Ronald K. Smith is in

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From the Pastor's Desk

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you think?--- Jesus said, "these signs shall follow them that believe", and listed speaking in tongues as one of the signs. (Mk 16:16) If there are no "signs", doesn't it follow that we are not believers? You might protest and say, "Hey, I believe"! But do we really believe? "Believe" is not simply mental assent. It goes far beyond lip-service-- to placing all our trust in Jesus. "Believe" is an active verb that includes the whole idea of discipline and discipleship. To me, Jesus is saying, if you are my disciples, these signs will follow.. ..If you are my disciples, you will repent and become as a little child.. .. And the promise is, that if we "believe" (put our whole trust in Jesus) the Father will bear record of Jesus to us and the Holy Ghost will bear record of Jesus to us.. ..and the signs will follow. (See 3N 5:32-40)

More News and Notes

charge of the Graceland winter term that sponsors the trip and Lyle Smith of Pre-Columbian Institutes will be the director of the tour. Whether the tour happens is contingent upon the registration of 20 people for the class. Non-students are welcome for a small additional fee. The class begins with a week of intensive study of the Book of Mormon in Lamoni and continues with the trip. Contact Ron Smith if you are interested either in taking the class or in contributing to a scholarship fund to help a student.

Artists Featured at Homecoming Shows

Beth Knotts is one of four artists who had their paintings on display at the a Graceland Homecoming Arts Show in Shaw Center. Her offerings were largely landscapes. A mobile created by George Knotts and titled "Redemption" was hung in Helene Art Center. The title comes from the transformation of a piece of discarded scrap into an art piece of value.

Fasting, work weekend set

A fasting and prayer weekend where work will also be done on the church building in Mount Ayr is planned for October 22-24. Fasting for the weekend and prayer for those that don't know Jesus in several prayer times will be held. In addition, work will be done on the church building. Mark this time on your calendar.

Hayride and wiener roast

A hayride, wiener roast and fishing trip are planned at the Barber farm Saturday, Oct. 30, for the congregation. More details will be announced before the event.