

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Baptismal Invitation

I've been working with students in the pre-baptismal class trying to help them understand just what it is they are doing when they ask to be baptized.

There probably isn't a better invitation statement in the scriptures than that shared by Alma at the waters of Mormon as recorded in Mosiah 9:39-42.

"And now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they might be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even unto death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life; now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?"

We have talked about promises -- blessings with conditions -- and again this is another important one that they have learned about.

The people at the time of Alma responded by clapping their hands for joy and exclaiming, "This is the desire of our hearts."

I hope those of us who have made this covenant long ago as well as those about to do so can join the saints of that time in saying that this covenant is truly all of our heart's desires.

TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Remembering Jesus - Ministry in Honduras

Seventy George Knotts began his Communion message asking for a show of hands of any who had difficulty with impatience. There were a number of hands raised. George commented, "That's an easy one to confess." Then he asked if anyone had any resentments against anybody.

When he saw a few hands he counseled, "It's good to get rid of that for sure because that is like driving your car with the brakes on". He went on to suggest that there may have been more people who had resentments than held up their hands because there might be one right beside them against whom they had resentment and they didn't want to confess it right in front of everybody.

Then he continued: "It's very critical that you get rid of your resentments. I found myself the other day after coming back from Honduras thinking about all the problems I observed down there and I found myself having conflicting dreams. All kinds of situations, but there was a conflict going on in my dreams, and I thought to myself, 'I think I brought home some resentments or have some resentments in my life', so I tried to make a list of anything that could be resentful in my life. I said, 'Lord, I don't want to have that any more!' In fact, on my worship sheet I have, 'George forgives everybody!' Can you say that? The congregation responded by repeating the statement, which, of course, Brother Knotts had not intended, so he corrected himself with, 'Can you say that about yourself?' I do try not to have anybody I have aught against or won't forgive. And I find that I am lots freer then. You know you can't think as creatively if you have any resentment or any unforgiving spirit in you? I try to be creative, so I need to have that all cleared up.

Communion As The Lord Prescribes

I talked to Frank Frye in Oaxaca, Old Mexico yesterday and he said, "George, I found something very interesting today", and it had to do with Communion. It is the practice of the Mormons to have Deacons bring the water or the bread to the pews where it is passed down the row from one person to the other. Frank said he first discovered the problem in Spanish and then was going to translate it into English and send it to me. He just told me a few things that

I had already observed because the Mormons had asked me to meet with them in their study at Graceland. For several years I met with them. I would make notes and “how tos” and pass them to my friend, Francis, the librarian. He would take them and put them into his folder.

We had pure Communion here today - nothing adulterated about it. It was really blessed like Jesus wants it done. Aren't we glad that we had an Elder or a Priest serving Communion to us today? That was normal and what Jesus wanted done. And we serve it once a month. It could be served every day if we wanted, but it would become very common. They take it every Sunday, and that's probably all right, but I just wanted you to know something Frank had discovered. That is something we are blessed with and we just take it for granted.

I did a cartoon one time that showed a man taking wine to his lips and the title of the cartoon is, “We lie a lot on the first Sunday”. Why would a grown man in the Priesthood draw a cartoon like that? There is a possibility that it is true that we lie a lot on the first Sunday. We don't have the kingdom yet, and yet we say we are going to obey all of the Commandments. If you have no intention of obeying the commandments, and you say you are going to do it, that's inconsistent, isn't it?

Do you know how many commandments are in the book of Third Nephi? Jesus is talking in Third Nephi. There are over one hundred commandments in there. The same is true in the Book of Matthew. There are over a hundred commandments there. If somebody asked you, “How many commandments can you name beside the ten?” what would you answer? I have asked that around some Priesthood meetings and some can't get over three! They can't think of more than three, but if you bring up one, they say, “Oh, Yeah, I know that one.” They know them all, but they can't recall them to their mind. You don't necessarily have to recall them, but in baseball, if you can't see them, you can't hit them! So maybe you should have them on your mind. Maybe we should have a planned program of studying the commandments of Jesus and applying them to our lives. Would that be pleasing to the Lord? We study everything else. You take a class at Graceland, and you have a book. You go through that book, and you have to know that book almost backwards and forwards to be able to satisfy the professor, and maybe you have five or six books a semester, and they are pretty expensive, too - several hundred dollars. And you are required to know what is in them or you will not pass the course so gracefully. Now, Jesus only has forty five pages of His teachings in the Book of Mormon, and it is loaded with commandments - pages and pages of commandments, and since that's all we have to pass on, you know ---- . The most condensed teachings of Jesus in any world literature are right there in Third Nephi.

Henry Anderson did a cartoon a few years ago showing two kids coming out of the back door of a house. One says, “How come your grandmother is in there studying the scriptures. Every time we go into the house, she is studying the scriptures!” and the other kid responds, “She's getting ready for her final exam.” Isn't that something? Maybe we should think about getting ready for our final exam. What if the Lord called you before Him and said, “How many of the commandments did you name today, or how many have you been living by?” That would be harder yet. You might say, “I did all of them but those three, you know. Three out of a hundred is not bad!” But it could be a failing three. That would be tough, wouldn't it?

The Spirit Evidenced In Life

So we need to think in terms of what Jesus wants us to do because we have promised that we are going to do it. We promise we are going to obey all of the commandments. Then the last part of that prayer is that He will give us His Spirit to be with us. So I want to ask you, “Is the Spirit evidenced in your life? Do you have enough evidence of the Spirit working in your life to convict you if it was illegal?” There's a judge sitting back there. There are two judges here. How about that?

We need to have the Spirit functioning in our life. How does it function in our life? It manifests itself some way. It can't be in our life without manifesting itself some way. How can it manifest itself? In the fruits and the gifts of the Spirit. We usually think of the gifts only, but today we are including the fruits and the gifts of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, like that. The gifts of the Spirit are like prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, faith, vision, dreams. I didn't name them all, but I just gave you a general sprinkling. You know those anyway. So, those should be in our life as a congregation and as individuals.

And we do have them among us, but are they as fruitful as they should be? Ron came to our house and prayed for my wife yesterday. She had been barely able to make it to the kitchen before that. Afterward she said, “You know, I think I would like to go with you to Eagleville to pick up some Valentines at Finders Keepers. (They have got everything down there, birthday cards and everything 50 cents a card. That's a lot cheaper than some other places.) Anyway, she felt good enough to go and do that. Isn't that a blessing?

I was prayed for the other night for my cough, and it went down considerably. It is doing better. I haven't coughed since I have been up here. So that's a blessing right there, and I haven't coughed most of the morning. It's a real blessing! We have these blessings on a regular basis.

Chuck Sperry picked us up at the airport in Honduras, and we had to go, I don't know how many kilometers or miles it was, but it was 45 dollars worth of Diesel alone to go and come from the airport. That was quite a tour! The roads down there are rough. They have three lanes on the highway - I think this is on purpose. You can be passing another car with a car coming right at you. It was really scary until you got used to it. Then you just sat there. You couldn't buckle your seat belt off the highway because it would cut you in two the roads were so rough. I told Chuck, “You don't need to exercise if you ride in this truck! It will give you a workout just riding along.”

Anyway, Chuck got a cinder in his eye, hurting his eye really bad. So he said, “Would somebody pray for my eye?” So I just said a little simple George prayer - you know not very long. He didn't think that was adequate because he prayed about a minute and a half about his own eye. After awhile he couldn't go on. He said, “I just have to pull off here! Could I be administered to. So Frank, who was in the back seat, anointed his head with oil and I said a brief prayer, “I command that pain to leave your eye in the name of Jesus!” He drove on all the way home. We stopped and looked all around at a ruin, and he didn't have any more pain until after supper. I noticed that his eye was bothering him some after super, but it was an instant blessing to him right there.

Charles Sperry gave a cottage meeting about every night. He is a very aggressive young man. He got sick in his own nation and was going to have to go to bed one night. I don't know all of his symptoms, but he felt he should go to bed. He was administered to. We pulled the chair out into the middle of the floor. I anointed and

Frank prayed for him. He stood up abruptly. I said, "Are you going or not?" He said, "I'm going!" We went to that cottage meeting with him and he was full of life, had good liberty. He just talked freely and gave good testimonies and everything. I spoke and it was translated into Spanish and shared with the people, "A few minutes ago this young man was thinking about going to bed, but he doesn't look sick at all now, does he?" They said, "No. He doesn't." I said, "That's a testimony right here in your living room how the Lord has blessed this young man." Good things are happening on a regular basis down there.

Symbolic Ministry In Honduras

We went down to Honduras to establish a national conference for the people. The men met out in a circle - about fifty men in a circle about as big as this room. They were sitting in chairs and Frank was talking to them in the center of the circle. That is symbolic. Do you know what a circle with a dot in the center symbolizes among the Indians? The Spirit. That's a kind of interesting little sideline. That's the symbol of the Spirit!

And when you take a circle and put a vertical mark down through it and another horizontal mark across it this way, that represents Jesus right there in the center where the two lines come together. The vertical line represents the spiritual aspect of the cross and the horizontal line represents the physical aspect of the cross, and Jesus is symbolized where the two natures come together. Isn't that beautiful?

Frank was talking to these men about their responsibility in Zion. After awhile we will have Ron read a scripture. Frank was talking about it from the Old Testament. He asked me if I had something to say. I came out into the center of the circle and I said, "I notice you are sitting in a circle. That is the best symbol of Zion that I know of - a circle like this. The tepee is a symbol of Zion to me. All of the people are sitting on the same level. No one is higher or lower. All are sitting equal and they are around in a circle. The tepee poles go up the center like to God, and that is the symbol of Zion for me." Many interesting things happen when we join hands in a circle like that, so I told them about a time when our young people went over to Horton, Kansas to set up a tepee for Indian ministries over there. The young people who took the tepee over didn't know how to set it up. So an old man stepped forward and helped them. When he got through he told them this story: "A long time ago we had a man like your Jesus who lived among us. When he got ready to depart, he called His twelve leaders together and He wrapped His robe around them, and that's our tepee." The tepee he was talking about had twelve poles, and a tepee today often has twelve poles.

Interesting, too, is the symbol of the door. The door is low and you have to humble yourself to get in. If you enter into a tepee, you are very vulnerable to anybody who is in that tepee, because you have to bow your head to get in. I don't think I told them this, but it is very interesting. The Cherokees have a way of building a fire. We did this in the center of a tepee one time and it worked out very effectively. We built a fire with the logs coming from four directions. If you are around that fire, all you have to do is keep pushing the logs toward the center ever so often and your fire will burn and burn! You have a long stick of fuel there you can burn up just like that. But if you go out of the tepee and leave it alone, it will burn back and wait. What does that tell us? Incidentally, that fire represents Jesus at the center of the tepee. That tells us that if we are together, like this Communion Service, being of one heart and one mind and dwelling together in righteousness - that scripture has

several of those quotes in it - we can warm one another and ignite and burn up the whole fuel. You see, you can't burn a log up by itself. You just stick a log out there and light a fire and it will not burn up. The fire will die after awhile. You put two logs up there and you can burn both of them completely up because they reflect back and the fire unites each other and there is warmth going on there. If you want to test this out sometime, take a coal out of the fire. Lift it right out of the center where it is glowing white or yellow or whatever, and you set it over by itself and pretty soon it will go out! It will become cool, and that's it! If you want to isolate yourself from the Holy Spirit, you become cool. You go out!

We Promise to Remember and Obey

We promise to obey all the commandments. One way you can "go out" is if you disobey the commandments. We witness unto God that we take upon us His name. You can get rid of His Spirit by not taking upon yourself the name of Jesus. We would always remember Him. This is the most important thing. He tells us four times in the prayers we heard this morning about always remembering Him. You know last Sunday I told you how I helped to remember Jesus by having that little instrument around the house. I go over there and I say, "Thank you, Jesus!" This morning I prayed it backwards. I said, "Trust and be glad!" Those are my two favorite ones. For me, it helps me all the times to remember - "Thank you, Jesus!"

And I have a calculator that goes off on the dash of my car. I touch in clear, and this symbolizes for me - and maybe this is my Indian nature - repentance - clear! One, that is "I". Two, "thank you". Then I punch in seven - the perfect number - and that is "Jesus". "I thank you, Jesus." I reach up and touch the M+ there meaning "always". "I thank you Jesus, always." That's around my desk and on my car dash and I don't take off in my car until I do it. So every day I have two or three symbols helping me remember Jesus. That's a very important thing - to always remember Jesus. I don't know what little devices you can work out, but those work to help me.

If you have your daily devotions and a book mark in it, you have to keep moving that book mark down. I have my pages numbered 21 days. I have several devotions I have worked out in my Book of Mormon. I call it day one, day two through day 31. There are about four places in there where it is really heavy, heavy teachings. You can tell the heavy teachings. Take your Book of Mormon and look through it, and if you mark it with multicolors, then as you work through it, there are some that are really colored up. As I work those into thirty one units, I can get in there. I missed Mildred's birthday. I had it in my book - in my "God Calling", but I missed that day having my devotions. I don't do that very often. I missed it and had to call her the next day and wish her a happy birthday - the first one to wish her a happy birthday in the next year. Going through devotions keeps you accountable. You can tell if you miss! I have things that help me. This one says, "I love you, Jesus." "I praise you, Lord." "I trust you, Lord" "I obey you Lord" and "I remember you, Lord?" Those are the four directions. and on the other side I have another four directions. This is an Indian program praying in the four directions. I pray for the people at home. If you pray for the people east of you, and you pray for the people south of you, and you pray for the people west of you, and you pray for the people north of you, and you pray for about ten people in each direction, you are praying for about forty people a day. That can't hurt! And it blesses people sometimes to remind them that, "Hey, I am praying for you every day."

I sat behind Gaylord Shaw in the funeral yesterday and I said, "This is a couple I pray for every day. I pray for Gaylord and his family, so that includes his wife, too. Anyway, it is just kind of nice. Most of you people in this room, I am praying for daily. I put one on my list today that I hadn't had there before. I put Titus on, so I will be praying for him. And I put Richard (Robert) Vaughn, Eric and Shaw. Saw them today and I thought, "Hey, there are some people who could probably use some prayers!" There you go. It costs you nothing. Sometimes I ask to trade prayers. Trading prayers is a good thing to do. There is a Smith boy I am trading prayers with and we have tried to calculate how long we have been doing that and he said, "I don't get you every day. I wouldn't lie to you." I appreciated his not doing that. "I said I figured you would miss some." We have been praying for each other for five years! Isn't that good - just a swapping prayers? So if somebody says, "Pray for me.", you just say, "Let's just trade prayers", and it does people good to pray for you and it does you good to be prayed for.

Well, that's just some of the ways that I always remember Jesus . Inside here I have people I am praying for who are not members of the church. I have that in four directions, too. There are not as many on there, of course.

A long time ago we were told to keep a record of the things that happen to us in our prayers. So I take a page, and it has about 30 lines on it. Then I put the days of the week on the side and this one is representing February 2006. How many are keeping a log of the happenings in your life? Good! Its probably not as simple as mine. It has to be simple for me. At the end of the month I put that in the back of the file and keep on going.

In this meeting in Honduras I asked the men sitting around in the circle to stand up and join hands. So they all stood up and joined hands, and I said now, this is a principle that has really worked miracles at times when we have tried it. If you agree with the prayer that is being said, say "Amen" at the end. If you don't agree with the prayer, say nothing. That's kind of a challenge to say nothing - keep quiet. So we had this prayer and we prayed that they would be able to witness to the North Americans like the North Americans have always been coming down to witness to them. They have a stewardship to witness to the North Americans about Zion and the things they will be carrying out, and the North Americans will be assisting them in carrying that out. I was talking in general terms, but I would like Ron to read some promises to the Indians - to the Lamanites - in Third Nephi 9:87-106.

God's Promise To The Lamanites

"And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign, for verily I say unto you, that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles, That they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them; Verily, verily, I say unto you, When these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you, for it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, And be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

"Therefore, when these works, and the work which shall be wrought among you hereafter, shall come forth from the Gentiles

unto your seed, which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity; For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may shew forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause, that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel:

"And when these things come to pass, that thy seed shall begin to know these things, it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. And when that day shall come, it shall come to pass that kings shall shut their mouths; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider. For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them; and there shall be among them who will not believe it, although a man shall declare it unto them. But behold, the life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil. Therefore it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, whom the Father shall cause him to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said,) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant;

"And my people who are a remnant of Jacob, shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Their hand shall be lifted up upon their adversaries, and all their enemies shall be cut off. 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; And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee; so will I destroy thy cities. "And it shall come to pass that all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and priestcrafts and whoredoms, shall be done away. For it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that at that day, whosoever will not repent and come unto my beloved Son, them will I cut off from among my people, O house of Israel, and I will execute vengeance and fury upon them, even as upon the heathen, such as they have not heard."

I recommended to the men that they read that, but they didn't read it. I think I have mentioned it to you before in Sunday School classes, but we haven't read it there either, so this is an opportunity we have had of hearing that all at once.

When I prayed, they all said "Amen" without an exception. They all said "Amen" with intensity. And their preaching was surprisingly powerful. It was really dynamic preaching. I have never hear a sermon preached on equality before - all things common. It was outstanding. I had a translator right there. A young man sitting beside me was picking up and translating very fast. And the man was putting it across with a lot of emotion, which was really dramatic. At the end, it was so good I said out loud and in English,

“That was a good sermon!” I just couldn’t contain myself.

American Indians Take Seriously the Testimony of The Book of Mormon

There was something else I want to share with you about the Book of Mormon and how that scripture was read. How many of you know what the Indian AIM group was about? In the 1970s they were burning and killing around the nation. We had a symposium of Indian ministries down at Pink, Oklahoma and we had left over some New Testaments of the Book of Mormon. I bought those from T. Ed Barlow and gave them to this lady who was an outstanding lady among the Indians, and she was well received. They were having a spiritual meeting up at Whiteoak, Oklahoma. She took those Book of Mormons and went up to a big hotel in Tulsa where they were having another meeting. An Indian leader said, “If you had been to Whiteoak, you would know where we are going,” She responded, “I know where we are going, and you may not be there!” She was a very bold and outspoken lady and very knowledgeable. She knew the Book of Mormon very well by that time.

That night there was a knock on her room door, and the body guard for the AIM group said, “The council is meeting upstairs and they want you up there. So she took a Book of Mormon with her. They had chair in the center of the room. They set her there and said, “What do you know that we don’t know?” She opened up the Book of Mormon to Third Nephi 9 and read what we just heard read there. There was silence until one man said they should get all of the Book of Mormons and lock them up. There were different responses, but the one response that was really key was that the head guy of AIM, Vernon Belicort, followed her around after that council meeting and kept asking her questions about the Book of Mormon. This AIM group was the one that had been killing and burning. There was really vicious, militant stuff going on.

The Cherokees came and got the AIM group and took them down to Talaquah because they thought that the chief was misusing some funds because he took some Cherokee funds and built a motel. So Belicort went in and the chief laid it out and said, “Here is the money. If I hadn’t spent it in this way, I would have had to give it to the government.” When he came out of the building he had his picture taken and it was put in the Tulsa World, and he said, “The chief has done well with the funds.”

As Belicort came back through town, he called her up and asked whether she had seen the article in the paper. She said she had. He said, “That’s all I have got to say!” And they have never had another ripple out of those guys. They found out about the Book of Mormon. They found out about a heritage they didn’t know they had. They found exciting things about that, and not another ripple out of the AIM group negatively! That’s just a blessing. They heard what you heard today, and they took it seriously

You heard what I heard as the prayers were being read today, and we should take that seriously! Be honest to God!

In response to the entire service, Sue Beck sang for us all, “Take My Life and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee.”

Why Does Jesus Christ Have a Church?

Elder H. Alan Smith chose Rev. 12:6-9 for the beginning scripture of his sermon February 12. “And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon

and his angels fought against Michael; And the dragon prevailed not against Michael, neither the child, nor the woman which was the church of God, who had been delivered of her pains, and brought forth the kingdom of our God and his Christ. Neither was there place found in heaven for the great dragon, who was cast out; that old serpent called the devil, and also called Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth; and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ;”

Michael Jordison sang, “What Wondrous Love is this, O My Soul?” Alan resumed speaking.

I have been teaching a prebaptismal class for the past several weeks. As you teach a prebaptismal class, you are trying to come up with ideas that will help people understand some of the basic beliefs that we have about the church and what they are becoming a part of, so I have been asking myself questions. Why do we have a church? That was one of the questions when we started the class. Valle came in with me and we kind of brainstormed with the kids about what they wanted to know, what they did know; and one of the questions was, “Why do we have a church? What is this all about?” So I have been thinking about that and I hope that maybe I have developed a little different perspective on all of this.

You have seen many times the picture that we have of the church that we have used for a long time. You know it has the rock of revelation, the foundation of priesthood offices, the gifts of the Spirit windows and all of these kinds of things. And that’s helpful in terms of showing the different parts of the church. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought that maybe as a church we have relied too much on saying we have all the parts. We can list all of them. We have all the Priesthood offices. We know the gifts of the Spirit. We have accepted all of these things, and because we have all of the parts we have the church of Jesus Christ. And the more I have thought about it, the more I have thought that maybe we have focused on the wrong thing. We have focused on having all of the parts instead of on what the parts are supposed to do.

I would like to talk a little about the church today in terms of what its purpose is in maybe a little different way. What should we be doing as a church if we are going to be the church of Jesus Christ. Or how will we know the Church of Jesus Christ? Is it because of a list of things that we can say that we have? Or is it by what we do?

Recognized By What We do

I think the Lord is calling us to be a church that can be recognized as the church of Jesus Christ by what we do instead of only by some organizational chart or checklist of things we have. The scriptures tell us that God wants us to be able to come back into His presence. His work and His purpose is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man - man living with Him in that eternal relationship. And so Jesus went about setting up His church. But, as we read in Revelation, and I am going to read for you again from the twelfth chapter of Revelation, the purpose of the church is to bring forth the Kingdom. Several places in the scriptures it talks about this as the husband, Jesus, and the bride, His church and their child, the Kingdom. I would just like to read to you from Revelation 12 again.

“And there appeared a great sign in heaven, in the likeness of things on the earth; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And the woman being with child, cried, travailling in birth, and pained to be delivered. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all

nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God and his throne.

“And there appeared another sign in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon. . . . And the dragon stood before the woman which was delivered, ready to devour her child after it was born. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore years.

“And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought against Michael; And the dragon prevailed not against Michael, neither the child, nor the woman which was the church of God, who had been delivered of her pains, and brought forth the kingdom of our God and his Christ. Neither was there place found in heaven for the great dragon, who was cast out; that old serpent called the devil, and also called Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth; and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.”

This picture that we have from Revelation is telling us about the church and what its responsibility is to bring forth the kingdom. And it seems to me that that needs to be the focus if we are looking to find the church of Christ in these latter days. Where is the Kingdom being brought about? If that is the purpose of the church, to establish the cause of Zion - what causes Zion? What causes the Kingdom? People who have learned to live together in righteousness and the perfect love of Christ - forgiving and being forgiven. Making mistakes and learning from them. Discovering new insights in revelation as God works in our lives. Discovering true joy and peace. When we find a group of people who are doing that, we have discovered the church of Christ.

Kingdom or Kindom?

I am talking about the kingdom of Christ - the kingdom of God - not the “kindom” of God. On the internet these days, more and more people are dropping the “g” out of kingdom and making it the “kindom of God.” There is something about us being kin, brothers and sisters in Christ, brothers and sisters under God, but I think they are losing a lot of the meaning when they drop the “g” out because “kindom” doesn’t understand and recognize the relationship, that we are brothers and sisters but we are under the King! We are under God! It is God that we follow. It is the commandments of God that are important. We can be brothers and sisters. We can be nice to each other and be a kindom of God, but we won’t live in righteousness, joy and peace unless we follow His commandments, thus making Him the King in our lives.

The analogy of Christ, the church His wife, the child the Kingdom may be a better way for us to understand what we are looking for in terms of His church as I have come to understand it. Maybe the drawing needs to be of Christ, the church, His wife with all the parts, and the Kingdom the child which they are to bring forth. The analogy indicates that the work of preparation will not be easy. It talks about the pain and travailing that the church will go through to bring forth the Kingdom. But it also recognizes the great joy that comes from that struggle. The author also helps us remember that both men and women are important to the Kingdom. If anything, the woman has the major part in this kingdom building process. She is the one that brings forth the baby. It also helps us remember that we can’t be the church without Christ. Both Christ and the church have a part in the Kingdom. We can’t have the kingdom without Christ and Christ can’t have the Kingdom without

us. There is a relationship there that is necessary if we are going to be His church and be doing the things that He calls us to do in the world.

The emphasis needs to be on how well we are developing a relationship of righteousness, peace and joy more than, do we have all the parts of the puzzle in place. All of the pieces are important, but the reason that we have all these pieces in this church is to bring forth the kingdom, not to just have all the puzzle pieces.

Steps To The Kingdom Analogies

Valle tried to help me come up with an analogy that maybe will make it a little easier to understand. She has been studying reading lately since she is the reading specialist, or the teacher. She is the one teacher in the school who spends all of her time trying to help kids who are having trouble with reading learn to read. They talk about reading as being made up of several skills. One is phonemic awareness to recognize that there are different sounds out there and to be able to manipulate those sounds. You don’t even have to use your eyes for phonemic awareness. You hear sounds and then manipulate them yourself. That is one step in this process.

Another step is phonics. In phonics you tie these sounds that we make with symbols - with letters, with blends and these kinds of things. And from there you go on to expand your vocabulary. You have more and more words that you recognize. Then you become fluent in your reading. You can read smoothly and with expression in your reading. Those are the four main building blocks of learning to read.

The problem is that sometimes we have students who have phonemic awareness and can deal with phonics, sound out words and have a vocabulary, and even can be fluent in how they read, but they don’t really understand anything they are reading if they don’t have the mortar -- if they don’t have this understanding or comprehension. If you don’t understand what you are reading, it doesn’t do you much good. You can have all of the bricks in place, even to read out loud, but the whole concept - the whole reason you want to read is so that you can communicate with the author. You can recognize what the author is trying to tell you. You can read between the lines. You can say, “The author said this, but he may have meant this.” All the things that authors do. Maybe they foreshadow. There is something that is going to come and they want you to know that, but they didn’t put that down necessarily into words.

I think this is like the church. We can have all of the building blocks. We can have the foundation. We can have the Priesthood offices. We can have the gifts of the Spirit. We can have the steps of entrance and all of these kinds of things. We can point to them and say they are a part of what we believe, but if we don’t have the kingdom and the concept that that is why we are here, and why all these pieces are a part of the church, are we actually getting to where God wants us to be? Have we reached the level of comprehension, the level of doing what He wants the church to do and being what He wants the church to be?

I have used this example from my life before, but I will tell you about the first time I baked an angel food cake. My mom makes a wonderful whole wheat angel food cake, and I had her recipe book when I lived in Red Oak. I was a bachelor, and I decided one day that I was going to bake an angel food cake. So I got out the recipe. I went to the store because I didn’t have any cream of tartar, which was one of the things on the recipe. I had everything else, so I began making this angel food cake.

You are supposed to separate the whites from the yolks of a dozen

eggs, and I got through eleven or so and just had whites. On the twelfth one it kind of broke and I got a little bit of yolk in with the whites, but I thought just a little bit won't make any difference. So I began to beat up the egg whites. You put them in the mixer and beat them. And you know they are supposed to get fluffy and peak like a meringue or like whipped cream does. I beat and I beat and I beat. They never did do what I thought they were supposed to do but finally I said it had been long enough. This had to be right. So I went ahead and added in the sugar and the flour and all the other things that are supposed to be in there. I still just had a kind of a liquid instead of a fluffed up solid, but I followed the recipe. This must be right!

So I took my two part angel food cake pan that Mom had given me. I poured the mixture in it and headed for the oven. All along the way I left a path because the stuff was liquid enough that it was dripping out of the bottom of the pan. I got it in the oven and cooked it as long as it was supposed to cook, and cleaned up the mess that was outside. When I got done I had angel food cake about this high (He measured about 2 inches). It tasted okay, but it sure wasn't angel food cake. I had gone through all of the steps I thought I was supposed to go through, but I didn't have an understanding that if you got any egg yolk in with that white, you wouldn't end up with an angel food cake. You would end up with pound cake!

Parts Have Purpose

I hope we understand as we talk about what the church looks like if we are going to look for the church of Jesus Christ, that not only do we have to have the steps - the things you read about in the scriptures - to be His church. Unless we are bringing about His kingdom, we don't have His church. When you stop to think about the church from that point of view, I think you get kind of a different understanding. You see the reason that we have the Priesthood offices we have. The reason we have the gifts of the Spirit that we have. The reason we have the steps of the gospel that we have are not so that we can have a church. The reason that we have all these things is so that we can have the Kingdom.

The Rock of revelation, that's the thing that we have on the bottom of our picture of the church that we kind of looked at before, and that is so important. Without God revealing Himself and His will to us, we don't know what righteousness is. How can we have righteousness, peace and joy, which is His kingdom if we don't know what His commandments are - the things He is going to tell us to do that we can have this peace and joy in our lives?

In our picture we have Jesus as the cornerstone of our foundation, but I don't know that that is strong enough. Is Jesus just a small cornerstone? The cornerstone is important to the foundation. The cornerstone is important to the building, but isn't it more important to have Jesus standing beside us as the church and recognizing a loving relationship - a husband-wife relationship - instead of just being a cornerstone of our foundation. The goal we are working on is coming back into the presence of God and His Son Jesus on an eternal basis. Husband and wife, this loving relationship may be a better understanding than just Jesus as the cornerstone.

The priesthood offices are shown as kind of the basis of the foundation of the church in the picture to which we are accustomed. They are important, but I think it is important that we understand how each one of them is designed, not to just say we have these offices, but to help us bring forth the Kingdom. The Deacons help us understand how to be good stewards of the physical things we have. They are to make sure that families have the things they need to have their physical needs met. They are to be sure that the church

building is in order. The Teachers are to watch over the church, to strengthen it - to see that there is no iniquity or hardness with one another or lying or backbiting or evil speaking. - to see that we meet together often and do our duty as members.

The Priests are to preach, teach, expound, administer the sacrament. They are to visit the home of each member and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and to attend to all family duties. We have all these Aaronic Priesthood seeing to it that our relationships with one another are what they need to be to be Kingdom people. They are seeing that our relationships in our families are what they need to be and also helping us in our first steps in our relationship to God. The scriptures tell us that the power and authority of the Aaronic Priesthood is to hold the key to the ministry of angels, to administer the outward ordinances - the letter of the gospel. - baptism of repentance for the remission of sins agreeable to the covenants and commandments. So they have a part in our recognizing how we live together in our families and in our congregation in harmony, peace and joy and help us take the first steps of repentance and baptism.

The Elders bring the ministry of the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us with our growing relationship with God. The Seventy are traveling ministers who help share the Kingdom with others. The High Priests deal in presiding functions, ordinances and our corporate relationships with God. The Apostles are special witnesses of Jesus Christ and spreaders of the Gospel. The Bishops help us understand our personal stewardship as well as stewardship and Storehouse on a church wide level. Evangelist-Patriarchs provide guidance for our lives as well as a rejuvenating ministry for members. The Presidency provides prophetic leadership for the church.

The Melchisedec Priesthood focuses on building our relationship with God and ministering spiritual things - holding the keys to the spiritual blessings to the church - communing with the general assembly of the Church of the Firstborn - the presence of God and Christ. We don't have the Priesthood offices just to say Jesus had those offices back in those days and we have those offices today. The Priesthood are to help us find the way to live in joy and righteousness and peace together - to help us in our individual relationships, our family relationships, our financial dealings, with what God wants us to do with our lives - our understanding of the love of God and living with it - helping to share the good news with others - helping with corporate repentance and new views of where we need to be. It is exciting to view His church and the Priesthood offices that He has as means to the Kingdom. That's what they are there for - not just to have offices, but because they are there to help us grow and to be ready for the Kingdom.

The principles of the Gospel that we have as the front steps on our church building picture are important: faith, repentance, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. Those are all steps that bring us to the Kingdom. The windows of the church are the gifts of the Spirit in the drawings we have had. The window analogy is a good one if we think of them as bringing light into our lives, because that Spirit and the gifts of it are good. But if we view it as a stained glass window - something that we just want to worship instead of worshipping the light, then we have problems again. The scriptures over and over tell us that the reason we have those gifts of the Spirit is not for us to say, "We have the gifts of the Spirit, therefore we are the church of God - the church of Christ." The gifts are there to help us grow - to help us bring ministry to the lives of people. That's why they are there!

I guess what I am saying is, we can have all the pieces of the church picture in place in name only, but if we are not using them to nurture the Kingdom relationships in preparation for the delivery of the Kingdom, then we haven't gotten to the place where He wants us to be and where we want to be. Jesus promises that if we seek first the Kingdom of God, all these things will be added unto us. The physical things come as we seek the kingdom. The spiritual blessings come as we seek the Kingdom if that's what our goal is - if that's what we are working for - if we understand that that's the reason we are meeting here. That's the reason we are a part of the church.

In the parable of the ten virgins, they all had their lamps. They could all say, "Yes. I have got a lamp!" But only the ones who were using them were able to go in to the supper, the Kingdom. We can't just say, "We have the lamp, but we have oil in our lamp and it is burning!" We are doing something. That's how we can be recognized. Jesus told His disciples that they would do greater things than He did because He could not bring forth the Kingdom. His church had to do that. Those who would follow would do that. Jesus talked about in the last days there would be people who thought they were following His commandments and Jesus would say, "I don't know you!" Could it be because they were looking, saying, "But I have all the bricks!" and Jesus says, "But you need the mortar.:" Jesus says, "My sheep will know My voice, and they will be prepared so that when I say, "My Kingdom is here." They will say, "Yes!" instead of when I call you to the feast you will have something else you will have to do first because we haven't decided that the Kingdom is what we really want to do.

I could go on and on, but I hope that maybe this will give you a different view of the church and its role -- just a sampling. There is much more to be understood, but ultimately, we are only the church of Jesus Christ if we are developing the Kingdom. Other things are important tools to help us do it, but if we aren't working on Kingdom relationships, we are just being fluent readers, we don't have the comprehension we need. We are just being angel food cake bakers with egg yolks in our egg whites. I hope we can learn to put the Kingdom first in our church life because that's what we are working on so we can establish the cause of Zion. The cause of Zion is relationships with one another in our families, in our communities and righteousness, peace and joy are evident. People can look and say, "Yes! That is the church of Jesus Christ!"

Three Books of Scriptures, Our Blessing

(Note: Robert Rolfe was in charge of the service. Kathleen Myers sang, "Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go." The congregation was aware that three of Brother Clisby's children, who had been separated from him for many of their growing up years by divorce, have now come to live with him. Understanding this situation may help the readers better understand some of Brother Clisby's concerns expressed in his sermon.)

Priest Kent Clisby chose to read Doctrine and Covenants 68:4b and 4c, opening his sermon February 19, 2006. "..., for this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized; and their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands: and they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk

uprightly before the Lord."

The hymn we just sang, "Teach me, my God and King, in all things Thee to see. Teach me to be in everything, all Thou wouldst have me be" says a lot that has been going through my mind recently. The scripture I just read out of the Doctrine and Covenants says we are to teach our children to pray, to walk uprightly before the Lord. I have to start with myself. I need to ask forgiveness from the Lord myself. I like to throw stones. I am not perfect, and yet I want my children to walk uprightly and pray. The Lord wants us all to walk uprightly and pray and praise His name. But this is going to be all related to me which may be not for you all so good.

The Scriptures Are There To Guide

But looking at the scriptures this morning and last night and the night before, (Kent had just learned he was to preach on Wednesday night when the call went out for a volunteer.) I keep thinking about how my kids are doing, and how I am showing them what is right, what's wrong. I really worry about not being a good example sometimes. But I am looking for some kind of guidance - an answer. I guess the biggest joy I get is when - well, after church today my daughter finally asked me if I would help her with a school project. That kind of tickles me to no end! It's something she thinks Dad can help with. It is an art project, and I said, "I think I can handle that. We can do that after I get back from church.

My kids being new in town, they all have got themselves little jobs here and there and I can't get them to come to church because two of them are working this morning. And my youngest son, James, has decided to sign himself off to the Army National Guard. He was supposed to be there this morning. He said, "I'm going". I asked, "How are you going to get there?" He says, "I don't know." But he did find some way of getting to Des Moines.

We all want to grow up. They want to grow up in their own way. They are not always asking for guidance. They are not always asking somebody else. We have heard it when we were younger. Now they are that age and we try to tell them. I don't think it is any real difference. Everybody says history keeps repeating itself. I think it repeats itself every twenty years when you start having kids again, you know. You see, my Dad really knew something, but I didn't really listen.

Our fathers who wrote these books (the Scriptures) and gave them to us knew something. Why aren't we listening? I wish I had paid attention more! I am not a very good student of the scriptures, but I love hearing the words. Sometimes it is hard to figure out where it starts and where it stops.

Out of the Book of Mormon, the book of Alma, chapter seventeen, verses 68 -70. This is kind of a helpful hint for staying alive. "O remember my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth;" Boy, I have lost that! But then there is a second childhood. (Brother Clisby called attention to Seventy George Knotts who had recently been on a mission to Honduras and commented.) After he came back he has been like a different person. It is really nice to be around George. I think that trip down south did a lot. I enjoyed you before, George, and now, it's so much different. I love you more!

"Learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God; yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord for ever; counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good: Yea, when thou liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou riseth in the morning, let thy heart be full of

thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.”

It seems kind of a simple thing to do, but we have so many things going on in our lives any more that -- I don't know. My kids complain to me that I don't sleep enough. I complain to them that they sleep too much. I don't know if that evens it out, you know. It has been very interesting. Lie down at night with God in your heart, and rise up in the morning and praise Him. Yes, I've got another day, and I can put another foot forward.

I try to call my mother now and then. Every once in a while she will answer the phone. I don't know whether it is one of those motherly instincts things. They hear a voice and they go, “Oh, yeah, Hi!” They know who you are. You don't have to say much. “This is Kent, Mom.” You didn't have to say that, but she will answer and say, “Oh, my good son!” That bothers me sometimes that she thinks of me as being good. I don't know what good means to her, and it kind of bothers me that I don't feel really good about myself in some respects. I know I should be better. I am not doing a lot of things like other people, and that's where we should stand up and tell the guy (Satan) to get behind us. He has no right to be with us. And it's amazing how that works and how free you are. I have only done it a few times, and I have felt wonderful afterwards. He has got no place to be in our hearts. Our hearts should be only to the glory of God.

I like trying to use all of the scriptures. You know we have three books that have been given to us to study and read. Most of us study. I try to read it. And I feel like sometimes I forget that we have three books of scriptures that have been given to us. I can't --- I have a hard time trying to find the right words to give to you, this congregation, to take home and to feed on and to enjoy. So out of the book, the Holy Book, we have Proverbs, chapter three. (Proverbs 3:5-6) “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” I like that! I keep hoping that's the path I am going eventually. Eventually I hope that's the path that we all go. Right there is the beginning and the end - the Alpha and the Omega! We have to start, prepare.

Scriptures Prepare Us For The Test

The three kids that I have at my house now, I will go back to that. My youngest is still in high school and he is very good at taking tests. The kid is outstanding. He went and took the test for the National Guard. They expected fifty to fifty-one percent - something like that. He had eighty seven! Then they started really talking to him, more and more. He does test well! He doesn't want to do all the little things to get to the end of that test. I keep trying to explain to him we've got to start.

The reason the teachers are having you learn little things instead of having the answers all ready is so that the bigger things will come more naturally - a little easier. That's what Christ gave us. That's why we have these three books to go back on. And it is just given to us a little bit at a time so that we will understand - that we will be ready when the Kingdom is come.

I missed out by not speaking the last opportunity I had. I was working that day. Then this opportunity came up and I guess I needed to say, “thank you,” to everybody, too. My knees have almost quit shaking now. I don't know if it is the cold or what. There is an understanding that I feel for this congregation. We have a long way to go to achieve the goals that we are looking for - the Kingdom of Christ! And we have to take some of these smaller tests instead of graduating without them.

In the beginning of the Saints Hymnal there is something that I kind of miss - something that is not shared often enough. It is the Lord's Prayer, and I will end with it.

“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

The Presider Comments

Brother Rolfe, as presider, gave emphasis to some of the things Kent had preached. Francis Harper was cited for his practice of every morning asking that his feet be directed into the Lord's paths. The practice was recommended for each of us that we start each day asking the Lord to direct our paths.

One of the things Brother Rolfe told Kent and us that he has learned in life, is that we should never compare ourselves to other people. For one thing he said, tongue in cheek, he would not want anyone to feel bad because they were not as good looking, healthy and strong as he. Seriously he said, remember that the Lord made each one of us just like we are. We really need to have the belief, particularly in this church, that all of us are unique and that God made us the way we are for His purposes, though we may not understand what those purposes are.

When we compare ourselves to others, other than the Lord, we think they are smarter, they are faster, they sing better, they do all of these things, and it is a way of breeding unhappiness in us; and I would hope that we would be able to overcome that thing. If you compare yourself to Jesus, you are always going to be short of the way we ought to be, but the only person we are going to have to be worried about is our Lord and what He would want us to accomplish in our lives.

A Faith That Persists

Elder Gerald Bolingbroke brought us the message on the last Sunday in February. He began his sermon by reading Genesis 7:15: “And so great was the faith of Enoch, that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them, and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command.”

Brother Bolingbroke continued by noting that we are at the end of a month that has two holidays celebrated by many people in the United States. President's Day honors the presidents of our great country, and Valentine's Day honors those that we love and cherish. And although the reasons for celebrating both of these holidays are noble, he stated that today we have come to honor the greatest of all, our Heavenly Father and his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His hope was that his message to us would help us grow in our faith in these creators.

When we read or hear the words of Jesus, we find that as he traveled with his disciples down a road in Judea from Bethany to Jerusalem, they came upon a fig tree. It had pleasant green foliage and had the promise of full fruitage. Apparently, Jesus was hungry. He arrived at the tree and found it was barren.

Jesus rebuked the tree, and declared, “No man will eat of thee hereafter for ever.” If this happened to us, we might wonder why the Lord spoke in this manner. Not long after this happened, the disciples and Jesus were once again walking down the same road and approached the same tree. To their surprise, perhaps, they

found that the tree which had green leaves the day before, now had dried up with withered leaves. Christ, their leader tells them, "Have Faith in God." Jesus had control of living things. Jesus was never dependent on a pulpit or a microphone. He preached from the mountain side or from a boat upon the sea, or from the road, by the riverside, or the interior of the synagogue. On this occasion He preached a short sermon on faith and forgiveness.

Most people live by faith. They have faith that the sun will rise, and they have faith in the future. A people without faith would be seem less than human. Faith determines their values. By faith a society either succeeds or fails. If a calamity or destruction wipes out all of our material possessions, then we must rely on faith. When we look at societies of the past, faith to the people of their day seemed to be true. Some of their faith was true, much of it was inconsistent with reality. Today we can see the ruins of such civilizations.

The Hebrews asserted that there is one God who called Abraham out from among the peoples of the world. God directed him to a land where he was to build a society upon the laws of Christ. It was Christ who had created the world and all that is in it. God taught Abraham faith in the test of the command to kill his son Isaac (Gen. 22: 2), "And the Lord said, Take now thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains of which I will tell thee."

If we go back further we see that when the Israelites left Egypt they had to have faith in Moses and God to part the Red Sea so they could cross without drowning. No affirmation was more important to the Israelites than the scripture from Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."

Is faith in God unscientific? Lord Kelvin, in an address before the Christian Association of the University of London said in 1902, "Science positively affirms creative power. It is not in dead matter that we live and move and have our being, but in the creative and directing power which science compels us to accept as an article of belief." In previous sermons, Brother Bolingbroke has talked about modern scientists who believe in God by the fine tuning of the Universe.

There are many examples of great faith in the Book of Mormon. One is Lehi and Nephi in their mission to the Lamanites. They were in a prison, the same prison in which Ammon and his brethren were put. Angels conversed with them in prison. Brother Bolingbroke read some from Helaman the second chapter, "And behold the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire; and they could speak forth marvelous words. And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying, Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my well beloved, who was from the foundation of the world. And now when they heard this, they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open: and angels came down out of heaven, and ministered unto them."

Another scripture which exemplifies great faith is about the brother of Jared. Remember he forgot to call on the Lord for a while, the Lord chastened him for this. From Ether we find these words: "And it came to pass at the end of four years, that the Lord came again unto the Brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the Brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord. And the Brother of Jared repented

of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord for his brethren who were with him."

The Brother of Jared did molten out of rock sixteen small stones which were clear and transparent as glass that he carried to the top of the mountain so the people would have light in their barges as they traveled to the New World. "And they were white and clear, even as transparent glass, and he did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord, saying, O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy, and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee;"

And another passage from Ether is also very significant (Ether 1:71-74), "And he saith unto the Lord, I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood. And the Lord said unto him, Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so, ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this? And he answered, Nay, Lord, shew thyself unto me. And the Lord said unto him, Believest thou the words which I shall speak?" O, if we could have the faith of the Brother of Jared, we could do marvelous things

Joseph Smith came in a day when the world was slowly becoming Christian. He began his work at the beginning of the great industrial and scientific revolution when the importance of steam was just being discovered. It was a time when science and invention began to upsurge. It was a time in which men anticipated a golden age. It was also a time when the great foreign missionary society anticipated that the whole world would soon be converted to Christianity. Men were well satisfied with themselves in those days. They thought they were serving God acceptably. They thought they were good Christians. But Joseph Smith came saying that God had spoken to him and said, "Every man walketh in his own ways, and after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon the great which shall fall." (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 1:3e). Such statements did not make him very popular. Since that time there have been two world wars and Russia is no longer under communism. There has been the bombing of the trade center in New York, the Korean war, and two Persian Gulf wars. Joseph Smith came back from his first vision with the declaration from God that all the creeds of the popular churches are wrong. This did not make him very popular, for the church was persecuted and yet it grew very rapidly.

Joseph Smith received several revelations on faith. One of them is recorded in Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, (DC 1:4c-4e), "The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that mine everlasting covenant might be established; that the fullness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple, unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers."

The Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." As this verse clearly says, if we do not have faith, we cannot

please God. We can't even have a relationship with God without faith. It is faith in Christ that justifies us before God.

In today's skeptical society, faith has been twisted and misrepresented until it has been equated with ignorance. Skeptics commonly say that to have faith, you must abandon reason and logic. The skeptical viewpoints are shaped partly by the very fact that they reject God and party by hearing the arguments of those who defend Christianity without clearly knowing why they believe.

The Bible instructs us to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us. 1 Peter 3:15-16 reads, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer with meekness and fear to every man that asketh of you a reason for the hope that is in you: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conduct in Christ."

We don't want to have blind faith, and the Bible doesn't teach blind faith. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, defines faith this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The assurance of our hope is based on the evidence. God did not require blind faith, but faith based on the evidence He had already revealed to them.

The same is true throughout the Bible. Even Jesus revealed evidence and then called for faith. Jesus did not come to reveal His ability to do miracles, but the miracles were to reveal that He was the Christ. Jesus' miracles were to give us enough evidence so that we could take the required step of faith and commit our lives to Him. Faith must have an object and the object of our faith must be God through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that we are to have faith in God and that through prayer and believing nothing is impossible (Mark 11:24-26). Nowhere in scripture is faith referred to as a force. Faith is always considered to be an active belief in what God has said, and Jesus Christ is the central focus of our faith. This has been a general overview concerning how the Bible defines faith.

There are several ways faith applies to our daily lives. Faith is accounted for righteousness. In Isaiah 64:6 we are told that all of our righteousness is filthy rags to God. We can't measure up to God's character nor can we measure up to God's standard of righteousness. Jesus compared our sin to leaven. It is like yeast in a lump of dough. If you add more dough without yeast, it doesn't change the dough, but rather, the entire lump – including the unleavened dough – will soon be unleavened as well. In a similar way, we can add good deeds to our lives, but the sin remains. There has to be something greater than ourselves that cleanses us and then makes us righteous. The righteousness of God is given to us when we commit our hearts to Christ by faith.

In Ephesians 2:8 we find: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; but it is the gift of God." Our good deeds are very important. But maybe we don't emphasize grace enough. It is only through faith in Christ that we receive the gift of God's righteousness that gives us salvation and renews us. This is the wonderful grace of God. If we will receive Christ and repent, God does not count our sins towards us but instead turns our sins over to Christ who died for those sins. He gives our sins to Christ and gives Christ's righteousness to us. This is why it is written, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Without this exchange, we never become righteous, and cannot obtain the promise of heaven because sin cannot remain in God's presence. Without redemption through faith in Christ, we remain condemned by our sins and will reap the wages of our sins. Spiritual death is the wages of sin (Revelation 21:8). It is interesting to note that

Ephesus, the land of the Ephesians that Paul was speaking to, is not inhabited today because when the Romans took it over they burned all the trees off the land to grow food. Then when the rains came they washed the silt from the land that had been cleared for farming into the harbor, filling it with silt. Ephesus is just a marsh land today. The Romans did that to other cities along the Mediterranean also, and that is one of the reasons why Rome fell.

Faith is a defense against Satan. Look at 1 Peter 5:8-10 where he says,

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Whom Resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." To be sober is to have a clear mind. Know what you believe and stand steadfast on a solid foundation built on the word of God. We live in a fallen world. God never promised us exemption from pain, temptation or suffering. The advantage we have is the promises of God.

Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Psalm 1 tells us that the Lord knows the ways of the godly. If you are in Christ, God knows your way. God knows every detail of your life and every thing that happens, God has promised to use for our good. Very few Christians ever trust God completely and allow God to use their problems for their good. How many times do we turn back when a little more endurance would allow God to reward us according to His promises?

Again in Ephesians 6:15 we read, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Faith is increased by our commitment. The Bible tells a story about a man who had a possessed son. The disciples of Jesus had faced similar challenges, but this time they were completely unsuccessful. Jesus came and set the young man free. The disciples questioned why.

Jesus gave an interesting reply in Matthew (17:20), "And Jesus said to them, Because of your unbelief; for, verily, I say to you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. Jesus first said that their failure was unbelief and then said the key was prayer and fasting. The Bible says each of us is given a measure of faith by God. I don't believe that we have the power to increase our own faith, but we can be found faithful and God can increase our faith. Jesus said that prayer and fasting are essential.

Romans 10:16 says that faith comes by hearing the word of God. Many times I hear people say they wished they had more faith. Increased faith comes by cultivating a close relationship with Christ. That relationship can only be cultivated through discipline. Scripture study and a strong prayer life are very important. Jesus taught that God deals with us according to how we use what He has given us. If we are faithful over the little things, God will increase what we have. If we are slack and don't bother to faithfully use the abilities God has given us, He will take what we have. (Matthew 25:14-30)

Faith is one way to please God. We have already read that God has said that without faith it is impossible to please Him. Also look at these passages: Hebrews 10:38 "Now the just shall live by faith;

but if any man draw back, my soul have no pleasure in him," and James 1:6, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." How true that is today when the world is in such a bad condition where we need Jesus to come back soon.

Faith must be alive. Faith is believing God and acting upon that belief. Believing alone means little. We can believe something without demonstrating faith. Look at what the book of James has to say: "And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. For, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.

Brother Bolingbroke continued by sharing a testimony that reflects the scriptures and is helpful in bringing about a better understanding of those scriptures. It is a testimony of faith and is entitled "Saved From the Fire" by Sallie Gross Presler.

At about 5:00 p.m., Sallie's five year old son, Dane, and Sallie went outside to work in the yard. After Sallie had raked part of the hill, they started burning leaves. As the fire started burning down, they began adding things like the Christmas tree, brush from the yard, a couple of pieces of wood that had been too big to put in the fireplace the previous winter, and two trees. They finished up with some lumber left over from building their house, mostly 2 x 10's. It was a large, very hot fire after they put the lumber on it.

Having loaded up the fire, they spent a couple of minutes sowing some flower seeds. Then they picked up the hose and started watering. As they watered, they played. Dane was sticking his finger into the water stream as she held the hose. Suddenly, the water squirted out in his face, and he whirled around to run. As he whirled, he lost his balance and fell backwards into the fire. As he landed in the fire, he started rolling away from her.

She dropped the hose and ran around the fire, thinking she would keep him rolling to put the fire out. As she reached him, he was on his back. He was not burning. She rolled him to his stomach. He was not burning. She carried him away from the fire and began to look at him. He was crying. He said, "I am sorry Mommy. I did not mean to fall in the fire!" She assured him it was okay. He said, "But Mommy, my shirt!" She looked at his cotton T-shirt. It was not burned or charred. He said, "But Mommy, my pants!" She brushed off some ashes and looked. The pants were not burned either. His hair was not even singed. Even his hands, which he put down into the fire as he rolled, were not the least bit red.

Later that evening, she shared with her husband, Aaron, what had happened. He brought up two events. The first was that the evening before, Aaron and she had taught the two through five-year-olds class at church about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Jesus had been there so that there was not a burn mark or singed hair on them. Also, two weeks previously, they had their home dedicated to God. At that service, there had been a prayer by the Aaronic Priesthood, asking for the ministry of angels upon their home, as well as a prayer by the Melchizedec Priesthood asking for a spiritual blessing.

She knew how large and hot the fire was. She once suffered a third degree burn and knew the pain it brings. She knew her faith is weak. She knew she was undeserving of this blessing for her son. Yet God, in his infinite mercy, sent an angel to protect, Dane. And in doing so, He touched her family in such a way that they will never again be the same. This was a great miracle for this family. The faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego is evident in this story. Dane had the faith to be not burned.

Brother Bolingbroke closed with the scripture from the tenth chapter of Moroni verse 15, "Wherefore, there must also be faith, and if there must be faith, there must also be hope, and if there must be hope, there must also be charity; and except ye have charity, ye can no wise be saved in the kingdom of God;" May God add his blessing to all of you this day.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
Mount Ayr Restoration Branch
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News & Notes

Preparation for Easter Cantata

The congregation had its first “sing through” of Joseph M. Martin’s “Harvest of Sorrows” under the direction of Jan Jordison February 26 after church services. The Easter cantata will be performed at the Mount Ayr church on the evening of Palm Sunday, April 9.

Anyone from the community or congregations in outlying areas who wishes to sing is welcome and invited to participate. Just come and join in. The first rehearsal is set for 1:30 PM Sunday, March 5, following the Zion dinner. Additional rehearsal dates and times will be announced.

Second Conference of Branches Convenes

The first week of April will see the convening of the combined conferences of Restoration Elders and of Restoration Branches. The theme of the conference week is “Come Unto Christ - Let Us Reason Together”. The week will begin Sunday, April 2 with a Joint Sacrament service held in the Auditorium and directed by the Pastors in Zion.

The Conference of Restoration Elders will commence Sunday afternoon with registration at Waldo Avenue Restoration Branch. Preaching service held that evening is the first gathering of the conference. The conference of Restoration Elders will then proceed through Wednesday, April 5.

Registration for the Conference of Restoration Branches, for those not already registered, begins Monday, April 3, at the Waldo Restoration Branch. Early registration is encouraged and is available. Forms may be obtained by writing to the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches, P.O. Box 3310, Independence, MO 64055 or from the internet at www.conferenceofbranches.org.

The Conference of Restoration Branches is a delegate conference. Delegates chosen from participating branches will have delegate seating to expedite counting of votes. Each delegate will be credited with 25 votes whereas individuals who wish to vote will

only count 1. For all participants, registration and name tags are required. There is no charge for registration. Conference books are available for those who want them for \$5.00 each.

Pre conference meetings are planned to discuss resolutions to be presented, to share information on evangelism and the world and to give training in conference procedures.

On Thursday, April 6, the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches convenes with a mass meeting of the Elders at 7:30 a.m. followed by a general prayer service directed by the Spiritual Fellowship of Restoration Patriarchs. Business sessions occupy the rest of the day. The evening song service begins at 6:30 p.m. followed by a worship service under the direction of the Patriarchs. Friday and Saturday schedules are the same as the one for Thursday.

Sunday, April 9 the service will be moved to William Chrisman High School to accommodate all who wish to worship with the conference. Activities there begin with an 8 a.m. prayer service followed by the morning worship. The conference adjourns at 1 p.m.

Delegates to represent the Mount Ayr Branch will be chosen Sunday, March 5. Anyone interested in being a delegate is invited to volunteer to be a candidate. Mount Ayr is asked to send four representatives, including the Pastor.

I-Chat service shared over miles

The congregation had the opportunity Wednesday, March 1, to share in a service of worship in Mount Ayr and Champaign, IL at the same time.

When prayer service was held at the home of Alan and Valle Smith, they hooked up by I-chat conference with Peter, Erin and Eli Cornish in Illinois. The family in Illinois could see and hear what was happening in Mount Ayr, and vice versa.

Peter and Erin shared in the service, with Peter offering the closing prayer from Illinois.