

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Peter's Lesson

Imagine yourself in the apostle Peter's position.

You'd followed Jesus for several years and had experiences like being able to walk on water for at least a short way.

Jesus is teaching the disciples about the Lord's supper, breaking and bread and serving the wine. Then he turns to you and says:

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan desires you that he may sift the children of the kingdom as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not; and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

Can you imagine being offended like Peter was? I'm not converted? You're picking me out of this group to say Satan is working hard on me?

Like Peter we might say "Lord, I am ready to go with you, both into prison and unto death."

Jesus knew that just saying the words was not enough, but they had to be put into action, and Peter wasn't going to be able to do what he said.

"I tell you Peter, that the cock will not crow this day before you will have three times denied that you knew me."

Peter, your resolve to be a follower of me won't last the night, Jesus was saying.

Maybe like Peter we would say more vehemently: "If I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any way."

The other disciples said similar things, but none of their resolves lasted the night.

Take Peter.

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TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

His Name is I AM

Note: At the opening of the service, Gordon Winkler and Cathy Akers were asked to share good news.

Heidi Winkler had gone through surgery for a growth on her thyroid. Heidi had planned the surgery so it would not interfere with her school schedule and approached the surgery with faith such that she refused the medications that were presumed to be essential to calm the patient for that sort of surgery on the basis of her affirmation that she had discussed the situation with her Lord and was not afraid. The growth proved to be benign and the family would have liked to let the surgeon know that the excellent work he exhibited to his coworkers was not all his own. Our prayers and Heidi's faith were involved.

Cathy had been diagnosed with pressure and bleeding in the back of one eye. The date for her surgery was set. She asked for administration and prayers at prayer meeting the night before the surgery. The specialist who was to do it examined the eye and could find nothing wrong! There was no adverse pressure and no bleeding! Her cataracts were even too tiny to cause concern.

Brother Robert Rolfe sang the setting of the Twenty Third Psalm that affirms in its chorus, "Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days, all the days of my life." He then invited the congregation to join him singing "Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King. Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King. Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King. Hallelujah! We are going to see the King." We finished the beautiful, quiet harmony of the song, and Brother Rolfe added, as he removed his guitar, "Surely I come quickly!"

The Sermon

Elder Norman Nelson read the account of Jesus serving bread and wine in the Americas when no bread or wine had been brought. (3 Nephi 9:40-45)

"And it came to pass that he break bread again, and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat. And when they had eaten he commanded them that they should break bread, and give it unto the multitude. And when they had given unto the multitude, he also gave them wine to drink, and commanded them that they should give unto the multitude. Now there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude; but he truly gave

unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink; And he said unto them, He that eateth this bread, eateth of my body to his soul, and he that drinketh of this wine, drinketh of my blood to his soul, and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled. Now when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold they were filled with the Spirit, and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.... ”

This day we come to this table to witness to Jesus that we are willing to take upon us His name, to be His friend, His servants and His children, and to promise we will always remember Him in everything we do. Jesus has said, “I am the Lord, thy God!” “I AM” is His name. And then He tells us, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and strength and thy neighbor as thyself.” (Matthew 22:36-38).

And as He spoke in Deuteronomy (5:6-14), He said, “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth; Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

“Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.

“Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work;” (Not five but six) “But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.” I am the Lord thy God. Serve Me!

We find that we should always be seeking to be the servants of our Lord, but this is a day when we renew our covenant to serve Him with singleness of heart, and the offering we bring is that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

A broken heart and a contrite spirit! I am not God. I am not a righteous person. I need to confess to you, my friends and to My God that I am not the person that I ought to be - that I need you and I need my God every minute. We are finite. We will not always be here. We don't know what happens when you change. We have faith that God will take care of us, that Jesus will be there, and He will be able to forgive and to welcome us into His kingdom, not because we are perfect or the persons we ought to be or the persons He wants us to be, but because He is reaching out to us - standing between us and where we ought to be. Unless we can recognize the difference between where we are and where we ought to be, we cannot be entirely honest with ourselves. So we come again asking His forgiveness, His help - asking Him to make us what He wants us to be. As long as we think of ourselves as better than others, we have a problem. When we see others living wickedly we should not condemn but say, “But for the grace of God, there go I!”

When I fall, He picks me up and sets my feet back on the path He wants me to walk. Remember, I have told you before of the time Jesus asked if Samuel had not prophesied that at the time of the resurrection many Saint came out of their graves and ministered. Those Saints are still here doing the work that God would have them

to do to help bring us back to be the people we ought to be. Because the Lord loves you, He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from bondage. It must be by His mighty hand. Not by might, not by our strength but by His power He will lead us out of bondage if we allow Him to do it. It will be as miraculous as it was when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. It is His work, for His glory and by His grace he will lead us if we allow Him to do so. Isaiah 42:6-8 reads, “I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” We must recognize that the glory is His and He will do it with a strong hand.

“And Jesus answered and said, “It is written. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4). We have been asked to study, pray and fast that we may be prepared to listen to Christ. One of my favorite scriptures is Genesis 3:4-5: “Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him; and also that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten I caused that he should be cast down; and he became Satan. Yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive, and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.” Christ says to us, “I am not subject to him, but you are. Pray always that you enter not into temptation.” We must abide in His law, seek His Spirit daily and seek always to be with Him.

The word of the Lord came to Zechariah (Zechariah 7:9-11): “Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother; And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.” That is our condition today. We are satisfied with ourselves. Our hearts are not broken as they should be. He will do it. He will bring to pass that righteous situation. We need to tune ourselves to be there as much as we can. Jesus said, (Matthew 5: 1-18): “And Jesus, seeing the multitudes, went up into a mountain; and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words, when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe on your words, and come down into the depth of humility, and be baptized in my name; for they shall be visited with fire and the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.” Have you been visited with fire and the Holy Ghost?

“Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit, who come unto me; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And again, blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. And blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth. And blessed are all they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost. And blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy. And blessed are all the pure in heart; for they shall see God. And blessed are all the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

“Blessed are all they that are persecuted for my name's sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are ye when men shall

revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. For ye shall have great joy, and be exceeding glad; for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor, wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall thenceforth be good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of the world; a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Therefore, let your light so shine before this world, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Our job is to keep His commandments. His job is “to bring to pass the immortality, and eternal life of man.” (Doctrine and Covenants 22:23b). Your job is to covenant with Him and seek diligently to hear His voice. You can not follow His voice unless you hear His voice! This is His work, and He will do it. We have to try the best we can to be with Him.

Fasting Prayer Service

The Mount. Ayr Restoration congregation accepted the invitation of a group of young priesthood to join them in using the morning worship period of the second Sunday of each month from March to August as a fasting prayer service, except as the Spirit of God directs differently.

Sunday, March 12 was the first of these services. Elder Gerald Bolingbroke was in charge. He had the room arranged so the fifty of us sat in two concentric circles and our deacon, Danny Kinnaman, provided the traveling microphone for those participating.

We sang, “Joyful, Joyful we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love.” Brother Bolingbroke offered the invocation and we sang “Touch me, Lord, with Thy Spirit eternal. Stir my soul to respond to Your call.” Then Brother Bolingbroke read the letter of invitation that was signed by seven young Priesthood who wrote:

“For the past five months we have met together as a group of friends and priesthood members to pray and discuss our lives and the condition of the church. Like many others, we have found that we have a common desire for healing within the body. Our passion is similar to what Nephi expressed (2 Nephi 15:4) “For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry; and I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers, for the gain of my people.”

“The Restoration branches in their divided and fractured state are not the vehicle designed by God to bring forth Zion. We will continue to fragment and drift apart as long as we do not have a unified vision. We recognize that the church was established on the concept of seeking the will of the Lord when we lack wisdom, as referred to in James 1:5. The very fact that so many people in today’s church claim to know what is best for the body, each with a different idea, indicates that, as a whole, we do “lack wisdom”.

“We feel strongly that if those who call themselves part of the Lord’s church will humble themselves and pray (Chronicles, 7:14) that the Lord will assist the church in this time of confusion. We do not claim to have the answers. We do, however, recognize within the church that there is confusion. Because of this, we desire for the entire Restoration to come together with the single purpose of

seeking God’s will. We hope that together we can find wisdom from God and that this wisdom will unify the Saints and that division among us will cease.

“The basic premise is very simple. We would like for the Restoration Branches to set apart six months, from March through August, as a period of prayer and fasting. To discern the Lord’s plan for healing His church. Like you, we are concerned about the many voices that are crying out for the people to follow them. We would like for all of the saints to feel part of petitioning the Lord for direction. In this way, when the Lord answers, we will be united in our response to His call to serve Him.

“In order for this activity to be fully successful, it will be important for all the branches that can to set aside the second Sunday morning each month as a service of prayer and fasting. In this way we can be united for at least one day out of the month for this purpose. The service should be directed towards repentance and seeking the will of our Heavenly Father.

“Hopefully this monthly service will not be the only time the branches address the need for supplication. We would desire that each branch seek out other ways to incorporate this striving for God’s will, including priesthood visiting themes, Sunday school classes or sermon topics.

“We would like to create an atmosphere among the branches where each branch feels part of a larger effort. We would like for the branches to join together in their fasting services to further encourage this feeling of unity among the body of Christ.

“Please contact us if you have any question about this initiative. We thank you for your prayerful consideration and for your help in encouraging the body to turn their hearts toward God. We fully believe the Lord will hear us as we cry to Him for help.

“Your Brothers in Christ,

Aaron Smith, Nathan Smith, David Gilmore, Aaron Rhoads, Aaron Bailey, Chris Morris, Jeff Anger”

We were welcomed and called to come together in unity as we sang, “Church of Christ in Latter Days, Rise, fulfill your destiny!” Pat Bolingbroke read Doctrine and Covenants 38:6, “Behold, this I have given unto you a parable, and it is even as I am: I say unto you, Be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine.” Prayers for unity were offered by a number of worshippers.

We sang, “Crown Him With Many Crowns, the Lamb upon His throne” and Ephesians 4:1-5 was read by Alan Smith., “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, In one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” Prayers were offered for doing God’s will.

We sang, “He Leadeth Me, Oh blessed thought! Whate’r I do, where’r I be, Still ‘tis God’s hand that leadeth me!” Cheryl Phipps read Moroni 10:15-17, “Wherefore, there must 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 in no wise be saved in the kingdom of God; Neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God, if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope; and if ye have no hope, ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity. And Christ truly said unto our fathers, If ye have faith, ye can do all things which are expedient unto me.” Prayers for the strengthening of our faith followed.

We were sent forth from the service with the hymn, “Sent forth

by God's blessing, our true faith confessing, the people of God from his dwelling take leave To work for God's kingdom and answer His call." Brother Sherman Phipps offered the benediction.

The Flaxen Cord That Binds

Elder Michael Jordison chose to read 2 Nephi 11:109.- "But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money, they shall perish." He thanked the Galusha family for reminding us that it is the Lord who leads us throughout life. He commented on some, perhaps Mennonite or Amish, of whom it is reported that when they come to worship, they "open up the book", and where it opens is where they start preaching. The scripture that Sherman read to us this morning (Doctrine and Covenants 28:1-2f) has a wealth of information in it and is certainly one that we could talk about this morning, and in a way we are going to talk about it. Perhaps we will revisit that scripture later on. But I would like to lead out this morning, again from the second book of Nephi 11:90-94. This is Nephi prophesying, "And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; Nevertheless they put down the power and the miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves, their own wisdom, and their own learning, that they may get gain, and grind upon the face of the poor; And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice; And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the foundation of all these things; yea, the foundation of murder, and works of darkness; Yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords for ever." I would like to focus this morning on that flaxen cord. I don't know if you are familiar with a flaxen cord. I am not real familiar with it other than the fact that bow strings (for bow and arrows) are often made out of flaxen cord. The cords are actually comprised of the stalk or stem of a flax plant. It is dried and beaten down until all that is left is a feathery kind of a fiber. The longer the fiber you can get the better. They will take those very long and light fibers and weave them together. Each little feathery or fine strand like a thread, by itself is very fragile - very light - but when they are woven together, they create a strong cord that is very difficult to break and does not stretch easily. That's why they use them for bow strings. They need something that will hold its tension.

So a flaxen cord about your neck is very light - something that you don't easily feel. If someone were to place a heavy chain around your neck, you would know that right off the bat. But a flaxen cord is different. It is light and thin. Sin is a lot like those flaxen fibers or flaxen threads that comprise that cord. One sin by itself doesn't have a whole lot of power to bind us and to keep us from turning from it, but when we have many sins in our lives, they begin to weave themselves together and emesh themselves in our lives, creating a strong cord, like a chain. And when we try to turn from them, we feel the tension. One sin by itself does not have power of itself to keep us, but many sins are stronger and will. And remember, it is the devil that leads us about with these flaxen cords leading us wherever he will down to hell. Sometimes we realize that the cord is there. Sometimes we don't. It restricts where we go and what we can do. Often we make excuses for our lack of mobility. We say it's not sin

that is binding us or keeping us from doing something. It's something else. So we deceive ourselves, really.

The more common experience of Christians, and that's who I am talking to today, and that is who the scripture that Sherman read referred to. It was talking to the "elect". We are the elect. It is a lot easier to talk to people who have gross sin in their life and tell them to repent than it is to talk to people who have little sins in their lives and tell them that they need to repent. But the Christian experience with the flaxen cord usually comes from pride.

Samson's Story

I don't know if you are all familiar with the story of Samson. (Samuel, do you know the story of Samson the Nazarite?) We will visit him just a minute this morning. He was chosen by God before his birth. There was not a razor allowed to be on his body. He couldn't shave his hair. He received his strength because he was set apart for God as a Nazarite and because he was not shaven. He fell in with a woman named Delilah who won his affection. She was offered a lot of money if she could find out Samson's secret and tell that to the Philistines. (Michael, it was the Philistines. May I delete this statement?) excuse me, the Israelites. So she asked him several times, "Samson, what is the source of your strength?" He gave her various reasons for the source of his strength, and each one was not the real source. Finally he broke down, weary of her asking, and he told her the truth. So one night after he fell asleep in her lap, she called for the barbers. They came and shaved him. They cut his hair - cut the locks off of his hair. And when she called, "Samson, the Philistines are coming!", he tried to get up to defend himself, and found he couldn't do it. He had lost his strength.

We as Christians sometimes think, "Yeah, we know we have sin in our lives, but that is something we can overcome. We can do that tomorrow. I can change that tomorrow or I can change that on Communion Sunday. That's something that's easy." But what we don't realize is that we have become like Samson. We have allowed the secret to our strength - the source of our strength to be made known to the enemy. We have cut ourselves off from that strength and find ourselves bound with that flaxen cord, each fiber by itself not able to bind us, but when woven together allows us to be led down into captivity.

As Christians we know that Christ has the power to break those bonds, but when we fail to honor His word, we are left to ourselves; and even though we know the source of our strength, He who can redeem us from that sin, we don't have His Spirit in full power and therefore, are unable, in many instances to break free of that chain. Instead of turning from it in true repentance, we begin to believe that we can break free of it later.

The Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Nigh

Brother Ron, Brother Delbert and Brother George have all been called to the office of Seventy, as have others. When Jesus walked the earth with His disciples, it says in the tenth chapter of Luke, that He ordained other Seventy and sent them forth, two by two, to prepare the way before Him, into every city where He was to go. And they were to give a charge saying, "The Kingdom of God has come nigh unto you." The Seventy went to prepare the people for the Kingdom of God. The Seventy today have that same calling - to prepare the people for the kingdom of God. Jesus is waiting for our response to the gospel so that He can give us the Kingdom in full measure - His righteousness - His peace, and His joy and all of His affection. Jesus is the Kingdom. He is the Kingdom in bodily form.

There are games out there which ask you a question - if you

were a fruit, what kind of fruit would you be? Or, if you were a car, what kind of a car would you be. You have to think about all of your characteristics. Am I a fast race car, a Mazarreti or am I a Pinto or a Volkswagon, or whatever, a Mercedes. If we turn that question around and ask, "If the kingdom of God were a person, who would it be?" and the answer is, Jesus Christ. Within Jesus are all the elements of the gospel in a person. Everything that is good and true and lovely resides within Jesus, and just as Jesus was nigh unto the people in His day in Israel, He is nigh unto us today. And the kingdom of God is nigh unto us today. It is awaiting our response to the gospel so that we can be showered again, like I said, with those affections and with His power.

I recalled a testimony that Brother Ray Huggett shared in 1971 at Oak Grove of an experience he had. The back of the sanctuary was opened and he saw the city of Zion. He saw that it was a glorious city, but there were these shadows - these clouds - that were obscuring it from view. He was given to know that these cloud were the failures of the church to equip their youth, and ultimately everyone in the church, because the youth grow up, to equip them with the life saving and the life giving principles that they would need not only to insure their standing in the church, but to cultivate those skills in building up the Kingdom of Zion. These clouds he saw were failures to observe keeping the Sabbath Day Holy, obeying the law of stewardship, remaining chaste before marriage and keeping that covenant in marriage, utilizing the promises of the Word of Wisdom and respecting our bodies as temples of the Spirit in what we do to them, and keeping our covenants with God - obeying His commandments. You see, when we fail to keep these things, they don't just keep us from building the Kingdom. They keep us from seeing that the kingdom is already there. The kingdom is already before us. Like as Jesus commissioned His Seventy, the kingdom is come nigh unto us, and Zion is available right now. Like Norman says, the Saints who were resurrected at the resurrection of Jesus are available to us now. Zion is available to us now, but its glory and its power are obscured because of the sin that still reigns in the church - not in the world, but in the church! We are lacking some kind of spiritual capacity to see it.

In the Garden, you will remember, it talks about when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it says their eyes were opened. Their natural eyes were opened and their spiritual eyes were closed as they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. It is through baptism that those spiritual eyes are reopened - the baptism of water and the baptism of fire. And many of the church have allowed sin to close our spiritual eyes again, blinding us to the reality of the kingdom before us. When we close our eyes to the cord around our necks, we close our eyes to the things of God. We have allowed the devil to weave those flaxen cords of sin around our necks. And he wants so much to carry the church down into captivity where he can put his chain around us forever - through all eternity.

We Can't. Jesus Can!

Like I said, of ourselves, we cannot break the cord. Samson couldn't defend himself. But the power of Jesus Christ can do that for each one of us. We may repent of some sin, but unless we keep our guard up, it may creep back in, or new sin may come in and weave itself into our life.

About a month ago I hurt my hand in Tae Kwon Do. I thought I had just bruised it. Evidently I did something worse to it because it progressively got worse. After three weeks of urging by my wife, I finally went to the hospital, and they put a splint on it and wrapped

it up completely. They made it immobile, useless. It was basically a club. I couldn't do much with it. I tried to work a couple of days with it but couldn't do anything, really. So I went out and bought this brace. It has helped. It restricts the movement of my hands so I can't move my wrist up and down. But you know, I have lost the full use of my hand. This brace is better than that splint they put on there, but I am still not back up to 100%. The only thing that would bring me back to 100% would be the full restoration of my hand. And the kingdom of Zion is very similar to that. We need to be one hundred percent effective for the work for Zion to be. We have to give 100% to remove those clouds and those shadows to see the kingdom. When I say build up the kingdom of God, I am not saying that we have to start, because the foundation and the walls are already laid. When I say, "build up", I mean we have to shore up. Isaiah talks about, "strengthen the stakes and lengthen the cords of Zion." We are to enlarge its borders. The kingdom is there for us. We must nourish it.

Called To Be Laborers For Zion

"But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money, they shall perish." Ron, what do you do for a living? Teach mathematics. Why do you teach Mathematics? I like mathematics and they will pay me for teaching. Gordon, what do you do? CEO of the health facility. Why? Because I like the opportunity to help others. Kent what do you do? Build. Why? Like it. We do things usually because we like them. Now if I were to ask Cody, "What do you do?" You go to school. Why do you go to school? So you can get an education. I thought maybe you would say, because you have to. Usually we do things because we like to do them or we want to do them. Our motivation is what reflects our character. I heard this once and I think it's true, that our character can perhaps best be defined as who we are and what we do when nobody else is watching - when we are by ourselves. Let's say we get a few free hours through the day. What do we do? The family goes away for the weekend and we are left by ourselves. What do we do? Are we laboring for Zion in our private lives when we are by ourselves? I think if we really want to effectively labor for Zion as a congregation, as a church or as a family or a group, we first have to have that same desire to labor for Zion when we are by ourselves - when nobody else is watching - when there is nothing else to distract us. Our corporate worship will never replace our own personal conviction. Whatever we do when we come to church on Sundays is not going to make up for what we do when we go home. Whatever we do at home by ourselves, that is what counts! We must labor for Zion, not for things of no lasting value.

Don't let me get you too down, but I just want to tell every one of you that you are all very ugly. We are all covered with wounds. We are all struggling for breath, but most of us don't realize it. As I watched my father die from cancer, I saw what appeared to be, for all practical purposes, a normal, healthy person, in less than a month wither away to a bag of bones and flesh and lay on his bed struggling just for breath. You know my Dad was dying on the inside way before we ever could tell it on the outside. And Satan is doing that to every one of us right now - killing us on the inside, and he usually, not always, kills us and destroys us on the inside way before we see its effect on the outside of our bodies. Immoral sin sometimes we don't see for awhile, but it shows up. We are created in the image of God. We have a body and we have a spirit, and it is sin that destroys that spirit.

From the Doctrine and Covenants, section 28 verse 9a-9c, the Lord spoke through the prophet Joseph Smith and said, "Where-

fore, verily I say unto you, that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal, neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam your father, whom I created; behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him; for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural, nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.” And sin is the offense against our spirits. Sin is the result of breaking the spiritual commandments, and when we sin, it is just like cutting ourselves. But instead of cutting our hand off where we can see it, we cut the hand off of our spirit, and we wonder why our ministry is lacking.

I was just thinking about this - why don't we see more fruits of the Spirit in our worships than we do? We read in our publications from yesteryear and they were full. And I can't help but wonder that we have marred our spirits up so much that we have hindered the power of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in our lives and in our worship. We are like children with leprosy. Leprosy is a disease that sometimes destroys the sensory nerves and makes parts of your body go numb. You can't feel them, so as you are walking along and stub your toe or cut our hand on something you don't realize it because you can't feel it. If you don't get medical attention right away, your hand may get to the point where it has to be amputated. That is what sin is doing to our spirits. We are numb to what happens to our spirits and only sometimes do we get to feel the effects in our bodies as consequences of that sin.

So the more sin that we are engaged in, whether it is heavy or whether it is light, the more our spirits are marred and mangled, until we are like my father on that hospital bed - a bag of bones and tissue struggling for breath. Or, perhaps we are mangled and marred so badly we are bleeding from every pore. You will recall that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night when His friends fell asleep. It says that as He prayed, he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. Jesus took that spiritual marring from us - the cutting of our spirits of those who would exercise faith on Him. He took more than any man could. In fact, He took so much that His physical body began to show the effects of it. And about twelve hours later His physical body succumbed to that sin.

Most of us have laid claim to the proxy sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us. We have covenanted with Jesus Christ. We have entered into the waters of baptism. And we have given a sacrifice of ourselves. That is what the water of baptism symbolizes - our own death and our own resurrection as a new creature. Then we forget, most of us.

I want to revisit the scripture that was read this morning Doctrine and Covenants 28:1-2f, because I think that scripture is very important. Will you bear with me?

“Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the great I AM, whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins, who will gather his people even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, even as many as will hearken to my voice, and humble themselves before me, and call upon me in mighty prayer. Behold, verily, verily I say unto you, that at this time your sins are forgiven you, therefore ye receive these things; but remember to sin no more, lest perils shall come upon you.

“Verily I say unto you, that ye are chosen out of the world to declare my gospel with the sound of rejoicing, as with the voice of a trumpet; lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father; and it is his good will to give you the kingdom; and as it is written, Whatsoever ye shall ask in faith,

being united in prayer according to my command, ye shall receive; and ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect, for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; ... ”

We are elect when we harden not our hearts, it says here. What do you suppose it means to harden not your heart? It means that you hear the word of God and you accept it with all readiness, and you are obedient to that command. That's what makes us elect.

“Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place, upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts, and be prepared in all things, against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked; ... ” Saints! That is our calling, and responsibility. We have forgotten that. We have forgotten that the laborers in Zion - the church are to labor for Zion. Our profession, our school, our leisure activities, the things that we do are to be for the building up of the Kingdom. In our private lives, we are to build up the kingdom. There are many things that we should be doing. There are many things that we shouldn't be doing, too. But there are many things that we should be doing, and when we allow sin to grow within ourselves, we cut off the response of the Spirit to allow us to build up the kingdom. I speak from great experience at this. I know there are many things - I am one of those Christians that says, “Yes. I know that there is a lot of sin in my life. I know that I've got a few strands of flax hanging around my neck, but I can break that later. When Jesus comes and restores the church and I join the church in its fulness, those cords will be broken.” But the scriptures don't say that. Just as they say when we die, we are received into the state that we are in at that moment. Who we are when we die is who we are when we cross over into the next life. And it is our responsibility as Saints, if we really desire to live in Zion, and to build Zion, to remove those clouds in our lives that blind us from the reality that Zion already is - the potential is there just as the potential for every person here was in that tiny sperm cell - in that tiny strand of DNA. Everything that you and I have become was written in that seed.

And Zion is the same. So I hope that each one of us is encouraged to have a different perspective in why we are doing what we are doing whatever it happens to be and whenever it happens to be because, if we don't change, and I think it's pretty obvious that we all need to change, no matter how good we think we might be now. We will not be magically caught up in the building of the kingdom - changed from a luke warm Saint to an endowed one. We may be better than others. We may be worse than others. We still have to change. We still have to endure until the end. As long as we do that with a sincere effort, there are things that are going to slip through the cracks, but Jesus said that His grace was sufficient to cover for those.

So, thank you. God bless you.

Sherman Phipps, in charge of the service, spoke briefly at the close of the sermon saying: I will tell you that I agree with Mike, and of course I can only speak for myself, that sin is a kind of a deadly thing, and it kind of sneaks up on you. You have to be watching it - fighting against it all of the time. So what I say next doesn't mean that I think everybody here is perfect. I don't want to leave that message at all. I would rather - I think we need to listen to Mike. We need to be repentant. We need to be ever vigilant.

But one of the things I pray about every week is that the Lord will bring together here on Sunday those that He wants here - those that can be fed by being here and nurtured. So each week I come and I am interested to see who is here - who needs the help this week - who needs the message, and in turn, who can help me by being here.

I think there are some who would say, “Look, Sherman, your prayers are not being answered because every week it is pretty much the same group.” But I think that is an answer to my prayer.

So I am glad you are here, and I hope we can look at ourselves, we can recognize what we need to do in order to free Zion and in order to give God the liberty that He would like to have with us. Let’s sing, “Let us shake off the coals from our garments and arise in the strength of the Lord.”

God Plants The Restoration In Liberia

Elder Randy Vick, a member of the Warrensburg, Missouri Restoration Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ ministered in Mt. Ayr Branch Sunday, March 26 for both the church school and the 11:00 o’clock worship hour. The congregation had just sung the African hymn, “Bye and Bye. We will understand it better Bye and bye.” under the direction of Barbra Jordison in a phonetic African language. Brother Vick took his microphone. With deep appreciation he spoke of the great thrill it would give the people of whom he was to report to know that we had wanted to sing one of their songs in their tongue. There is not room in our Newsletter to report the transcription of Randy’s entire presentation so we have excerpted portions that help us understand the situation and the way in which the Lord is planting His gospel in Liberia, a devastated, war torn land.

Elder Vick Speaks

I know that there are many here who have been on a missionary trip, so I am kind of speaking to the veterans. But I am anxious to share the story about the gospel of Jesus Christ and how it has gone into Liberia, a small country in Africa. I came back last July after a year and a half in Liberia, and I have been blessed by the Lord because over the last four months I have had the opportunity to speak almost every Sunday at one of our branches. It gives me an opportunity to share the story and it makes me feel a little more connected to the people there.

The reason that we do what we do is because God has commanded us to take the fulness of the gospel into the world. That is what He has called us to do. He blessed us in giving us the fulness of the gospel through the Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and He has commanded us to share that with the world. As we read in the 58th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, (15c), “For verily the sound must go forth from this place” and the “this place” He is talking about is the Centerplace. It must go from here to the rest of the world. “Into all the world; and to the uttermost parts of the earth, the gospel must be preached unto every creature.” Liberia, qualifies as “the uttermost parts of the earth”. it is out there in the middle of nowhere.

In the 17th chapter of Alma (33) we read, “And behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they”, and the “they” it is speaking about are the Book of Mormon records, “that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue and people” And I want you to remember that word, “tongue” in that scripture, because tongue there is speaking about language. The gospel has to go forth to every language group in the world. And then again from Doctrine and Covenants 83: 10a, “Therefore, go ye into all the world, and

whatsoever place you cannot go into, you shall send, that the testimony may go from you ... , unto every creature.” Obviously, not everybody can go into the missionary field in far lands, but what section 83 assures us is that if you can’t go, you send. And if you send, then the testimony, the witness is coming from you; so you are sharing personally the gospel of Jesus Christ with people in far away lands. And so I want to share with you today how the Restoration gospel came to Liberia .

For those who may not know, Liberia is a small country on the west coast of Africa, very close to the equator, about the size of Tennessee, with a population of three and a half million people. It was established primarily by freed slaves returning to Africa from the United States. It became the first democracy on the continent of Africa when it became an independent nation in 1847. Liberians consider America their mother country. So they really look to the United States for a lot of things. At the same time in the eighteen twenties when the Lord started speaking to Joseph Smith in the process of restoring His church, the freed slaves started returning to Liberia and began the preparation of that nation which would, in our day and time, receive the fullness of the gospel.

I worked for the United Nations as an international police officer. Seventy five American police officers were sent to Liberia to help the United Nations in rebuilding the police system in Liberia. I arrived on the 24th of February, 2004. On the eighth of March, my team of eight was deployed to Buchanan, the second largest city, about a hundred and fifty kilometers south of Monrovia, the capitol city. It is right on the coast of the Atlantic ocean. We were to try to find Liberian police officers who would come back to work. The dictator, Charles Taylor, liked to kill police officers so most of them had vanished into the society. Now we were supposed to encourage them to come back to work.

The United Nations had determined this would be an unarmed mission in a country where basically four major armies that had been fighting each other for 14 years. Buchanan was still occupied by 3,000 armed Model rebels who had captured the city in 2003 and had occupied it ever since They were in control. They were the power, the authority, the police, the army. They controlled everything that went on in Buchanan, and the U.N. sent eight unarmed men to change that situation!

I was appointed the regional police commander for Grand Bassa County, with Buchanan, the capitol, and for Riverset and Sino Counties. Liberians patterned their government after ours except their county is equivalent to our state. During this 14 years of civil war, the country literally destroyed itself. The entire infrastructure has been destroyed. There is no electricity, no running water, no sewage disposal, no garbage collection in this nation of three and a half million people. If you are living in the capitol of Monrovia with 500,000 people, or in the city of Buchanan with eighty thousand people with no utilities, it makes life pretty difficult. Buchanan was a beautiful resort city. It has been totally destroyed. The harbors are littered with sunken ships left over from the war.

As the police commander I had to travel to Greenville, the capitol of Sino County twice week trying to reestablish the police system in a County still occupied by twenty five hundred armed Model rebels. I had to pass through Riverset County whose capitol was occupied by about a thousand Gull rebels, and fifteen hundred Model Rebels who were still fighting each other.

For fourteen years here has been nobody to maintain the roads - nobody to repair them, and they have monsoon rains every year.

In Buchanan we had 26 inches of rain in one day, so when the road is completely gone, the local people will cut some trees from the jungle and try to find a little path around. But travel is extremely difficult! And when vehicles break down, many people are left stranded for food or water except what they can glean from the jungle, for days.

The first time I made that trip to Sino County I was in for quite a shock. I was about a hundred and eighty kilometers south of Buchanan, in the middle of nowhere, and was really surprised to see a billboard announcing the Community of Christ church. I had done some research before I went over there, or tried to. I checked with people in the Restoration branches. I checked with people at the Community of Christ in the Auditorium, and apparently the Community of Christ just did not want to admit that we had a presence in Liberia. So when I was driving through the jungle and saw this sign for the Community of Christ, with the Lion and the lamb and the boy, I was really shocked. As I proceeded on towards Greenville, I saw four of those signs. So I was praying to the Lord asking Him just what He wanted me to do. It seemed pretty obvious to me. He had gotten me appointed as the police commander for that particular area, and I believed He had brought me in contact with these people for a reason.

I felt directed by the Spirit to stop at a little village named Thea Town. I found the Pastor and learned that everybody in the village belonged to the church. Brother Gabriel, the Pastor, gathered all of the villagers together. We had a little meeting. We had prayer together. As we were visiting, I noticed he had brought this tattered old Bible with him to the meeting. I asked him if he had the Book of Mormon. There was just a questioning stare. He had never heard of the Book of Mormon. I mentioned Joseph Smith. He had never heard of Joseph Smith. The more opportunities I had to visit with Brother Gabriel the more obvious it became that they had been baptized into the church in the mid eighties, but they had never been taught the Restoration Gospel. And they had not had any contacts with the world church for eight years with the exception that in 2000 they received a written communication from a church official in Monrovia telling them that the name of the church had been changed and telling them how to do the lettering on their billboards. That was the only contact they had with the church.

Every time I would make this trip, I would stop and visit with Brother Gabriel. I gave him a missionary copy of the Book of Mormon and some tracts and pamphlets like the one, "If You should Ask Why". I was trying to explain to him from my perspective what was happening in the church. Of course, he was pretty much in shock at some of the beliefs and the doctrines that were being introduced into the church. But, he was not sure if he should believe me or not. We maintained this association for a couple of months and then the U. N. Decided to reorganize and they deployed other police teams to Riverset and Sino County, and I became the police Commander for just Grand Bass County. I no longer had the authority to be traveling to Sino County, so I did not have a way to maintain a relationship with the Saints there. So I asked the Lord to intervene and do something so I would be able to have contact with the Saints in Sino County again. And He did. Two weeks later, the U.N. decided to reorganize again. I got Riverset and Sino Counties back which gave me opportunity to again have contact with the Saints there.

Another thing that we take for granted in a lot of ways, maybe, is the availability of emergency services. We encountered this wreck on the highway one night out in the middle of the jungle. Fourteen

people were riding on the back of one of those little pickups that flipped upside down the bridge. The driver was thrown into the river. We were never able to find him. A couple more people died, but there were a lot more people with serious injuries. You know. We couldn't just pick up the phone and call 911 and have the ambulance or a life flight helicopter or whatever come. They were just stuck there. They would have to wait until a vehicle might come by that might have room on it for the injured person to be put on hoping that vehicle is going to eventually get to a city where there is a doctor and a hospital. In Buchanan we had three hospitals serving about 250,000 people, and we had one doctor! There are twenty four doctors in the whole nation - just another idea of the difficulty of life there.

(Brother Vick inserted a number of pictures of life in Liberia - absence of emergency assistance, transportation of everything from bananas and felled trees to water and food on the heads of the women, food preparation with primitive facilities and limited resources, with chicken feet a frequent source of meat. They have one meal a day. It's always rice and they have a little potato greens or cassava leaves on it, and if they are really fortunate they may have a little cube, or a couple of tiny cubes of meat or fish to add to the meal. They do their laundry in the streams and dry the clothes on the foliage near by. The people are very cleanliness minded. They bathe every day. Somehow they show up for church on Sunday with clean, bright clothes.)

God's Power Displayed

We began with my team on the eighth of March. We had been there about two weeks and there was a confrontation between a citizen and a Model Rebel. That was not allowed, so the Rebels went on a rampage through the city. They attacked people with machetes and clubs and hand grenades and AK-47s, killed some people. We spent the day checking things out. The Bangladesh army had been deployed to Buchanan to Grand Bassa County. The Bangladesh army doesn't do much soldiering. They have rifles. They have AK-47s that they hang on their shoulders but they never load them. They never take their rifles off their shoulder. They just drive around. So when this rampage began, the Bangladesh Colonel came to me and asked if the police would help put down this rebellion or this riot or whatever it was. My Liberian police officers, we only had three or four of them at that point, were afraid because the rebels knew where they lived and they were afraid of retaliation. So they wouldn't go. My Nigerian and Jordanian colleagues wouldn't go. So the four American police officers went into the city and spent the day having AK-47s fired and machetes waved in our faces because they knew we were unarmed and there was nothing we could do. They were all doped up and just marauding up and down the street. It was really a frustrating day for American police officers. We are taught and trained and are usually able to arrive on the scene of chaos and restore order. We weren't able to do that here at all. We went back to our tent compound that night and listened to gunfire throughout the city through the night. During the night I went and visited the hospitals to check on the injured. I knew that there had been a young boy killed by a hand grenade who had died at the government hospital.

We realized that we had to do something because when we arrived in the city on the eighth of March, we might as well have ridden in on white horses in shining armor because the people came rushing to the streets. Two police vehicles! That's what we arrived in when we came, but they acted like it was an entire police force. They just thought that things would be okay now that the U.N.

police were there and they would be safe. This proved to them that they were not safe. They weren't any safer than before we arrived. So we knew we had to do something. So my American colleagues and I decided we would start arresting those Model Rebels. There are three thousand of them and they are armed with AK-47s, rocket propelled grenade launchers and over weapons while we had batons!

We knew where they were located. They had commandeered houses throughout the city and there would be fifteen or twenty rebels occupying each house. We picked out some houses that we thought were maybe isolated enough that they wouldn't be able to get reinforcements real quickly when trouble started. So we started kicking down doors and going in to arrest these Rebels. What we found was, and I have to admit I didn't anticipate that, because I was really concerned. I used to be a SWAT team commander, so I know how difficult it is to plan a raid on a drug house where you know there are weapons, and here we were charging into these houses armed with batons! These rebels had been fighting a war, killing and raping people for years. They are seasoned soldiers! And they are almost always high on heroin and marijuana. We knew that it was a really dangerous situation, but we went ahead with it. And what we found was when we would kick in door and go charging into one of these houses that the Lord had gone ahead of us! He had struck fear into the hearts of these seasoned soldiers. We found they would be cowering, and their hands would be shaking, literally shaking so badly that they couldn't pick up their weapons to turn them against us. So we were able to take them into custody. In about a week and a half, we arrested thirty two rebels including five of their commanders, and over a thousand of the Rebels fled the city because they were afraid of being arrested.

The Model general for Grand Bassa County came to me and asked me if we would be less aggressive in our tactics against his soldiers. I explained that he would have to control his soldiers because as long as they were committing criminal activity, we were going to continue to arrest them. And so he did. He got his soldiers under control and things became somewhat peaceful.

This is why they didn't want to go to prison. These are prison conditions. I mentioned that the infrastructure has been totally destroyed. That goes for the law enforcement system and the court system, too. The prisons were all destroyed, so this is how we found ourselves housing prisoners from time to time, crowded together with standing room only, out in the open, fenced in by barbed wire or crowded with 89 prisoners in a jail cell that in the United States we wouldn't be allowed to house more than ten, maybe twelve prisoners. Now, it's between 95 and one hundred degrees outside. You can imagine what it is inside. There are no facilities. There is no water. No toilet facilities. When you get put into jail in Liberia, unless your family brings you food and water, you don't get food and water. But the Lord delivered those guys into our hands and the Rebels began to behave themselves, then it was back to normal police duty.

Child Soldiers

In late June into July we began the disarmament process - the final disarming of the Model Rebels. Among those soldiers that we disarmed were child soldiers. In Buchanan we disarmed over six hundred child soldiers. This is a real deep tragedy in Liberia, and it happens in the third world anywhere there is civil war. In the United States to recruit, there are enticements, and you get paid. That is not the way they recruit an army in the third world. What they do is, when you want to raise an army, you get some young men who are

agreeable to join your army. Then to get more people in your army you go into a local village and round up everybody in the village. Then you sort out the eight, ten, twelve year old boys and a few of the girls, just for a good measure. Then you kill their parents in front of them. Then you take them off into the jungle, start giving them heroin, get them hooked on narcotics, give them an AK-47 and tell them how to shoot it. Then you take those kids into the next village and let them kill the parents of the kids that you have just recruited in that village. That's how you get an army in Liberia. That's how they got their armies. The government did it, too.

The boy in the top picture is Victor. He is twelve years old and has been a soldier for four years. Since he was eight years old, that is all he has known. As far as he knows his parents are dead. He has no family to go back to. He has no education. He has not been able to go to school. He doesn't know how to read or write. He is hooked on narcotics. He has been killing and raping people for four years, and now the war is over and he is supposed to become a good citizen. The U.N. is operating programs where these kids are going through drug rehab. And the U.N. is starting to give them an education teaching them a trade as a carpenter, a mechanic or whatever they have something to go on. You can't even comprehend what life is like for them now as they try to live some kind of normal life.

Charles Taylor's Legacy, the Zoes

Look into the eyes of those people. They have no hope. They have no reason to hope. They are trying to exist from day to day. They don't have the gospel of Jesus Christ to fall back on. These are the zoes. That was something they did not prepare us for at all when we went in there to do our police work. The zoes are witch doctors, and the witch doctor is a huge part of the culture. The people believe in magic and power of the zoe. Most of it is done by fakery, but a lot of it is done just by strong arm tactics. This is one of the things that Charles Taylor did for Liberia. He made the witch doctor system a part of the federal government. Liberia has a chief zoe who is in the ministry of the interior. Every county has a grand zoe and a deputy zoe. They are devils. The zoe is in charge of an area. Most of the villages have their own zoe too, and the zoe runs the village or he runs the district, whatever area he is over. If the people begin not to follow his directions, and do what he is telling them to do, he summons the devil who comes into the village and marks several men and boys with white chalk. Because it is magic, they become his army to do whatever he tells them to do. So he will send them out to terrorize the villagers with all manner of mayhem to get them back in line and get them to do what the zoe has told them to do. As long as they have been marked by the devil and painted with the magic white chalk, they are not responsible for anything they do. They do whatever the devil tells them to do and there are no repercussions. Under Liberian law, you can't prosecute them. They have not broken the law. That boy says he is able to handle this deadly viper because he has the magic of the zoe.

The Lord Launches His Work

A football tournament is the mechanism the Lord used to really launch His work - the Restoration of the fullness of His gospel - in Liberia. I wanted to organize that tournament just as a way of letting the kids know that things are returning to normal - that you can do normal childhood things. Since the war is over, schools have sprung up all over Liberia - mostly parochial and private schools. In Buchanan there are eight high schools - one public high school and seven parochial and private schools. In order to organize a tournament for the high schools I had to visit a number of officials and

school administrators. As I was headed out of the office to do that, one of my Turkish police officers who was in charge of our recruiting, said, "There is a young man who has applied for the police service, and I am supposed to meet him at the Liberian police station. He had a couple of questions. I can't get away right now. Can you meet with him?" So I agreed.

I met with this young man, answered his questions. We talked for about five minutes, maybe ten at the most, and I just felt led to ask him if he would help me organize this football tournament. He was more than happy to do it. We got in my patrol vehicle and headed out to make our contact at the first school. We hadn't been in the truck fifteen minutes when he asked me, "What do you believe about the gospel of Jesus Christ?" The Spirit just opened up the ability for us to share with each other. I was able to share about the Restoration gospel - even about Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and all those things in a really brief time. The conversation just flowed, and he seemed to be absorbing it. He commented that he would like to read the Book of Mormon if he had the opportunity. I had a missionary copy that I could give to him. What I didn't know at the time was that he had already heard about the Book of Mormon. He had already been told that the Book of Mormon was an evil book. He should stay away from it. I think based on the conversation we had and the presence of the Spirit there, he had a desire to read the book for himself.

Over the next few days, we continued to discuss the gospel and to share. He took the Book of Mormon home with him and his wife, who was a Baptist, would read the book out loud, so they could share it. He said one evening she was reading from it and she just stopped, turned to him and said, "This book contains the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the same gospel that we believe in. She was really shocked.

They continued to read together and Mark invited me to his church. Mark was one of the young men the Lord had been preparing for over a decade. When the war broke out in Liberia, he was one of the four young men who fled to the Ivory Coast and had come back to Liberia when the war broke out in the Ivory coast. His church was the Buchanan Christian Fellowship. It was a little house church - about fifteen people attended. Brother Mark and Daniel and Ben all attended. Daniel had been to a seminary and was an ordained minister. Mark and Ben were just helpers, but they were all involved with this ministry, Rural Indigenous Evangelistic Missions, which they had formed along with Joshua, who comes into the picture a little later, while in the Ivory Coast. They did it because they felt called by God to be a part of the great commission, share the gospel of Jesus Christ with, not only the people of Liberia but with the people of all of Western Africa. They had put together this organization themselves to do this. They had a plan. They wrote a prospectus and everything of how they were going to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of the people in Africa. When the war broke out in the Ivory Coast, these three young men came back to Buchanan and Joshua, the fourth, ended up in Monrovia where he also stated a little fellowship, a little house church there,

I attended church that following Sunday at the little church of the Christian Fellowship and was able to get there in time for Sunday school class. I shared with them there. Afterwards, Brother Daniel came to me and asked if I would preach the following Sunday and also start to teach their weekly Bible study class. I agreed. Because of police work I wasn't always able to make it on Tuesday afternoon. But I preached that following Sunday, then met with the three young men after church and asked them if they would

be interested in cottage meetings. I had the "Go Ye and Teach" on a CD and I had my lap top. They accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ - the fullness of the gospel - the Restoration gospel, and requested baptism. Brother Mark's testimony was, "I have found the church that has the fullness of the gospel. This is the church of the New Testament that Jesus established while He was on earth." On the fifteenth of January of last year, Brother Mark, Brother Daniel and Brother Ben were all baptized in the Atlantic ocean.

We planned a confirmation service for the following Sunday but I had a police emergency so we had to postpone it until the following Sunday. During his time, the Lord had given me evidence that these three young men had calls to the priesthood. He had indicated that Brother Daniel and Brother Mark had calls to the office of Elder and Brother Ben to the office of Priest. He was very clear about how He wanted that done. I was told that they were to be ordained as soon as they were confirmed. I was told that Brother Mark would be ordained first. Then Brother Mark and I would ordain Brother Daniel. Then Brother Daniel and Brother Mark were to ordain Brother Ben to the office of Priest. I remember when this was coming to me, I questioned the Lord in my human weakness. I am thinking to myself, Mark and Daniel are going to have been ordained for about five minutes, and they are going to be asked to ordain Brother Ben? But it seemed that was how the Lord wanted it done. On the thirtieth of January of last year, we had the confirmation service and we followed the Lord's instructions precisely. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit was there in such a magnificent way! The ordination prayer was one of the most beautiful, magnificent ordination prayers I have ever heard. It was obvious that Brother Daniel was being led by the Spirit. The Spirit was so prevalent in that prayer of ordination that it was really a blessing to all of us.

We had to find a place to have church. The Lord led us to a place we rented cheap for a year, and the church members completely renovated the building. In Liberian culture, the parents go off to church, and the kids stay home. We were encouraging them to attend church as a family. We didn't know what to expect. At our first services, we had 25 kids who came for Sunday school. We had pages from Bible coloring books and some crayons. For the first time, the children had their own pictures to take them home with them. It was just something that was unheard of, and the news spread across Buchanan like wild fire that the Restoration church was having programs for children. The following Sunday we had 40 kids. The next Sunday we had 60 kids, and they have maintained that level pretty much since then. They are averaging eighty to a hundred every total attendance every Sunday.

The fourth young man was Joshua. Joshua came to Buchanan to save his brothers from the evil of the Book of Mormon and found in this "strange gospel" as he called it, that all they had been doing to spread the gospel before had been as the blind leading the blind. Now, he realized, they had the fullness of the gospel to carry to the people.

Postscript

When Pat Bolingbroke, Ron and Di Smith, and Jeanette Thomas responded to Randy's invitation to come to Liberia last summer to assist with the work, they found opportunity to serve in the Blessed Elementary School Mark and Ben had started before ever meeting Randy Vick and the Future Hope Orphanage to which Randy says the Lord led him when, as a policeman, he had to find a home for twin babies whose mother died in giving birth. The orphanage was run by one then known as Mother Etta who has since

been baptized and is known as Sister Etta. The school has been completely renovated, including a latrine, a first for the area, and with the help of the American Saints, the children are equipped with regular school supplies to augment the 5 blackboards that were their entire schoolroom equipment then. Enrollment has gone from 165 to an anticipated 300, with the four young men then giving their time to teach now replaced by six full time teachers who have voluntarily given up a fourth of their salaries to make it possible to employ three more to take care of the anticipated enrollment.

The orphanage is one of many established to care for the thousands of children left orphaned when 250,000 people were killed by war. Once Sister Etta had to beg food for the children. Now the orphanage is a ministry of the local Saints. It has been given a large plot of land from which they will benefit both by making charcoal from the trees that are cleared and from the growing food to feed the children. Randy describes the project as Zioniac in that it will benefit both the children and the church members who assist it.

Moved by the plight of the children, Brother Vick closed his presentation with what he called an inspired song often sung by a Center Place Restoration School quartet directed by our own Dr. Nathan Smith.

Can you hear the prayer of the children
On bended knee in the shadow of a darkened room
Empty eyes with no more tears to cry
Turning heavenward toward the light
Crying Jesus, Help me to see the morning light one more day
But if I should die before I wake, I pray my soul to take.

Can't you feel the heart of the children
Aching for home with something of their very own
Reaching hands with nothing to hold onto
But hope for a better day. A better day.
Cry Jesus, Help me to feel the love again in my own land
But if unknown roads lead away from home
Give me loving arms away from harm.

Can't you hear the voice of the children
Softly pleading for silence in the shattered world?
Angry guns preach a gospel full of hate
Blood of the innocent on their hands

Cry, Jesus help me to feel the sun again on my face
For when darkness clears I know You're near
Bringing peace again.
Can you hear the prayer of the children?

(There is much more about the Lord's action in Liberia. We will try to find room for some of the testimonies in next month's Newsletter.)

News & Notes

Conference Delegates Chosen

Three delegates and three alternates to the Conference of Restoration Branches were chosen in a short business meeting held at the close of church services Sunday, March 5. The branch is allowed a delegate for each 25 persons enrolled in the congregation, or portion thereof. Robert Rolfe, Ronald Smith and Mildred Smith were chosen to accompany our Pastor, who is a delegate ex officio. Alternates chosen were Gerald Bolingbroke, Kent Clisby, and Danny Kinnman, in that order. The conference convenes April 6-9 at the Waldo Branch, of the Church of Jesus Christ just off of River on Waldo Ave. a few blocks north of the Auditorium. Everyone is invited to attend.

Cantata In Rehearsal

The Mount Ayr choir meets each Sunday afternoon to rehearse Joseph M. Martin's Harvest of Sorrows. Since the members are from a widely diverse area, they have lunch at the church with rehearsal following. The cantata is being prepared for performance on Palm Sunday, April 9, at 6:00 o'clock in the evening at the church in Mount Ayr. Everyone is invited to enjoy the music with us.

Youth Sponsor Family Night

The youth invited the branch to have dinner together and view "The Light and the Glory", a movie about the life and ministry of Joseph Smith, Jr., the first prophet of these Latter Days. Ronald and Di Smith hosted the event in their Lamoni home.

Conference Visitors Anticipated

After the service on Sunday, March 19, Pastor Alan Smith called a brief meeting to determine whether the congregation would want to assist delegates coming from other countries to attend the coming Conference of Branches. A sum of \$2,000 was allocated for that purpose.

Among those guests that the Mount. Ayr branch anticipates is the visit of Sam and Judith Agwanda, Eric and Pamela Odida, and Tom Okeyo of Kenya and Hensley Mbanso of Nigeria.

Randy Vick Guest Minister

Randy Vick, recently head of the United Nation's peace keeping mission in Liberia, was the guest minister in Mt. Ayr March 25-26. He met with the group Saturday evening at the home of Robert and Lynda Rolfe in Lamoni and at the church on Mt. Ayr on Sunday. Randy was the person who helped establish a Restoration branch of the Church of Jesus Christ in Liberia. It was he who invited Pat Bolingbroke, Ron and Di Smith and Jeannette Thomas to come to Liberia to assist in training teachers to teach and otherwise assist with a vacation Bible school for children of the church's school and orphanage there.

Young Violinist Honored

Jazmyn Galusha is one of two students from Lamoni chosen to perform with the state Middle School Honors Orchestra at Des Moines on April 22. The students are chosen by audition. They go to Des Moines for rehearsal April 21 and 22. Their concert is in the first Christian Church at 2000 University Ave., near Drake University, at 5:00 PM on the twenty second.

From the Pastor's Desk

Continued from page 1

Later that night Jesus asked him to pray with him and three times Peter fell asleep instead of helping. Not to put his life on the line, but to stay awake. Peter couldn't do it.

When they tried to take Jesus away, it may have been Peter that struck out with a sword and injured the high priest's servant, but Jesus told him to put the sword away. You don't understand yet, do you, Jesus was saying.

Then three times Peter said he didn't know Jesus, even getting a little foul with his language to emphasize the point.

It was then that the cock signalled morning. This third time Jesus turned and looked at Peter. He didn't say a word, but Peter remembered his promise. And he went out and wept.

When Christ arose, the angels said to the women at the tomb: Tell his disciples -- and Peter (especially?) -- that he goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see him as he said unto you."

Peter ran to the tomb, saw the death clothes left behind, and "wondered in himself at that which had come to pass."

So did Peter get right at sharing the news.

No. Peter went back to fishing. Jesus had called him from fishing to be a fisher of men, but Peter went back to his old ways when Jesus was gone.

Then Jesus appeared on the shore and gave Peter a fishing lesson. Peter recognized him after getting the big catch at his command and can't wait for the boat but jumps into the sea and heads for shore.

That's when Jesus asks Peter if he loves him more than fishing. Once for the young girl he denied Jesus to when Jesus asks him to feed his lambs. Two more times for each of the others he denied that he knew Jesus to.

Peter was a man of his word this time. And a man who could "strengthen the brethern" with words like those recorded in 1 Peter 2:20-25). It is quite a testimony.

Jesus taught us all a lesson as he did Peter. It isn't just enough to say Jesus is your savior and you will follow him.

You have stay away, you have to control your anger. You have to testify of him instead of by your actions or words show that you don't know him. You can't just fall back into your old habits at the changes, big or small, that come into your life.

Jesus died for our sins that we might live for him.

How sharp are your lamb or sheep feeding skills? Do you even know where the barn is? Are you converted? These are questions for all of us this Easter season.

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

Easter Activities

Sunday, April 9 -- Palm Sunday

11 a.m. -- Fasting and Prayer Service

6 p.m. -- "Harvest of Sorrows" Easter Cantata at the church. Invite your friends.

Monday through Saturday, April 10-15

Breakfast With the Master at First Christian Church in Mount Ayr, 6:30 a.m.

Thursday, April 13 is the morning for our church group to help with cleanup. Alan Smith will be the speaker and we will be providing and leading music.

Wednesday, April 12

Prayer service at 7 p.m

Sunday, April 16 -- Easter Sunday

Easter breakfast at church at 9 a.m.

Easter Sunday services follow.