

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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### Awaiting Christmas

We are in the season again where we look forward to Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ.

I can remember when I was young and the time seemed to inch by until Christmas would come. There was a good deal of anticipation for its arrival and it seemed like it took forever to get here.

I'm not sure when time sped up so much, but now it seems like we just celebrated last Christmas and when Thanksgiving comes around it will just be a couple of days and Christmas will be here too.

I'm not sure what that says about me.

It may mean that I have lost some of the innocent joy of looking forward to celebrating Christ's birth with the wonder of the Christmas story. It may mean that I looked forward to opening Christmas presents more than I do now. It may mean that I have more to do than I did then.

Now I look forward to that one event each year that finally touches me in a way that I remember what the season is all about. It may be some music I hear or sing. It may be finding just the right present for someone. It may be a taste or a smell. Or it may be hearing the Christmas story over again and finding something new in it. I'm amazed how that can happen. Either it's something new, or something I have just forgotten. In either case, it becomes a moment of excitement to realize the richness of the story of Christ's birth.

It may also mean that I can understand what it will be like when we come into the presence of God and time doesn't have any meaning any more. If everything is as a day with God and he can see the tableau of time in an instant, maybe it's like time getting shorter and shorter between Christmases. Only better.

## TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

### Listen to the Enticings of the Holy Spirit: Remember Who You Are

Sue Beck had just sung the Lord's invitation, "Come ye apart and rest awhile," when Seventy Ronald Smith opened his sermon on the morning of November 5 with the words of King Benjamin as recorded in Mosiah 1:116-122. "And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given, nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. For behold, he judgeth, and his judgment is just, and the infant perisheth not, that dieth in his infancy; But men drink damnation to their own souls, except they humble themselves, and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent:

"For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been, from the fall of Adam, and will be, for ever and ever; But if he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man, and becometh a saint, through the atonement of Christ, the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come, when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent; ... ." This scripture is one of many in the first chapter of Mosiah which I really like because it talks about the atonement and what is needed for our salvation.

Not long ago in Pennsylvania there was a man who went into an Amish school, rounded up the girls, and killed several of them before killing himself. When you hear of that kind of an atrocity occurring, you wonder about man, who he is and where he is. Sometimes it causes you to think about life and death. I was very interested in the response of the community to that man and his family. You probably read where some of the family members of

the children who had been killed reached out to this man's family and tried to bring comfort and extend forgiveness. I thought, "What a wonderful example of the ministry of Jesus Christ in our midst!" And I wondered, "What would have happened if it had been Graceland into which somebody had come and rounded up the children and shot them - or Lamoni school, or Mt. Ayr school! Would we have responded in a similar way? Could we have reached out to the family of the man who did such a horrible thing and tried to bring comfort? What would we have done?"

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." To the people who were killing him. The only way that we would ever have a chance of responding as Jesus did is if we really remember Him, and if we think about Him and we think about what He did for us, and if we are very, very sure that the things that He taught us about life after death are true. If you don't believe that there is anything but this life, you are not going to respond that way to people who do terrible things.

### **Giving Up The Natural Man**

In this life, we are consumed with what King Benjamin in our scripture this morning was calling "the natural man". Many times we forget just what the natural man is. If we act as if or believe that nature is all there is, that this life, when it's over, is all there is, we are acting in accordance with the natural man, and we are in total conflict with the nature of God. Each of us must answer this question for ourselves. Are we going to let the natural man be the leader of our lives or are we going to respond in the way that Jesus responded and say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

According to King Benjamin, the natural man is an enemy to God, has been, will be forever and ever. The only way out of that is for us to give up the natural man and become a saint by yielding to the enticing of the Holy Spirit. I am presuming that you who have come today have come because you have yielded to the enticing of the Holy Spirit - at least a little bit. Maybe you have come because your parents made you come. Maybe you came because your children made you come. Maybe you came because a friend invited you. For whatever reason, I am hoping that today we will understand that when the Spirit of God touches us, we have choices to make.

We hear all of the time, from Christians and non-Christians alike, that it doesn't matter what you do. Many Christians will tell you that it only matters whether or not you have confessed that Jesus is the Savior. Many non-Christians will tell you that even that doesn't matter. But I am here to tell you today that it does matter what you do. Jesus said that it mattered what you do. It does matter how you react and whether you remember Him.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 6:46-49, "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock, and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he who heareth and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great".

Jesus said, it doesn't do any good to call him Lord if you are not going to do the things that he says. He says that just calling him Lord is like building our houses on sand. The problem is not that we cannot get our house built, but when the storm comes, the house will

fall. When the terrible thing happens, then the house will fall if we are not built on the rock. If we haven't made a practice in our life of choosing the right each day, then, when the tests come, we will fail.

### **We Have Promised to Listen**

This morning those who have been baptized and have made the covenant with Jesus Christ have come to share in a special meal. We have promised that we are going to listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit. But, folks, it's not automatic! Just because we have been baptized and said we will listen to the Holy Spirit, and even if we have made that covenant, that doesn't mean that the next time that something happens we are going to automatically listen to the Holy Spirit. King Benjamin says that we have to listen to the enticings of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says we have to do the things He says.

The scriptures have all kinds of information about what the Holy Spirit will teach us to do. For example, the Holy Spirit will teach us to pray. It says that if we listen to the spirit that teaches us not to pray, we are not listening to the right spirit! It is the spirit of the evil one that teaches a man not to pray. So, if we are listening to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, we will pray. The scriptures say we will pray in secret. We will pray in our families. We will pray over the business that we have, or the classes, over our friends, and over our families. There are many, many things that the Spirit would teach us to pray about if we just listen to the enticings of the Spirit and learn to pray.

Now, the natural man is not going to teach us how to pray. In fact, the natural man says not to pray at all, or, if you do pray, to make a big show of it. The scriptures tell us that you don't have to be going out and making a big show of praying. They tell us to go into our closets and pray. Jesus had some words for people who made a big show of praying. He said they weren't really following the Spirit. He said that if you go into your closet and your secret places to pray, then God who hears in secret will reward you openly. If we are listening to the Spirit, we are going to respond in love when people hurt us, and that's really hard to do. When someone has hurt you, the first thing you think about is, "How can I love this person more?" Are you there yet? Are you listening to the enticing of the Holy Spirit?

When Jesus talked to His disciples about how they should handle hurts, He said, you should go to that person first in private, and you should begin by trying to win them as a brother, letting them know that you love them, that they have hurt you and you would like to work things out if you can. Is that where we go first? Or do we go to other people and say, "Boy! That person really hurt me! How am I going to handle this?" The natural man doesn't do even that. The natural man, if someone hurts you, goes around and says, "This person is not a good person because, look what they have done!" The natural man says, "Let's talk about everybody and talk about the bad things that have happened and all those terrible things that they have done." But the enticing of the Holy Spirit teaches you that is not what you should do. You should go to that person and try and make it right with them first. Then if you need to, you can go with a witness and let people know. Then, if that doesn't work, you can come to the church and you can say it. But the church is not the place where you should start.

If you listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will lead you into all truth. And if you listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, you will be reading the scriptures and trying to understand the things that have been written. Jesus often referred to the scriptures when He was speaking to others and when questions came up about hard things in life and difficult choices that people

had to make. He would refer to the scriptures, and that's what the Spirit would have us do. But we have to listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, or these things will not happen.

So that is why we have come here this morning. Many of us have made a covenant with Jesus that we are going to follow Him and be His people. It is not going to be automatic that we do that, but we have to come and remember Him. Jesus commanded us to "Do this in remembrance" of Him. In a very short while, you are going to have an opportunity to partake of the bread and wine. This is done in remembrance of Christ's body and of the sacrifice that Jesus made. Jesus actually died in order to take upon Him our sins. He died to be the sacrifice for the things that we have done. He died to take upon Him the sins of the world. According to King Benjamin, in the scripture that I read in the beginning, the time will come that none will be found blameless except it be little children and those who have repented and have had faith upon the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

### **Are There Other Ways?**

There are many of our Christian brothers and sisters who look at various verses in the Bible and say, "All you need to do is to call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved." Romans 10:13 does say, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Mark 13:13 says, "he that endures to the end shall be saved." Another Bible verse, Mark 16:15 says, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Romans 8:24 says, "If you have hope you will be saved." Romans 10:9 says, "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Many people pick one or another of these scriptures and say, "Well, you just need to confess that Jesus is the Lord and you will be saved." Or they pick another one and say, "This is all you need to do to be saved." But Jesus said, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not the things which I say?" In the book of Matthew, He even says it with a little more force. "Verily I say unto you, it is not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, that shall enter unto the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:30 IV or 7:20 KJV)

So, we have a choice this morning. We can sit here and partake of the Communion and let it not make any difference in our life. Or we can remember what Jesus said and did, and we can make that covenant that says, "I am going to listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit and put off the natural man today and this week and this month. I am going to once again to be listening to that Spirit as I grade my papers, as I teach in my classroom, as I prepare for class, as I interact with my granddaughter, as I listen to my wife, and as I do all those things which I am going to do this week. I want to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Folks, none of us is perfect. Jesus recognized that, but came to show us the way to live with the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Those of you who have been baptized and had the hands laid upon your head have been given a gift of the Holy Ghost that will be part of you, and on which you can call at any time. And you can listen to its enticing, if you will. That is why we come back to this table, and that is why it is so important that we remember what Jesus has done.

And I am hoping that next week when we come back, all of you can say, "Here's something I did this week when I listened to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, and I did something different this week than I would have done if I had not listened to the enticings of the Holy Spirit. I did something this week that I wouldn't have done if

I had not come to the table and partaken of the Lord's Supper and remembered Jesus."

When I was still at home, I remember before we left the house to go out on date or an activity with friends, Mother would always say, "Remember who you are!" To me that meant that whatever I did, people were going to look at me and say, "That's what people who believe in Jesus are all about. That's how people who believe in Christ act. That's what members of the Smith family do." So she would always say, "Remember who you are." We need to remember who we are. We need to remember that it does make a difference what we do. Not just that people see what we do, but what we actually do and think does make a difference because we have to make that choice every day whether we are going to listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit and do the things which He says.

### **Listening and the Kingdom**

It's not hard to be part of the Kingdom if you do the things that the King says to do, and it's that simple. But we have to listen to the enticing of the Holy Spirit. Some of us have trouble being in touch with that Spirit each day, but the Lord has given us lots of direction about how to do that. He says, when you rise in the morning, call on His name. As you go through the day, remember to pray. How many of you students pray in the morning before you go to school and ask the Lord to help you in your school to remember Him? I see some people have their hands up. Very good. How many of you mothers and fathers, when you get up in the morning pray that the Lord will be with you that day as you interact with your children and as you go to work? Sometimes I forget to do that. This is me talking, and I know if I forget, that some other people probably have trouble remembering, too. That's why I am coming back to the table this morning, so that I can tell the Lord that I want to remember. I want to remember who I am. I want to remember in a way that will make a difference this day, this week, this month so that I can be part of the Kingdom of God. May God bless you all as you partake this morning of the emblems of the Lord's supper. We know that there are some here who have not been baptized and have not made that covenant. We are awful glad that you are here. You will not be offered the emblems, but when the time comes that you decide that you can make that choice, we would love to have you be baptized. We would love to have you take on the name of Christ that you might have that Spirit living inside you that you might be part of the Kingdom of God here on the earth. May God bless you always and may we all be part of that Kingdom is my prayer.

## **How Can We Not Believe?**

Priest Ed Anderson chose a very short scripture for today's sermon, November 12, 2006 - 1 Nephi 5:36: "And thus we see, that by small means, the Lord can bring about great things." When asked if he had a theme for the day, Brother Anderson said he had more of a starting place than a theme, and the starting place is, "How can we not believe?"

I was driving home the other night taking the kids to practice or bring them how from practice and just looking at the sunset. The beauty - the golds and the yellows and the different colors on the clouds were just fantastic. You have all seen them - the beautiful sunsets, and I ask myself again, "How can I not believe?" when viewing such great creations. This is a little past the time of the year

for the trees to change color, and the different colors are glorious, especially when the sun hits them and you are looking into the trees, with the sun behind you. How beautiful that is!

I was at work the other day. I was just standing there, probably from here to the wall from a water faucet. The water faucet was in the window and the sun was shining in the window on the faucet, and the faucet was dripping. I happened to glance over, or maybe I should say, I was attracted by the drip to look. The sun hit the drip to the point where it looked that big to me. (Ed inscribed a circle like a large balloon with his hands.) It was one big, bright light coming at me from this one drip with the sun shining through it. And I had to ask myself, "How can I not believe?" There are so many testimonies as we look around us of the goodness and glory of God!

#### **Awed By The Complexity of Man**

This morning Rob used a word that kind of came into what I was going to talk about. It was "pond scum" - you know, we all evolved from "pond scum" or we go to the zoo and see our ancestors. It just amazes me the more I have learned; and I am in the medical field, so I kind of understand a lot of the intricacies of what goes on in a body as complex as ours. My view is really - what are the odds? I am not a mathematician. Ron can probably tell you the mathematical aspects of this, but what are the odds of all of the organs being created - I don't care how many billions of years that you want to talk about. What are the odds that those things could come into being and complement each other. You can't live without your liver. You can't live without your heart. For those all to just self generate, become a viable creature and reproduce.

Now there is a key. Reproduce! Right? Not only does it have to happen once. It had to happen twice! And not only does it have to happen twice, it has got to happen probably within a period of thirty five years of each other. For organisms to be reproductive, they must have the opposite. Right? And there is a short span during which that is capable of happening in a human being - thirty five years about - somewhere in there. For two beings - these two creatures - after they have this offspring, then we have to have a way of feeding them. And is it inbred - innate that we know how to take care of them? And if that particular one dies, how many more billions of years before we get this one again? If the one offspring dies, then we're really back. Then we have another problem because we have one male and two females or one female and two males, and the one dies, and then we are back to start again. The mathematics of that is just so astronomical to me as to be out of this world that we can be related to the little monkeys in the zoo or that we were just generated out of pond scum!

This brings me to another point. Everybody has gone to sporting events. What's the song they sing before they ever start playing basketball or football? The Star Spangled Banner. Please stand and Ron, would you lead us as we sing The Star Spangled Banner? (We sang.) I have gone to enough sporting events that I hear that song often, and every time they have the Boy Scouts go out and raise the flag onto the flag pole before they sing. What are your thoughts while they are singing it? Here are my thoughts. My thoughts are, first of all, this nation is in existence because of God's plan. I should say, this continent. In Canada and the United States at least, I don't know so much about Mexico, you can worship freely. Theoretically, there is no one monitoring your words. There are no thought police. We can express ourselves with total freedom. When we look at the world as it is now, and as it was in 1930, in how many countries on earth would it have been possible for Joseph Smith to have received the Book of Mormon, found the finances to

publish it when he had no money whatsoever to his name? And for the church to expound the gospel - to grow - freedom of thought - freedom of movement. We look around us, and there are so many blocks in the other countries. This nation was planned. It is a chosen nation to God, for the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon.

So every time the flag raises, I am standing there saying, "Yes. This is the country, but also, with this being the country, there are so many responsibilities that go with that freedom. We have received so much, and we owe so much to the people who sit beside us, to the people who are not as fortunate as we are in this country and not as fortunate as we are in some of the other countries.

One of the things that inspired Dad as I was growing up, I remember what his thoughts were. His thoughts were about the gospel. The scriptures say that it was given to us. We have a responsibility to bear some of the sins of those about us if we don't share that gospel with them. God has a plan. This country was a part of that plan. The gospel is a part of that plan. I took what I call a simple testimony out of the recent Restoration Voice. It is the testimony of Frederick G. Pitt, and I would like to read a part of it. And I am going to do some editorial talking as I go through it.

#### **By Small Things God Guides His Children**

Brother Pitt tells a part of his story as a soldier in the Civil War. "On the occasion referred to, I was on the picket line between the two armies during an artillery engagement. As I stood on my lonely post between the two fires, it seemed to me that the end of my life was at hand. I then and there knelt down and told the Lord that I was not yet prepared for death and that if He would spare my life, I would consecrate it to Him." He made a promise. He recognized God as the giver of all life and One who was able to spare his.

"Being a boy of only fifteen, I failed to understand the full meaning of my covenant; but the Lord understood and evidently accepted it, as I passed through many battles after that. Though hit several times, I was never wounded, and I came home from the war in better physical condition than when I entered." God inspired him, probably, to make that prayer. A small decision - just one simple prayer, "spare my life!"

The testimony goes on. "Keeping in mind my promise, I sought a church and united with the First Baptist Church of Brooklyn, New York. At my baptism, I was disappointed, however, as I failed to receive any evidence of divine approval as I had expected. That evening in prayer, I told the Lord of my disappointment. Upon my retiring to rest, a sweet peace filled my soul, and though I heard no audible voice, something seemed to say to me, "You have done the best you know, be content, all is well." He is beginning to respond to the movements of God.

"I tried to be satisfied, and at times would experience the sweet influence of the good Spirit filling my soul with peace and joy, but this would be only occasionally followed by long periods deprived of this holy influence. In the meantime, I chose a wife." Obviously, everybody feels like they need to be led to the one that they are married to. I would say that he was led to his wife, for when he accepted the gospel, who also accepted the gospel with him but his wife.

"We started west to make our home and arrived in Plano to visit my sister." Plano! Now isn't that amazing? Just out of the blue, coming from the state of New York, and coming to Plano. Now, was that just by happenstance? I think one thing here is that the author, even though he is attributing to God some of the things that have gone on in his life, is leaving out some of the things that are smaller. As I read in that scripture, "And thus we see, that by small

means, the Lord can bring about great things.” He only arrived in Plano to visit his sister, Sister W. H. Curwen. “Here I came in contact with the Latter Day Saints, the very last people in the world where I expected to hear the truth - for I had heard only evil concerning them - and for a long time I refused even to hear them.

“At last, however, I attended a few meetings, and what I heard certainly impressed me - against my will. We soon continued our journey westward and settled in the town of Marion, Iowa. There were no saints. Then I attended the Methodist and also the Christian church. But however much I fought against it, the influence of what I had received in Plano never left me. I read the Bible and prayed the Lord for direction. The more I prayed, and the more I read the Bible, the more convinced I became that the Latter Day Saints had the truth.

“This thought constantly burdened my mind. It was the first thing I thought of in the morning and the last thing at night. It seemed to me if I did not get relief in some way, I would lose my mind. At last I said to my wife, ‘I can stand this no longer. The first chance I have to join the Latter Day Saints, I am going to unite with them,’ whereupon my wife replied, ‘Well, if you join, I am going with you.’

“Only a day or two later, quite unexpectedly, I was given the opportunity of going to Chicago, free of expense. (Ed emphasized the importance of this unexpected development with the inflection of his voice.) “We went by way of Plano,” (Isn’t that amazing? A free trip to Chicago and he goes through where? Plano!) “stopping off to be baptized. But the great stumbling block was Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The doctrine was true, but I had heard so much said against Joseph Smith that I felt like I could not accept him as a prophet of God. The Bible, I said, was sufficient for me, therefore I had no use for the Book of Mormon. I asked Brother H. A. Stebbins, whom I chanced to meet” (Ed again emphasized the small events involved in this process with the inflection of his voice and added, ‘Was H. A. Stebbins sent to Mr. Pitt? More than likely!’) “I asked Brother H. A. Stebbins, whom I chanced to meet, if I would have to believe in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in order to unite with the church.

(To his surprise, what was the answer?) “No, Mr. Pitt, your salvation does not depend upon your belief in either Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon, but in your belief in Jesus Christ and obedience to His gospel.” (Now if that isn’t an inspired statement from H. A. Stebbins, I don’t know what is. What I am kind of getting at here again is, by small means the Lord is working through each individual to bring about His purposes in the people throughout the world.

### **Listen! God Has a Plan For Your Day**

When each of us goes about our daily activities in life, God has a plan for us. God is wanting us to do things. There are chores for us to do. There are people that we need to reach. God gives us the Holy Spirit in our lives who gives us direction. He leads us to these things that we need to do - that is, if we are listening. And sometimes He even uses the non-listeners and still gets some of the work done that He would like to have done.

How many of us have had that irresistible urge to do something that was really out of our character? Maybe we are shy and He has told you, “You need to go up to so and so and you need to tell them “God loves you.” That’s God working with us. When that person hears that, we don’t necessarily know the result. We may never know the result. That person may have been considering suicide. That person may have been considered some other things - choices

in their lives - that that one statement that God loves you may change their direction, the course of their life! And it is the small things, the repeated bombardment by the Spirit of God working through out lives that eventually, we hope, we get to where God wants us to be.

In our quest in life, I know I make my plans - I am going to do this and this and this today. Sometimes I wonder maybe I should say, “God, when I leave the driveway here, should I go left or right? Is there something You have for me to do? Is there somewhere that You would rather have me go that is not to HyVee and it’s not to Caseys to get gas. Would You like for me to go left or right? Is there somebody that needs my ministry today. If we can cultivate our lives, if we can cultivate our intuneness with God to a point where He is going to say, “Go left! Go to Dave’s house. I think he needs you there. And while you are at it, take your lawnmower. Put it in the truck and then go to Dave’s house. He needs his lawn mowed and his is broken.”

If we can cultivate that direction - if we can cultivate listening to that Holy Spirit to the point to where we can respond - we can be used as instruments of God in the building of His Kingdom. By small things are great things brought to pass. Who knows, those small things we do might bring people - might bring salvation to their souls by our little act of listening.

### **Afterglow**

High Priest Sherman Phipps was in charge of the service and took a few moments to comment. “I hope you have all listened to Brother Ed’s words this morning and felt the Lord calling us to be sensitive to what He has for us to do. We have just a minute, so, if it’s all right I would like to share a little thing. Ed was talking about sometimes it only takes a word.

I was at a youth camp one time in Nauvoo. We had an early morning worship. A few of us went every morning. Most of them slept in, but I got up and went to that every morning. One morning I went, and as I was standing there, a darkness - I don’t know how else to describe it - came over me. It was something I couldn’t have any control over. I couldn’t get away from it. It continued to envelope me. I don’t know how else to say it. I could tell the worship service was going on, but I really couldn’t tell what exactly was going on, what the words were, and all that. By the time they got to the end of that little worship service, I could tell it was over, and I could tell that everybody else was getting ready to leave, but I was completely, totally immobilized. I had a fear that I wouldn’t be able to describe because I couldn’t move. And I began to wonder what was going to happen to me if everybody else left and I was just standing there. I think part of that was just the usual silly kind of pride thing. I didn’t want to look stupid, but it was more than that, too. Like I say, I could tell everybody was leaving, and one of the people in that little group walked by me, just reached out, touched my shoulder and said, “We love you. God loves you!” When they did that, that darkness was just instantly gone. I think I learned a lesson in that moment. I have often wondered how many times, if we could just be there at the right moment, maybe we wouldn’t have to say anything - just reach out and touch their shoulder and God will use that to accomplish great things in the lives of other people.

I want to read two scriptures to you. “They that trust in the Lord in Mount Zion, cannot be removed, but abide forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever.” Psalms 125:1-2). That’s a promise to you this morning.

And I read another scripture when we started, and I kind of

stumbled, but I felt like it was important for us to consider today, too. I would like to have you listen to the words of this and consider it this week as you go about your business. “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” (Psalms 127:1) We need the Lord in our lives. We need to make choices that will allow Him to be there. And as our Brother Ed has said, use us in small ways to accomplish the great work that He has and which He has promised will be fulfilled.



*Seventy  
John  
Menzies*

## All Good Comes From God

### Seventy John Menzies Shares His Testimony

Seventy John Menzies opened his testimony with several selected scriptures on Sunday, November 19, 2006. He said: The words of Jeremiah’s twenty ninth chapter came strongly to mind as I was sitting in the class thinking of what I was going to say today. The book of Jeremiah is not renowned for its hopefulness. In fact, Jeremiah gives his name to a whole style of writing called the Jeremiad, which is a whining, long letter of complaint. So you never want to get a Jeremiad. But here is the message which Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the people that were carried off into exile from their home in Jerusalem - separated from family and friends, carried away in huge numbers, off to Babylon, almost an eternity away, it seemed to them - in a foreign land, in a foreign culture, bereft of the land which they believed was sacred and belonged to them by covenant with God. So those people were not particularly happy or hopeful.

This is what Jeremiah said to them, starting with verse 4: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and

settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also,’ and this is key, ‘seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’.... . ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to you .... . For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:4-11 New International Version). In the darkness, you have a man of great hardness, in many respects, phrasing words of eternal hope to a people that had lost theirs - counseling them to wait upon the Lord, as it were.

Now, I would be unfaithful to myself if I didn’t quote to you from the Book of Mormon. I am going to give you four quotes. They are all short. But this is what I believe is a constitution for all people who have been exiled in one way or another. This is how you live and prosper among a people that are not your own. This is how you live and prosper wherever you are.

First, from the book of Omni - not everyone’s favorite book in the Book of Mormon - chapter one, I think there is only one chapter, verse 45. This is the first instance this is stated in the scriptures anywhere - this principle.

“For there is nothing which is good, save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil, comes from the devil.” But remember the first part, because that is what is important. There is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord.

The second, Alma - I think almost everyone’s favorite in the Book of Mormon, Chapter 3, verse 67: “For I say unto you, that whatsoever is good, comes from God, ... .” That’s the key! Then we are going to finish with a flourish here because it just gets better and better.

The book of Ether, chapter 1, verse 106: “For because of my Spirit, you shall know that these things are true for it persuades men to do good; and whatsoever thing persuades men to do good, is of me; for good comes of none, save it be of me.” Isn’t that lovely? The principle is now becoming more defined.

Then in the book of Moroni, chapter 7 verse 10: “Wherefore, all things which are good, come of God; ... .” That is how the constitution moves forward from the days of Jeremiah to the present.

From the story of the Restoration, I just want to read one short scripture. Doctrine and Covenants 128:8b-8c: “... yet it is incumbent upon the Saints while reaping the benefits of these organizations to so conduct themselves in the carrying into operation the details of their organizations as to be in the world but not of it, living and acting honestly and honorably before God and in the sight of all men, using the things of this world in the manner designed of God, that the places where they occupy may shine as Zion, the redeemed of the Lord.” May God add His blessing to the reading of the scriptures today.

Kathleen Myers sang, “Give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the Holy One. Give thanks because He has given Jesus Christ, His Son.” And Brother Menzies continued his testimony.

### Youthful Experiences That Matter

I am delighted to be here today, and I want, more than anything to just share my testimony. Some of the things I will say will go back a few years. Some will be fairly contemporary. I want to start, though, when I was the age of some of you here- - when I was about

eleven years old -- I moved to England with my family.

I came from Wichita, Kansas, which is a nice little town in the middle of the prairie -- very flat, windy all of the time, with wheat fields that go on forever. It was a pioneer town, and it still had that characteristic when I was growing up there. In fact, a member of our church was a witness to the last gun fight that took place in Wichita back in 1904. He could tell about how they carried the one guy off into the stable there after the fight was over. So it was really a frontier town.

We moved from there to London, England. It was a little easier for my parents because they claimed to be Canadian, but I couldn't. I was the only one in my family that was born in the United States. I always joke and say that if our car had been faster, I would have been Canadian, too. But that is not quite true.

My brother and I were the first Americans ever to attend our school, which was founded in 1624, making it older than all but the very oldest colonies on this side of the Atlantic. We were the first Americans, so I knew I was in trouble on the first day when we were learning the school song. They dictated it, and one verse goes like this, "Clear before us, the task heroic -- high endeavor, lasting fame." But that's not what I heard and wrote down. I wrote, "Clear the forest, the task heroic - high endeavor, lasting fame." You see, when you are in Wichita, Kansas, you don't think about abstract tasks. You don't think about abstract endeavors and lasting fame. You try -- and this is an American characteristic -- you try to pin it to actual activity and real work. I couldn't think of abstract things to do, and I thought, "Where is this forest? Let me at it! You know, we can clear this forest." I sort of wondered why and how big it was, but it showed a difference in culture which has stayed with me my whole life. We are a people, we, all of us here, are a people that look to find solutions to problems -- not to think in the abstract. We try to reach out and make a difference wherever we can in peoples' lives, and in our own communities. That's part of our birthright, to make a difference.

To round out that part of my life, on my last day of school in Britain, I was in a German class. I had been at the same school for five years, and the German teacher was someone I really, really liked. Mr. Griffin was his name. On our last day he said, "Let's do a translation." So we all opened our books and started translating. It was a story about a ship that was on fire and sinking. Pandemonium reigned. There was absolute chaos - sailors and passengers running everywhere, and the ship was going down in absolute pandemonium! I will never forget Mr. Griffin. He pushed his glasses up on his nose and tossed the book on the desk. He grumped audibly and said, "If this had been a British ship, they would have got out the band and struck up "Pomp and Circumstance" as she went down. Then he pulled his glasses down on his nose, and he looked at me and said, "Menzes, what would they have done on an American ship?" And I stood up, naively, and was the custom, and I said, "Please, sir, American ships don't sink!"

### **God's Original Constitution**

But there you have the original constitution given to the exiles in Babylon. "I know what my plans are for you - to give you hope and a future." You are not going to sink. That's not God's intent. And it's not part of our culture. It's not who we are. It is not part of what is intended for us. Instead we are to be a blessing to the world -- to prosper every city where we live that it will shine as Zion, a place redeemed by our presence.

One of my favorite pieces of music is in the Messiah. I like the whole Messiah, but there is the Founding Hospital version of it, that

has the section I'm speaking of. It has an aria in it that is absolutely stunning. I like this one because it is done by a tenor. I am not going to sing it -- I wish I could -- but it's some of the most powerful music I have ever heard. Taken from Isaiah (60:2-3), it says: "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And Gentiles shall come to Thy light and kings to the brightness of Thy rising."

Now, we have always taken that as referring to the birth of Christ, but make it more general. It is God's intent that His glory shall be seen upon us, and that people will come to the brightness of that reflected glory -- that we shall make a difference in the world -- that we shall prosper the places where we live and redeem them and fulfill the purpose which God has for us, which is not abstract but very tactile: to redeem -- to bless -- to prosper.

For me it has always been the central scripture of my life, the one that I have read from the Book of Mormon to you, in four different versions: "All that which is good comes of God". Why is that important?

I'll tell you another story. When I was a young person growing up in England, my mother once had me sing a solo at some church program. Now, my voice is like fingernails on a chalk board, but I did it. I sang this solo, and some of you may know the song. It's "If I have been perverse or hard or cold, if I have longed for shelter in the fold, when You have given me some fort to hold, O, Lord, forgive!"

Those words alone carried meaning for me. They struck me very deeply, and I thought, "Yes, I can hold the fort. I can be the only member of my faith community in my school -- the only one on my block -- maybe in my town. I can do that!" I didn't know what the Lord had in mind -- the places where He would send me -- the doors He would open, and every one was for me a blessing.

### **Holding a Different Fort**

I didn't know I was going to end up in Sarajevo, but I did through an incredible series of events. They sent me out to Sarajevo ostensibly for thirty days in the middle of a war, and they left me there for two years and two months. I went out as the acting temporary deputy chief of mission and eventually was made deputy chief of mission. I was then made acting chief of mission, then chief of mission, then ambassador designate and then ambassador -- all over a period of 14 months. But my purpose was clear - to go out there and try to make a difference. It was a very different sort of fort holding than I had in mind.

I remember one day sitting in my office in the spring of 1995, May, 1995, and every 30 seconds you would hear a boom in the city as the Serbs were shelling the city intensely. And in between the booms you would hear sounds of the machine guns firing, or small arms, or the dreaded 20 millimeter antiaircraft guns, not shooting at airplanes but at cars and people. I have got some of these sounds on tape, actually. I put my video camera on the top of the embassy. You don't see much at all, but you hear the sounds of a war taking place. And it's, like any other war -- constant sound. But this day the shelling was the most intense it had ever been in Sarajevo, at least in my experience and my heart ached. My heart ached for the people of the city and for what they were suffering.

I sat there yearning to do something, and these words leapt from my lips. As I was sitting there contemplating, I said, "Lead, Kindly Light!", and somewhere deep in the recesses of my mind those words struck a chord. They were from a hymn. I should have brought the little black leather hymnal I have with me if I had

thought of it. How many of you have seen one of those little black leather hymnals of the Saints Hymnal? It has to be this one because the hymn does not appear in the current hymnal. But because I had to carry everything into Sarajevo myself, I took the smallest hymnal I could find, and it was the little black leather one. I looked through the index and I found that there was a hymn in there that began with those words. I tell you, to the very best of my knowledge, I had never sung this hymn, and it is a good thing, because I hate the tune. If I had sung the hymn, I would never have wanted to turn to it. But let me read the words which are important. "Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom." (and Sarajevo was encircled by Serb guns firing at will.) "Lead Thou me on. The night is dark and I am far from home. Lead Thou me on. Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me." In that moment, I was overwhelmed by a sense of peace, and I knew, as surely as I know the sunrises and sets, that we would bring peace to Bosnia. I knew that it would be by a series of steps, and that every step I would know what I needed to do. One step would be enough every time. I could recount the long series of steps that followed. We did bring peace, but I will never forget that moment when, in the midst of war, I felt more at peace than I ever have in my life -- perfectly at peace with the assurance of God's love for the people. Sometimes we are called to be emissaries of hope and peace to the world.

### **The Pattern - God's Plan Revealed**

I just got back from New Jersey. You probably have all heard -- or maybe you haven't, that I will be moving on to work at Seton Hall University, a school of about 10,000 students in South Orange, New Jersey -- fourteen miles from downtown Manhattan, New York. It's a Catholic school. It belongs to the Archdiocese there in New Jersey, and they have chosen me to be the Dean of the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations. It's the largest school of its kind in the United States. It is new, but it's growing rapidly. It will celebrate its tenth anniversary next year, so I will be there for that, and I start in January. I have been out a couple of times house hunting. (Now there's a shock for your system)! We may have found something. We don't know. It could be sold out from under us, I am told, but we will find out in the next couple of days.

I have to tell you the story of this because it fits the pattern in my own experience. Maybe I should start with the first part of the pattern. Back in the 1970s when Liz and I were first married, I applied for a job as an intern with the RLDS faith back then. I wanted to work for them. I was writing my dissertation but at the same time I ran across a job that sounded perfect for me at the University of California, Santa Barbara working as the assistant to the dean of the graduate division. I had a lot of experience doing that sort of work up at Berkeley, so I applied for it.

And I have to go back further. This may ring true to you. There was one day when Liz and I were going to go to a Stake event down in Hayward, California. We had to drive through Oakland. We drove down there. I got to the door, and I said, "Liz. I can't do this! I just can't do this today. Let's go. Let's get out of here." So we got back in the car and started driving home. We got into the middle of Oakland and, wham! We were involved in a car wreck. It wasn't our fault. And I said, "Okay, Lord. that will teach me! I got the message!"

The police man came and, of course, he took all of the information and handled the situation just beautifully. He did a great job, in part because it truly was not our fault in the least degree. You know, two lanes that could turn right. One had to, and the other

was optional. We were in the middle lane turning right. The guy on the curb went straight. So it wasn't our fault at all. The policeman took care of it. He was great. Okay. Back to the story.

I had applied for the two jobs then -- one as an intern for the church -- and I didn't even know whether I was going to get an interview down at Santa Barbara when the church called and said, "We'd like to offer you the internship." With the heaviest heart I had ever had in my life, up to that point, I said, "No. I just can't right now." I didn't believe that I could take the job. I felt that maybe that was the end of my eternal soul ! Not really, but I thought I could certainly be judged based on that. But I said, "No". It turns out Santa Barbara wanted me to go and have the interview. So far the story is pretty normal, except that suddenly came the notice saying, "You have got jury duty." I had to go down to the Oakland County Courthouse. I was trying to tell the judge I couldn't serve. The process for the selection for this one jury was going to take two weeks and I would have missed the job interview. They would already have hired somebody by the time I could finish. The judge said, "Thank you, son, for your service!" You know how that goes. They will not let you out of jury duty sometimes. So I figured I was in real trouble.

The selection process began. They were turning the drum, and they pulled out twelve names. Mine wasn't among them. The judge began to question the jurors and said, "This is a case involving an assault against a police officer." I thought, "Oh, great!" They then began to question the first juror. They dismissed the first juror and were going to reach in and pull out another name. I was already standing on my feet when the guy reached into the drum, because I knew, as certainly as night follows day and the other way around, that my name was the next one coming out. He pulled out the name, and I was already on my way to the seat. Instead of going through the whole panel, they started with number one again - which was me. They said, "Do you know either of the parties to this case?" And I said, "I sure do. I know officer Kerlinsky who handled the car accident I was in with great aplomb. When the other fellow was at fault and obstreperous, had been drinking and didn't have proper paper work, this officer just calmed things down." The judge said, "Stop. You are free to go!" The moment the officer's name was clear to me, the one police officer in Oakland I knew, and I thought to myself, "This is just God's grace letting me know I had made the right choice and that my path of service led elsewhere."

### **All Things Good Come From God**

Now I am going to tell you about another grace. Several months ago, Seton Hall came looking for me. I didn't look for them. They came after me through their head hunters, and so they invited me out there. I will never forget sitting in the interview because I was very relaxed. I wasn't jobless at that time. Every person in the room got to ask me a question. The head of the panel is known as one of the best preachers in Catholicism's. He was so good that the Vatican brought him to Rome to teach their highest officials how to preach. This was the acting dean that was in charge of the search process, too. Every question that was asked me by the twelve people that were part of the selection committee was like -- if you know baseball, this was like a lazy dirigible ball, slow moving flying across the plate. After it was over, I just felt exalted, because it was a wonderful experience. I said to Father Paul, "I hope I see you again sometime." Father Paul said to me, "Oh, John, I am sure you will." And so they invited me back for another round of talks later, and it all went well.

Then I heard nothing -- nothing for a long time. Eventually,



they came back to me, via the head hunters again, and said, actually they had had a long standing relationship with someone and that person didn't pan out. Now they were wondering if I was still interested. And I said, "No. I am going to stay at Graceland. I love Graceland - always have - always will love Graceland."

Things changed for me at Graceland, as you may have understood. There was some opposition to the way things were going. I understand that, but Graceland certainly doesn't need that kind of stress going into a period of ten year review for accreditation. I knew that there was some opposition in the corporate body of the faith community as well, and that disturbed me a great deal, so I decided that it was the right time for me to leave, after the best year in Graceland history. I don't care how you measure it. This past year has just been wonderful, and it is still going well; and I am glad for that. But it seemed like the right moment to leave and to move on.

I got back in touch with the good people at Seton Hall through the head hunters and after some talking, they decided they really did want me there. So I have been going out there meeting with them. This past week, I went out to dinner with Father Paul, this wonderful preacher who is looking forward to a sabbatical starting in June so he can write another book on preaching. But we were sitting in a restaurant just the night before last overlooking all of New York City from near Seton Hall. There is a beautiful place called Eagle Ridge which has unobstructed views of all of Manhattan and everything in between. It was a sparkling clear night - no fog - no humidity -- just perfectly clear; and as we talked about the future of Seton Hall, the Good Spirit rested on me again as it had rested on me previously, and I felt the call to be there -- that there is good work to be done in that place.

One of the things that struck me first, and I have told this story to a couple of you. On my first visit there, right after the interviews, I was walking with Father Paul along one of the sidewalks, and he just stopped, and he said, "John, I want you to know that here at Seton Hall we welcome expression of religious belief in the class room." And he was telling me that even as a "quasi- or a crypto-Mormon," that my religious beliefs and my passion were welcome in their classroom. I have never heard that at Graceland!

#### **God Knows His Plan For Us**

God calls us to prosper the place, wherever we find ourselves. He knows what His plan is for us. It is to give us hope and a future. It is for us to trust Him for the morrow. It is my hope that we will find God ordering His own house for us and with us - that we shall find new avenues of service -- that each one of us shall make the place we occupy shine as Zion -- a place redeemed of the Lord. May God's richest blessings be with you all!

## **With Faith, All Things Are Possible**

Rob Rolfe provided an appropriate setting for Elder Norman Nelson's sermon on Sunday, November 26 by singing Don Francisco's version of the Bible story of Jesus healing the young man who had been possessed with an evil spirit since birth. The desperate father answered when Jesus asked whether he believed he could heal him with, "Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief." and Jesus responded, "Everything is possible to those who will believe."

Brother Nelson followed, sharing his testimony of the rewards of faith, first addressing the congregation with the admonition, "I want you to remember that every one of you is a precious soul to the Lord. You didn't just happen to be here. The Lord has placed you where He wants you, and He will take care of you."

Let's start by going back to a statement that was made to us a hundred and many years ago. (Doctrine and Covenants 1:1). "Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say, Hearken ye people from afar, and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together; for verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape, and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated; and the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow, for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed; and the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days, and they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them."

I don't know a lot of what each one of you needs today. I thought we should start out by looking at the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first principle we talk about is the principle of faith. You know, it is as the Apostle has said, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." I guess the first scripture we find that tells us that is in chapter eleven of Hebrews 1-6. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 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."

You have got to believe that if you will try, He will come to you and you will know Him - if you try to come to God.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:7-10).

"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called; Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." (Hebrews 11:15-19).

#### **God's Promise Fulfilled**

If we have faith in God, we can do all things. I have a little momento I keep on my table that I look at frequently that says, according to Nephi, I know that God gives no commandment save He first prepares a way that you can achieve what He asks you to do. (1 Nephi 1:65). God doesn't ask you to do something that you can't do. He makes it possible.

I had a quite a bad time in my life. That's when the Lord picked me up. I was just sort of looking around seeing what was possible and what was available, and I went to Independence to a meeting. All the men there were signing papers and promising they would do this and that. I started to write on the paper, then I said, "I don't do that kind of stuff! It's not me!" But, on my way home I said, "But if You have something You would like me to do, You let me know, and I will do it."

The next morning I got a call from a person I had not seen in fifty years. She said, "We are getting a bunch of people ready to go to Honduras to give ministry there. Will you go along? We are leaving Friday."

My response - "Of course, I can't go. I don't have a passport. I'm not ready for that sort of thing and -." Right then I heard a voice that said two words. "You promised!" So I told Kay, "If you can arrange it, I will go." It wasn't Friday. It was Thursday. I had my passport, all my medical needs, everything, and I was on the road to Honduras. That wasn't possible, but the Lord made it possible. When I went to Nepal with George Thomas, we went on a bus up through the country on all the roads there were, and finally when there were no roads, We walked on a suspension bridge over a large river; and then we went up - almost straight up about four thousand feet. The young men with me there said, "We'll help you." And I said, "No. The Lord sent me. He'll take care of me." So I went up that four thousand feet with those young ones, and I was seventy five years old. He keeps His promises!

When I was in Nigeria, I was in a meeting with a group of so-called Evangelists that the pastor there in Lagos had brought together to listen to Bob Immer and me. Bob made his little speech and they asked him a few questions, and it was my turn. The first question I got was from an evangelist who said, "Why did Jesus sin in the Garden of Gethsemane?" My quick answer was, "Well, He didn't!" But God must have really loved that guy because He told me what to say. "You think I was afraid to die on the cross, and you are wrong! The reason I sweat great drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane was because I knew the pain of having to be separated from My Father to take on Me your sins, if you repent."

I think I have told you this one before, but do we know the pain of not being closely united to our Father? If you really think about it, you realize what kind of pain you are in when you are not with Him - all the misery, all the woes, all the nasty things you can think of and do when you are not with your Father. But, you know, He doesn't make you suffer that. That's the way He made you. He made you to be with Him - to be His children - to talk with Him, to understand everything He wants you to know. He wants you to be able to understand what is coming. You don't need to be in the dark about what is coming tomorrow - what you are going to need to be there. If you just take the trouble to listen to what He has to say to you, through prayer, you can communicate with Him. Through study of what others have done and have said and seen, you can understand the kind of people you are with - the kind of world you live in. The persons who are not with their God need much help because God made all of us to be His children, and He has given us everything we need to be the persons He wants us to be.

## **Your Special Mission**

Each one of you has a very, very special mission. You are not here by some higgility, piggility nothingness that happened because somebody had a baby. You are here because God placed you here for a very special purpose, and you need to find what that purpose is and fulfill your mission as His child. You must study. You must pray. You must sacrifice enough to know your God very, very personally.

All the scriptures testify to this fact. You read in Deuteronomy 4:1 and 6-9: "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons."

God has placed these things here for our benefit, and He is a wonderful, gracious, loving being. Only as you know this and seek diligently to follow do you have the possibility of fulfilling your mission and being the happy people He wants you to be.

## **Accomplished By Faith**

These things are accomplished by your faith. And this is so, if you don't believe it, you won't do anything about it, and you will lose the wonder and the glory of the great things you could have been.

If you lack faith, as all of us do, let's look at what Alma says. I will go back a little bit before that to the circumstance that Alma was in when he made his statement about faith. Alma prayed, (Alma 16:108-120) "O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and iniquity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities? For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

"O Lord, my heart is exceeding sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ? O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people? O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me; yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek, and Zeezrom, and also my two sons; yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord? Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ? Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them, because of the iniquities of this people? O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee, in Christ? Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our near brethren, therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom, that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee. "Now it came to pass, that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And after that, they did separate themselves one from another; taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or

what they should drink, or what they should put on. And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.”

You are placed here in Mount Ayr to do a very special work here. And we need to have that kind of prayer in faith that we know we can accomplish what He has sent us here to do. Now, you are all a very nice bunch of people, but there is a lot of sickness, mental, physical and spiritual, even some in our very midst. And unless we, ourselves pray in faith and seek to retrieve those who are lost, they will be lost, and we will not be able to have the joy of seeing them return to their Lord, repent and come in righteousness to the full wonder of what life can be like.

Reading again, Alma 16:125-144: “And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them, said unto him, Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men, because of their poverty; yea, and more especially by our priests; For they have cast us out of our synagogues, which we have labored abundantly to build, with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty, and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do? And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld, with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word. Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude, but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them, I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.

“Behold thy brother hath said, What shall we do? for we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God. Behold, I say unto you, Do ye suppose that ye can not worship God, save it be in your synagogues only? And moreover, I would ask, Do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week? I say unto you, It is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; For it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised for your brethren, because of your exceeding poverty that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. And now because ye are compelled to be humble, blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humbled, seeketh repentance; And now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

“And now as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble, ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? Yea, he that truly humbleth himself and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same be blessed; yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble, because of their exceeding poverty; therefore blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble, Or rather, in other words, Blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart; yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. Yea, there are many who do say, If thou wilt shew unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. Now I ask, Is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing, he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. And now how

much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? Now of this thing, ye must judge....

“And now as I said concerning faith: Faith, is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith, ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true And now, behold, I say unto you; and I would that ye should remember that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word.”

If you believe in God; if you believe His commandments; if you believe these things, you will take the time and trouble to try to be His child - to worship with Him -to be with Him every day. It is not something that you only do on Sunday. When you get up in the morning, ask, “My Father, what do You want me to do today? What can I do to help further the cause of Your Kingdom? How can I help others to know the things that I know and have the joy of being Your child?” How can we leave others in the misery of not knowing God at all and of being blindly buffeted by Satan’s darts? How can we do this and feel that we are okay if we haven’t asked God to make us instruments in His hands of bringing others of His children to know Him, to love Him, to have the joy of being with Him? (Alma 16:151-154) “But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith; yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. Now we will compare the word unto a seed.

“Now if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; And when you feel those swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves, It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding; yea, and it beginneth to be delicious to me.” Just believe and try. You can have the wonder of the presence of Jesus Christ in your life.

### **The Wonder of Being Near the Savior**

I have had two experiences of very close contact with my Lord. There is nothing so beautiful - nothing so great or so wonderful as being in His presence even for a few seconds. Like I said, when I was having my problems with life because I had been left alone, one night I was having one of my dreams and I don’t know how exactly to explain it to you, but I found myself in a situation where It was like as if I had a large gully of a very slippery metal surface to climb. It was a very steep slope, and I was trying to climb. Before very long I said, “This is hopeless. If I slip back, I am going to fall a long way down, but I can’t really go forward, either, because I just don’t have any traction on this surface. And I said, “Oh God, I can’t do this any more!” Then my eyes were opened. I looked before me, and there was Jesus on the same surface. I wanted Him to reach out and take me up, but He didn’t. Instead, He let me know, “You have to want to climb. If I do it for you, you are gaining nothing. You have to continue to work in the face of what seems to be impossible situations. Know that I will be here with you, but I can’t do it for you. You have to go ahead and be the person I want you to be in spite of all the problems you face. I can’t do it for you. I will be with you, but I can’t do the things that you need to do.”

Another time I had a dream. I was walking down a broad road. I don’t know where it was, but I saw in front of me a fountain of

water; and there was my Lord standing by it. He said, "Come and drink freely of the waters of life. Come and drink freely of the waters of life!" And you will never know how wonderful it is to be in His presence (until you have been there). It is beyond understanding - beyond anything I can say.

But I was surprised because He wasn't in white. He had on a dirty, gray robe. You know what had happened? He had on my robe. "Your sins are forgiven you. I have taken your place. You can be My son." These are the promises He gives to you. They are not mine. This is That is yours if you will take the time to be with Him. Pray, fast, study, whatever it takes, you will find it is worth it. Don't just keep going blindly along day to day doing nothing, finding stuff on the TV just for something to do, wasting your time. Your time is precious. Your life is precious. You are one of the most wonderful things the Lord has made, and He wants you to be with Him - to be His son - to be His friend. We can't be His friend doing all the other stuff that we do.

## **News & Notes**

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### **Family Movie Night Held**

The movie night at the home of Ron and Di Smith November 12 featured the second in the series, *The Light and the Glory*, based on novels about the beginning of the Restoration. The first in the series was fairly close to historical facts. The second has diverged in some areas. While it shows the violence suffered by the early members of the faith in heart breaking reality, it picks and chooses participants in those events.

Particularly obvious is the absence of Sidney Rigdon from the events in Kirtland. It was at Kirtland that Sidney Rigdon and members of his Christian community formed the nucleus of the gathering of the Saints. It was Sidney Rigdon who was tarred and feathered with Joseph Smith the night the Smith baby, suffering with measles, died from exposure. Sidney was dragged over the frozen ground receiving head injuries that plagued him all the rest of his life. It was Sidney Rigdon who was the first person to be ordained a member of the First Presidency at Kirtland and he remained in that position until the death of Joseph the Martyr. It was Sidney Rigdon who was charged with assisting Joseph Smith in correcting the Bible, thus producing the Inspired Version of the Holy Scriptures; and while thus engaged, it was Sidney Rigdon who shared the marvelous vision with Joseph Smith that led to the publication of Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants with their testimony of Jesus Christ: "He lives, for we saw Him, even on the right hand of God." Sidney was one of those who went to Missouri and dedicated the Temple Lot. He helped recruit those who formed Zion's Camp but remained behind to actively direct the work of the church in Kirtland while Joseph was away. He is reported to have spent many nights on the walls of the temple praying for its completion. Yet I don't recall hearing Sidney Rigdon's name even mentioned in the movie. In the movie, Brigham Young is presented as though he was Joseph Smith's close associate. Brigham was one of the two hundred or so who went with Zion's Camp to assist in Missouri and in 1835 was chosen an Apostle, a member of the original Twelve.

### **Menzies Guest Minister**

Seventy John Menzies, formerly Ambassador for the United States and President of Graceland College was the guest speaker





# Thanksgiving dinner 2006





at the Thanksgiving service held November 19. Brother Menzies and his family are moving to New Jersey where he will soon take up his duties as Dean of the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. The testimony he shared with the 64 persons in attendance is printed elsewhere in this Newsletter.

### **Thanksgiving Retreat Served**

The Geneseo, Illinois, Thanksgiving Retreat was attended by the Galusha family, Matthew Anderson and the Ron Smith family. Ron gave teaching ministry.

# Merry Christmas!

May the gift of Jesus grow in your life at Christmas and the new year!

## Special Christmas and New Years Events:

Community Christmas Musical Play  
(Five members of the congregation participating)

Friday, Dec. 8, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 9, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Mount Ayr First Christian Church

## Caroling Party

Gerry and Pat Bolingbroke home in Lamoni 5 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 17

(Note change from calendar)

## New Years Eve Party

Sunday, Dec. 31

Gordon and Linda Winkler Home in Mount Ayr

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