

TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Righteousness And the Kingdom

The Communion had been served and Elder Alan Smith took his place at the podium reading Romans 14:10-23: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For I live, saith the Lord, as it is written. And every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall swear to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another anymore; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, thou walkest not charitably if thou eatest. Therefore destroy not with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of; For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because it is not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

It seems like for the past few sermons, people have had one or two words or a phrase, or something that has come to them, and that is what they have focused their thoughts on. I have a word today that has been running around in my mind, I guess, if I were speaking directly to professional musicians like Cessaries Galusha or Nathan Smith, I would say that my sermon today is a theme with variations. The word is self-righteous.

This idea of self-righteousness and how it is a stumbling block to us in the Kingdom has been running around in my mind, and I would like to share some things about that with you this morning. If you go to the concordance and look for self-righteousness, there

is only one place that it shows up in all of the scriptures. It is just in the heading of Romans 14 where Paul is talking about the Kingdom, and the heading says, "Self-righteousness forbidden". Then it talks about the Kingdom being "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" and how we want not to be hung up on some of the lesser things that cause stumbling blocks with one another as we look toward the Kingdom.

What Paul is writing about is eating meat specifically. The Jewish law said that certain meats were unclean. And Paul says, though I am convinced by the Spirit that there is nothing unclean, I don't want to put a stumbling block in the way of my brother who doesn't believe that. In other words, "I am not going to invite my brother over who won't eat pork over for dinner and serve ham. I'm not going to flaunt my belief, even though I know there is some little part of the gospel plan that I am convinced of that my brother or sister isn't convinced of. The scriptures tell us that we need to follow after those things that make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another. We are not to split ourselves apart over something that we may know but our brother doesn't know yet, or our brother thinks about a little bit differently than we. If we focus on the Kingdom and the things that will help bring us to it, we can move forward.

There are a lot of words in the dictionary that begin with self. I found at least 250 words that begin with self - . Then there are a lot of variations on those words that I didn't count. The definition for self-righteous says, "being convinced of our own righteousness, especially in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others."

There are good words that have self in them like self-humbling, self-giving, self-sacrificing, self-disciplining self-determination, self-surrender, self-control. And there are words that have bad connotations that begin with self - like selfish - concerned exclusively about oneself. Self-satisfaction - being smug. Self-abusing, self-conceit, self-aggrandizement, self-centeredness, self-destructive, self-worship.

Looking at Self-righteousness Differently

I would like us to think about self-righteousness in a different way today - maybe help us understand the problem a little better. I would like to think of self-righteousness as thinking that we can be righteous by ourself. Isn't that the problem? Thinking we can be righteous by ourself is the opposite of what God calls us to do in His Kingdom in two ways. One is that righteousness, being forgiven and cleansed, comes only through our Savior. All the things that we can do cannot cleanse us completely. We can't become righteous ourselves. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

And the second is that we are called not to just be righteous ourselves, but to help our brother and sisters and to work together so that the Kingdom of God can be a part of our lives here on earth.

Something that Nathan Smith said when he preached a couple of weeks ago really stuck with me. When we look at the scriptures, do we look at the world as needing a Savior or just needing a teacher? If we just need Jesus as a teacher, then He can teach us something that we can do ourselves that will bring about our salvation? If we need a Savior, that means that something beyond ourselves is necessary if we are going to be the kind of people that God wants us to be. If we can say the scriptures are just good teaching, then we can say we don't have to look for the truth because it is just what we do ourselves with that good teaching that means anything. If we need a Savior, we understand that we all fall short of the glory of God, and we have to have Jesus die and rise again to help us to righteousness. We still follow, but we realize that in the end, it is a gift that must be accepted, not earned, and that's hard for us to accept sometimes.

Jesus contrasted being self-righteous and what I like to call blessed-righteous. Blessed-righteous is the opposite of self-righteous as far as I am concerned. Jesus spoke of it in the parable of two men, a Pharisee and a Publican who went up to the temple to pray. And the Pharisee stood and prayed this way, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers; or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." Amen!

"But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner." And Jesus said, "I tell you, this man" (the Publican) "went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for every one who exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he who humbleth himself, shall be exalted."

The Pharisee's prayer was similar to the prayers recorded in the Book of Mormon as offered on the Rameumptum - remember that big worship building they had that had this big, tall tower in it? You walked up into the tower and thanked God that you weren't like everybody else but were so much better.

Well, I don't know that we actually say it in those words, but sometimes in our lives, don't we think it that way? We are thankful that we are doing so many good things in our lives when we need to understand that that is not all there is to being what God wants us to be. We have to accept His gift.

Remember the parable Jesus said about the hiring of the servants? I think, maybe this could help us understand this concept as well. Jesus said in Matthew 20: 1-15: "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man, an house-holder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." (Most of us might not be attracted by a penny today, so maybe we should make that a little more - let's say \$100. That sounds like a wage that might attract some of us.)

"And he went out about the third hour, and found others standing idle in the market place. And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you; and they went their way. And again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They said unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right ye shall receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that began about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.(a

hundred dollars)."

"But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny (a hundred dollars). And when they had received a penny, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought one hour only and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.

"But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take thine and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last, for many are called, but few chosen."

Jesus said, "This is like the Kingdom. As people repent and come to me, there will be some of you who have repented a long time ago and have worked for a long time. And some of you will repent later and will not have worked as long. You both receive the same reward. You both receive the gift of my dying for you and making you clean again." We don't want to be like those who say, "How can it be that you forgive them all this time they weren't doing the right thing?" If we understand that to become righteous the kingdom isn't based solely on how long we have served or how much we have done. It is offered to anyone who will come. Anyone who comes to an understanding that allows them to make the decisions to repent, to be baptized and to love Christ by keeping His commandments can become part of the kingdom. We don't want to fall into the trap of believing that we deserve more because we have been at it longer. That's when self-righteousness comes between us and the kingdom. We can remember, too, that true joy comes anyway from helping someone else find the kingdom even if they haven't worked at it as long as we have.

Remember of the story of the rich man who came to Jesus and thought he had kept all of the law? He had worked and had done everything that he could do. He was self-righteous. He had gotten righteous by himself. Jesus asked him if he loved his neighbor as himself, and he said, "I have kept all of the law from my youth. I don't kill. I haven't committed adultery. I don't steal. I don't bear false witness. I honor my father and my mother. What do I still lack?" And Jesus said, "If you want to be perfect, sell all you have. Give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." But when the young man heard that saying, "he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions."

Jesus was saying to this man, "You have put your trust in yourself - that you can provide your own security. If you will give up thinking that you can take care of yourself financially and put your treasure in heaven, you are going to find much more. You can be perfect."

Jesus was saying, "You can't be righteous by yourself. All these things that you do are good, but you haven't learned to depend on me for your righteousness and your treasure." And the man just couldn't do it.

We need to rely on our heavenly Father for our salvation and not on ourselves. Not that following the commandments is not important. In Matthew 16:25-30, Jesus said unto his disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.

"Break not my commandments for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world

to come. And whosoever will lose his life in this world, for my sake, shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls; for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works."

Our Need to Share the Kingdom

As well as understanding that righteousness isn't something that we can just do ourselves, the second part in the equation is that we need to share in the righteousness in the kingdom and work together -- not just be interested in our own salvation. We need to be developing relationships that we can do things together. A Pharisee came to Jesus and asked what the greatest commandment in the law was. (Mark 12:34) Jesus replied, "The first of all the commandments is: Hearken and hear. O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment and great commandment. And the second is like this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." The Scribe understood, and Jesus said, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Righteousness is developing right relationships with God and with our fellowmen, understanding that serving others is serving God. Righteousness is understanding that the joy in the Kingdom is in sharing in the kingdom with just one person we can invite to share in that relationship with us.

The church has been through tough times in the past and been blessed. Alma 1:34- says this, "For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God. And also many withdrew themselves from among them. Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them. And when the priests left their labor, to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God, they all returned again diligently unto their labors; And the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers; for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner: and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength;

"And they did impart of their substance every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted. And they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely; And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions

"And now because of the steadiness of the church, they began to be exceeding rich; having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need; An abundance of flocks, and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things; and abundance of silk and fine twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth." They were blessed as they tried to stand fast in the commandments of God, didn't esteem one above the other, and shared what the Lord gave them. They were blessed abundantly.

The church has been warned that when we work together for the kingdom, there are pitfalls if we can't stop being selfish and

self centered. This is from Section 127:7c-7d of the Doctrine and Covenants - through Joseph Smith III. "The spirit of speculation, the exhibition of greed for gain is unseemly in the Saints and officers of the church, and should be avoided. It has the appearance of evil. Heed should be paid to the admonitions of those who from time to time preach and write upon the gathering to remove the principle of selfishness from the hearts of the Saints and especially from those upon whom rests the burden of the church and its ministrations abroad." Whenever we are talking about gathering - when we are talking about the kingdom, we have to remove the principle of selfishness from the hearts of the Saints.

We have come this morning to share in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But we are called not to come in the spirit of self-righteousness, but in a spirit of repentance. We need to have come recognizing that Jesus is our Savior, and we are lost without knowing Him - recognizing the sacrifice He has made for us, repenting, being baptized, and then trying to follow Him. We have the promise that if we remember Him, repent and come to Him this morning, examining ourselves, we can again be cleansed and have His Spirit to lead us to the Kingdom - to help us put our selfishness aside and become more selfless - recognize that we need to be blessed-righteous instead of self-righteous. I hope that is our experience this morning as we work to draw closer to the Kingdom.

The Foolishness of the Cross

Sunday, January 14, 2007 was a stormy morning and the usual number of participants in the services was diminished by the weather. Elder Michael Jordison commented on his concerns and his prayer through the week that those who did get to the church would receive the ministry of which they were in need. He chose 1 Nephi 3: 181- 187 as the scripture on which he desired to base his sermon. "And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord spake unto me, saying, Behold, saith the Lamb of God, after I have visited the remnant of the house of Israel, and this remnant of whom I speak is the seed of thy father; Wherefore, after I have visited them in judgment, and smitten them by the hand of the Gentiles; And after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which has been kept back, by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb, I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb;

"For behold, saith the Lamb, I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; And after thy seed shall be destroyed and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren; behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb; And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation; And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost;"

Cede Smith played a piano piece as special music for the service. Michael asked what the name of the song was and who was the composer. The name was "Fireflies" but there was no name given for the name of the composer.

Elder Jordison continued: It reminded me of some of the

simpler tunes when I learned to play the piano of great composers like Beethoven, and Mozart and other great composers who have come up with these melodies and have put them in the simplest of forms. That's just like the gospel. In its simplest form, anybody can understand it and anybody could play it on their heart. God can take those simple things and turn them into great masterpieces so that all may be edified.

Rob (Robert Rolfe), in your class this morning, you were talking about God's foolishness- and one of the things that you touched upon was the cross. It seems kind of foolish that God would choose a cross to save mankind. I thought about that and I was directed to these Scriptures. The one that I read, we have often talked about as we talked about the restoring of the gospel to the Nephites and the Lamanites at the last day. "And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; And if they endure unto the end, they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb;" (1 Nephi 3:187--188.)

Well, I found it interesting to say the least - the words that the angel used here. And if we go back just a couple of pages in the third chapter of 1 Nephi here - back to verse 82-87: "And he spake unto me again, saying, Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils, and unclean spirits; And the angel spake and shewed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God, and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.

"And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying, Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross, and slain for the sins of the world." Nephi said that He was lifted up upon the cross, and we might think it foolishness to use a cross. God could have come at any time, I suppose. He made the plan. But He chose to come at a time in the Jew's history when they were governed by the Romans, and the manner of capital punishment was the cross.

When Jesus came to the Nephites, He was giving them His gospel. He says this, (3 Nephi 12:25-26): "Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you, that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me; And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, I might draw all men unto me.".

What Is It About A Cross?

What is it about a cross that draws us to it? There are many methods of execution, but can you think of anything more humbling than to be there half naked, up high with your arms held out and your limbs and everything bruised and bleeding - seeing every flaw of your body. How humiliating that is! . We read so many times in the scriptures, "How many times would I have gathered you as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and you would not. " All the day long is my arm extended unto you." Here we have Jesus on this cross with His arms open wide in the most humiliating position, yet He still calls each one of us, "I am here, just as I am." We sing the song, "Just as I am" to Jesus, and He is saying, "Just as I am!. Here I am. I am nothing to be desired or to look at. My arms are open to you, and that's the message of the Gospel - that no matter what we do to God, He is still there with His arms open unto us. He wants to

receive us,

"That as I have been lifted up by men, even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil; And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father, I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name, shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father, at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

"And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father: and this is the word which he hath given unto the children of men. And for this cause he fulfilleth the words which he hath given, and he lieth not, but fulfilleth all his words; and no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; Therefore nothing entereth into his rest, save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end." (3 Nephi 12: 27-32).

"It wasn't foolishness that allowed God to choose the cross. It wasn't foolishness! "And if they endure unto the end, they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb (1 Nephi 3:188). Just as Jesus was raised up, we, too, shall be raised up.

Workings Of The Holy Ghost

Have you received the gift of the Holy Ghost? Do we use the gift of the Holy Ghost? We are going to jump courses here in just a moment.

This is from the sixth chapter of Moroni, verse number 9: "And their meetings were conducted by the church, after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach or exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done." Our meetings are not always led by the Holy Ghost. I am not speaking entirely of our congregation here only, but so many times we rely upon our own talents - which, if you think about it, I guess are really gifts from God - our talents. But we rely upon ourselves. I have however many pages there are in the Book of Mormon and the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants - we have say over two thousand pages of scriptures. It's not difficult to pick out a scripture to read for a service. It is not even difficult sometimes to look through and find a topic to talk about. And if we just kind of rely upon the scriptures only, we can get by. But it's really the Spirit that is supposed to be our teacher and our guide. And when I am up here, or anybody else is up here speaking, we are supposed to be led by the Spirit as to the things we are to say - the things we are to do. Jesus is calling to us each and every day. His voice is pleading. I am reminded of the time in the Book of Mormon when I believe Ammon and his brothers were cast into prison. It says, they were left there because God wanted to show forth his power. And there was a still, small voice. It says it penetrated to the soul. Again, it was not a loud voice - not a booming voice - and it called to them.

And Jesus is calling each one of us every day with that same still, small voice, piercing to our very center. The world doesn't hear it. It's not loud and thundering, but if we will respond to it, it will teach us what we need to be doing and what we need to be 'saying whether it's at work, whether it's at church, whether it's on the telephone, whether it's on E-Mail, maybe.

Back in 1831 Joseph Smith, Jr. received a revelation which was originally addressed to Brother Orson Hyde. (Section 68:1a-e.) "My servant, Orson Hyde, was called by his ordinance to proclaim the everlasting gospel by the Spirit of the living God, from people to people and from land to land, in the congregations of the wicked, in their synagogues, reasoning with and expounding all Scriptures unto them.

"And, behold and lo, this is an ensample unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood, whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth; and this is the ensample unto them, that they shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be Scripture; shall be the will of the Lord; shall be the mind of the Lord; shall be the word of the Lord; shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation: Behold, this is the promise of the Lord unto you, oh ye my servants ... Unto all the faithful Elders of my church."

I have been reading testimonies of other congregations that have happened in the past, and I am reminded of how much the Lord has worked with our people - with the church. Some of the testimonies are simply amazing, I guess - the manifestations of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophecy under the influence of the Spirit. We don't see that in our congregation very often. Haven't seen it for awhile. And so I am kind of left to wonder what's going on. Are we not doing something right? Am I not doing something right? Has the Lord turned the light bulb off? Maybe we are a fluorescent light and it's flickering. I don't know. The point of the matter is, God has so much more that He wants to give to us - so much more light and truth - so much more understanding.

We are a little bit different today than they were two thousand years ago. We have these books. We have all of this scripture available to each one of us. Two thousand years ago, if you wanted to read, you had to go to the temple or to go to one of the Scribes, who, maybe, had some copies for themselves, to find this out. Or you had to go to church and you had to listen to the ministers - to the priests and the teachers - as they were moved upon by the power of the Spirit. I think we have relied too much on our books, and we are not relying enough upon the Spirit to be our teacher and to be our guide. We are not relying upon the Holy Ghost, and so when I asked you earlier this morning, "Do you have the gift of the Holy Ghost? Do I have the gift of the Holy Ghost?" Then use it! Then use it! Then use it!

For the children -- I see we have some young kids in here this morning -- a young lad in here that doesn't normally come to church with us. I want to read a scripture here from the Book of Omni 1:46-47. "And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth, ye will be saved."

"Offer your whole soul as an offering unto Him." What does that mean to you, (The question was directed to some in the congregation, and when the responses were heard, Brother Jordison spoke.) That's the same response that Jesus wants out of each one of us, to come right up to him at the last day and grab His arm, his waist or His leg or whatever. That was what Apostle Paul was telling us, to put on Christ. It's to put Him in our place. When we offer our soul, we are saying, "Here's a go, Lord. Take this dirty garment and give me something back. And when He does, it's like

putting Him on - putting His armor on. In Ephesians 6 it talks about putting on the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation and the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. Don't you remember that all of us that were baptized in the water were baptized unto Christ's death. That's what it means to offer your whole soul. It's everything. When we go into the water in baptism, our whole body goes down underneath the water, doesn't it? Right, Isabel? When we are baptized our whole body goes underneath the surface of the water. You can't see the body. And then, what happens? Well, you come back out of the water, right? But is it the same person? No! It's a new creature, it says. Jesus places something within us that makes us clean - makes us pure. That's what it means to offer your whole soul. Offer your whole soul as an offering unto Him and continue in fasting and praying and endure to the end, and "as the Lord liveth, ye will be saved."

And that's what this is about - our life on this earth. It's about our salvation, and Samuel, can you tell me what the meaning of life is? (Again the congregation was asked to address the question of the meaning of life.) Someone responded with "Sacrifices and light" which Michael acknowledged as touching on the meaning of life, then continued. There is a scripture, and it goes like this, "Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy." (2 Nephi 1:15). That's the purpose of life - that we can have joy; and we can receive a fullness of joy in this life. That's what our baptism starts for us - to receive that fullness of joy.

Jesus had some parables recorded for us. This is Luke 15: 4--32. Jesus is talking to the Scribes and Pharisees here who are murmuring at Him, and He says: Parable 1 of the lost sheep - "What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the wilderness after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, and saith unto them, Rejoice with me; for I found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.

Parable 2 of the lost coin - "Either, what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repenteth."

Parable 3 - the Prodigal Son, verses 11-32 paraphrased : A certain man had two sons and the younger of them said, "Father, give me the portion of the goods which will fall to me." And not many days after that, the younger son gathered all of the things that the father had given him and took a journey into a far away country. There he wasted all of the goods with his wild living. And when he had spent everything, there became a mighty famine in the land, and he began to want because he didn't have anything left. And he went and joined himself with a person who lived in that land, and he said to him, "Send me to your fields to feed the swine." And he would have eaten the food that the farmer had given to the pigs; and he thought, "How many hired servants of my own father have enough to eat, and here I am in a far away country, dying with hunger. I am going to go back to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and I have sinned before you. I am no more worthy to be called your son. Please, make me as one of your servants. " And so he got up from the mire and the muck and went to his father.

While he was yet afar off, his father saw him and he had compassion on him. He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you and I am no more worthy to be called your son." So the father called to his servants and said, "Bring forth a robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his finger, and put shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and let us be merry! For this, my son, was dead and is alive again, He was lost and is found!" And they began to be merry.

And now, the older son - he was in the field, and as he came up to the house, he heard the music and he heard the dancing and the feasting, and he called one of the servants and said, "What's going on in there?" And the servant told him that his brother had come home and that his father had killed the fatted calf because he was safe and found. So the older brother was angry and said, "Father has never killed the fatted calf for me!" And so he did not go in to the party.

After awhile the father was looking around for the older son and didn't see him, and so he went back outside and found him and he said, "Hey! What's going on? Why aren't you in here to join the party for your younger brother?" And the older son said, "Father, for all these years I have served you and worked for you. I have done all that you have asked me to do - kept all of your commandments, and all that time you have never killed the fatted calf for me so I could make merry and have a party, too. But here, your youngest son who has taken all that you have given him and wasted it - spent it all - came back home, and you have killed the fatted calf for him. I don't understand it!" And so the father said to him. "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is yours. We should be glad - we should make merry, for your brother was dead. He was lost - and is alive again - lost and now he is found!"

"In all of those parables, when the lost has been found, there is rejoicing because the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents. And that's what the whole message of the gospel is about - to find that joy, and joy comes when the lost are found. And that is the mission of this church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days - to preach repentance and baptism for the remission of sins to the wicked, to our neighbors, to our friends, to the people down the street at the bar so they can receive joy - so the lost can be found.

Baptism Makes It Possible

For Jesus to Make Our Spirits Clean

Tyler, I don't know how much you know about God and about Jesus Christ, but just to give you a little back ground, you have probably heard about the creation of the world. When God made the world, He decided He was going to put people in it. God made the people. He made Adam and Eve and all of the people that were going to be in this world. I won't go over all of the scriptures right now, but after He made them, it says He had to make bodies for them. (Our speaker taped outlines of a person to the pulpit explaining that God first made spirits, then identical bodies that hold those spirits.) So for every person in this world, there are two parts. Everybody has a spirit and everybody has a body. And when the two come together, they become, as the scriptures said, a living soul.

Now, what happened was that in the Garden of Eden where everything was perfect, you could see the spirit. But when Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and to break His commandment, sin entered the world like this darkness (Michael passed a black paper over the drawings on the pulpit.) and covered the spirit so that all we can see now is our body. We don't see our spirit, do we? Normally we don't see our spirit. So what happens is we have a body

that everybody can see.

When we sin, it is like taking a marker and scratching the body. (Brother Jordison produced an instrument and drew it over the picture of the body, but you could not see the mark.) When we tell a little lie, the mark is down here. And when we steal something from our neighbor, we may have a mark over here. And after we have lived a whole life, we have all these marks from all these sins on us, Right? Can you guys see all those sins? You can't see the sins, can you? When we die, the one that made us can see the sins, because our spirits that are underneath, even though we can't see them, they still mark us up. (He removed the drawing of the body to expose the drawing of the spirit, and there were the marks.)

Do you see that, Teagin, Tanner? This is a representation of our spirits when we sin. We can't see our sins on our body, but underneath the effects of those sins are there. Jesus says that no unclean thing can enter into His presence, right? How are we going to enter into His presence when we are covered with all those sins? Do you think we can? No, we can't. Do you think we can be joyful if we can't be in His presence? No, we can't be joyful. So God provided a way that we could come back into His presence with all of those sins on us.

God provided a lamb, and the lamb was Jesus. So the Lamb was sacrificed, and the blood of the Lamb covers our spirits. You see all of those sins on there? (Michael placed a red transparency over the drawing of the spirit and all of the marks disappeared.) So at the last day, Jesus has taken the effects of that sin, and left us with what? A nice clean spirit. Right? A nice clean spirit.

And that's what our baptism enables for us. When we go into the water, it's just like Jesus was lifted up on that cross for everybody to see. When we go into the waters of baptism, it's a witness that we have chosen to follow Jesus, and just like the widow that found the silver, and the man that found his lost sheep, and the old father who found his son, when they found them, they rejoiced. They called everybody together and said, "Hey! Look! The lost is found! They didn't keep it to themselves. And that's what our baptism is. We are telling everybody, "Hey! Look, everybody, I have been found! Come and see!"

And when we have that kind of desire in us, God promises to give us something - a special gift. That gift is the one that I asked if you had this morning. Do you have the gift of the Holy Ghost? It's the Holy Ghost that makes us clean - that enables us to be clean. It points us into all the ways of truth and understanding.

Workings of the Holy Ghost

Getting back to where I started this morning, our meetings are to be conducted as we are lead upon by the Holy Ghost, and we can't be led by the Holy Ghost unless we have offered our whole souls as an offering to Christ, which means that when we want to do something, we have to check with the Lord to see if it's okay. Is that something I should be doing? Everything that we do in our life takes time away from something else. That's hard for me to get a grasp on, but it's really true. If I spend too much time watching TV, there is less time that I can spend studying my scripture. Or if I spend too much time down in the basement working, there is less time that I can be studying or doing something more important that I should be doing. Not that everything that we do away from the scriptures is bad, because we have to do things that are necessary. But we need to remember that everything that we do takes time away from something else. We are all given twenty four hours in a day. And really, as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ who are called forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, we need to be preparing

ourselves to have the Holy Ghost within us so that we can speak when moved upon to those to whom God leads us whether it's standing up here, whether it's out on the street; and it's not limited to just Priesthood. It's to every one of us. We all need to make some changes. We all need to prepare ourselves so that our meetings can be Spirit led and guided, and we can be partakes of that joy God has promised.

Come to God as a Little Child

Priest Kent Clisby spoke Sunday morning, January 28, reading from the Doctrine and Covenants, section 111, verse 4b-c. "Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fortification, and polygamy; we declare that we believe that one man shall have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again. It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband, neither is it lawful to influence her to leave her husband. "All children are bound by law to obey their parents, and to influence then to embrace any religious faith, or be baptized, or leave their parents without their consent, is unlawful and unjust. We believe that all persons who exercise control over their fellow beings and prevent them from embracing the truth will have to answer for that sin."

Elder Michael Jordison led the congregation singing. "In This Very Room", the sincere affirmation that the presence of Jesus "in this very room" assures us of all of love, joy, peace, hope and power of which we have any need. Then Kent continued his greeting.

This is a second chance, I guess for me to speak. Everybody was here last Sunday - right? I had prayed very much Saturday night that we would get a lot of snow and there wouldn't be a service, and I wouldn't have to speak. It happened. I was blessed for a short while, and then I was called an informed there wasn't church. Then we had church at Mildred's house and Norman and I happened to be there. Norman kind of presided over the service, then they all turned to me going. "Well. You are our speaker!" But that was fine. We had a good service. It was good!

Then I happened to walk into Rob's office Thursday and he asked, "Did you hear? George has got sick?" "What does that mean?" "We are looking for a speaker." So he calls George up before he said any more to me and asked George. George say, "I am feeling good! I am feeling great." So Rob hung the phone up. It was all over. I felt better. Then George called back within about a minute and he says, "I'll take a hold on that service. Give Kent a chance to speak." So, here I am. So it has given me two weeks to work on something that I only started yesterday.

Actually, I have been thinking about it a lot. I watch way too much TV and away too many movies. That's not my excuse. It's I see things through the movies - differently than other people, and because of how some films are portrayed, I enjoy them more.

Near the end of this week, It is going to be February second. Any idea what that day is? Groundhog day, and I am going to relate to that film a little bit - the film called "Ground hog day". I enjoyed that film. It was very humorous to me in a lot of things. Here was a man who thought he was on the road to greatness as a newscaster, and he was hoping to get out of this itty bitty town and its itty bitty station and go national and such. To the previous three years he had

gone up to Pennsylvania to do the newscast of the groundhog coming up and seeing whether he saw his shadow. He was very reluctant of go there. He didn't want to do it, and he thought, "Maybe this is the last time I will have to do it."

When he arrived, he did the show and thought it was all over. And what I like about the show is that it kept repeating the day - every day was the same! He would wake up the next day, and the same broadcast came on the radio. He kept going, "Boy, they got a nasty recording there. They had better change it." And what I liked about it is that he had to improve on what he did. He was taking it as himself. He was hoping for Go now. I just might live forever. I've tried to kill myself five or six times, and the day starts all over the same. He didn't understand or realize until the end of the film that he was doing it all wrong. He was not in tune as to how he should approach things.

I feel like that sometimes. Maybe I will get another chance. I'll get a reprieve like last week Not until the end of the film did he realize the things he had to do to move on and to do things correctly.

Who Is the Greatest

And I am a child of God! With that I wanted to read a story. It's out of Matthew 18 - the whole chapter.

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

"Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

"And a man's hand is his friend, and his foot, also; and a man's eye, are they of his own household. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost, and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them.

"How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if it so be that he find it, verily, I say unto you, he rejoiceth more over that which was lost, than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him

be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

“Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, that they may not ask amiss, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

“Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” (I like this!) “Till seven times seven? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven.” (Do you ever feel that way? Sometime when I wake up, I feel that way. Seventy times seven! We are forgiven always!)

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him who owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. And the servant besought him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. The servant, therefore, fell down and worshipped him. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him a hundred pence; and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

“So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all that debt; because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

“Forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

How often do we do that? How often do we do what is asked of us?

I wanted to start and finish that I am a child of God! We all are children of God. He has made us in His image. He has given us the chance to say yes or no to all we come into. And even if we choose the wrong direction of the wrong word, and ask for forgiveness, He gives us that forgiveness. Are we ready to give that forgiveness to our brother and sister?

A scripture from the Book of Mormon - Third Nephi 4:51, “Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin: therefore whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive; for of such is the kingdom of God.” A lot of people think I am just a little kid anyway, and some times I act that way just because I want to. I believe in the scriptures that I read, and I do believe we have to come to Him as a little child.

And my hope and my prayer for this congregation is that we call on Him until we can become a child again.

Afterglow

Brother Michael presiding over the service commented, “I am

reminded that I am a sinner” and he expressed his thankfulness for the forgiveness offered by our Savior. “It’s benevolent and offers forgiveness as often as I come to Him with sincerity and ask for that forgiveness. We all are weak, I know, so let’s stand and sing our hymn of “Consecration”.

Michael’s prayer of blessing closed the service, “Father in Heaven, we are so thankful for the promises that You give to us - that of Your never ending love and for the possibility that we might always have Your Spirit to be with us. Lord, we pray that as we go from this building, we might remember You always in the things which we do - the things which we say in our places of work, in our schools, at the stores in the mall, driving down the road we might remember our conduct before You and before all men so that we can truly be pressing down the road towards Your Kingdom.

“Father, I would pray also that Your Spirit might rest upon this congregation and even unto those whom You are calling to Your work and that You will give to them the knowledge and the understanding that they need for the step of faith that it requires. We pray that as they may move forth in ways of ministry and understanding that You will go before them and provide ways that they might be able to accomplish all that You have commissioned for them. We ask, O Lord, Your blessing upon this people in Jesus’ name. Amen”

News and Notes

Planning session results

At the planning session of January 7, tentative dates were set for:

A sledding party, if it ever snows.

January 20 - Restoration Women’s Day at Waldo.

February 10 - An adult Valentine progressive dinner.

February 16-18 - Fasting weekend.

February 23-24 - The winter gathering in Independence.

March 3 - a service day.

March 10 - Cessaries’ singing group will give a concert at Graceland University and conduct a service March 11.

March 17 - a movie or game night.

Beginning January 14, each Sunday afternoon at 3:00, those who are interested will meet in the Norman Nelson home for a study group meeting, the group to determine what they wish to study or view. Norman Nelson is in charge for January.

April 8 - Easter. There is a cantata in the planning

After the planning session, the branch budget was considered. Gordon Winkler moved and Fran Parker seconded the motion, that we accept the budget as printed. After some discussion, it was moved by Yvonne Galusha that we add a line item of \$2,000 for mission work in addition to the amount allocated for Liberia. The addition was accepted, bringing the entire budget to \$40,550.

The reported balance of funds on hand at \$80,386.82 does not include some moneys invested in CDs. There was discussion as to whether funds on hand are sufficient for us to look toward a different facility. The question is to be relayed to the building committee for consideration.

News and Notes

Women Attend Council Brunch

Winter weather finally arrived in Lamoni and Mount. Ayr the middle of January. Attendance January 14 was reduced to 27 and morning church services were canceled January 21. A number of members living in Lamoni gathered in a home, held a service then had dinner together. The main topic of discussion centered around the many evidences one sees in Mesoamerica that testify to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Robert and Lynda Rolfe were our latest visitors to the region.

The Sunday after noon gathering for study at the Norman Nelson home was held as usual.

Restoration Seventy Gather in Retreat

The Restoration Seventy met in Lucas, Iowa for their worship and planning session January 19-21. Final plans for the Family Missionary Reunion to be held at Graceland June 17-23 was among those items on their agenda.

Prominent among the testimonies brought back from the Retreat was the testimony of Sister Etta of Liberia. Sister Etta is the one who has the orphanage in Liberia who was converted to the Restoration gospel. When the "Christian" agency that was providing the place some 25,000 meals a year heard of her baptism, they told her she had to renounce the "Cult" she had joined, which they had judged non-Christian. They gave her until the end of December to renounce her belief in the Book of Mormon and other tenets of the faith. Sister Etta refused, and on December 31, 2006 the agency withdrew their support from the facility.

In the mean time a huge shipping container was being loaded out in Independence, Missouri bearing a four ton truck, barrels of food, clothing and supplies and thousands of pounds of beans all for the orphanage. It was the work of a number of Restoration congregations working with the Conference of Restoration Elders. Joy

Muir took a good ten minutes or more to share her joy at the many "miracles" she saw performed by the Lord as the container was being prepared.

In addition, Bishop Cederstrom's son, Thoric, works for an agency whose purpose it is to get supplies to the needy orphanages which agency had offered to supply a million meals a year if needed by the orphanage. And Cathy Nelson reported that her son works for the United States Department of Agriculture which has a "show case" every year in the Kansas City Area to which representatives of the church are free to go to solicit other valuable supplies for the children. It is apparent that the absence of funds from the "Christian" agency that judged the church harshly not only failed to damage the children's food supply but also opened the door to unlimited supplies not previously known to be available.

Women Attend Council Brunch

Cathy Nelson, Yvonne Galusha and Mildred Smith attended the Women's Council brunch at Waldo January 20. Patriarch Mike Ballantyne was scheduled to minister at the service but fell on the ice and received a severe head injury that necessitated his hospitalization. Elder Jack Hagenson ministered in his stead. As reported just before this letter went to print, Brother Mike is doing very well. Joy Muir was one of those giving testimony of the Lord's presence in the work of the Restoration now in progress. Her testimony is noted in the report of the Seventy but should be available in greater detail from the Conference of Restoration Branches.

Congregation Welcomes Back Gracelanders

Graceland University students returned to the congregation following winter term closure.