

September 2021

Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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For the Beauty of the Earth

*For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies.*

Refrain:

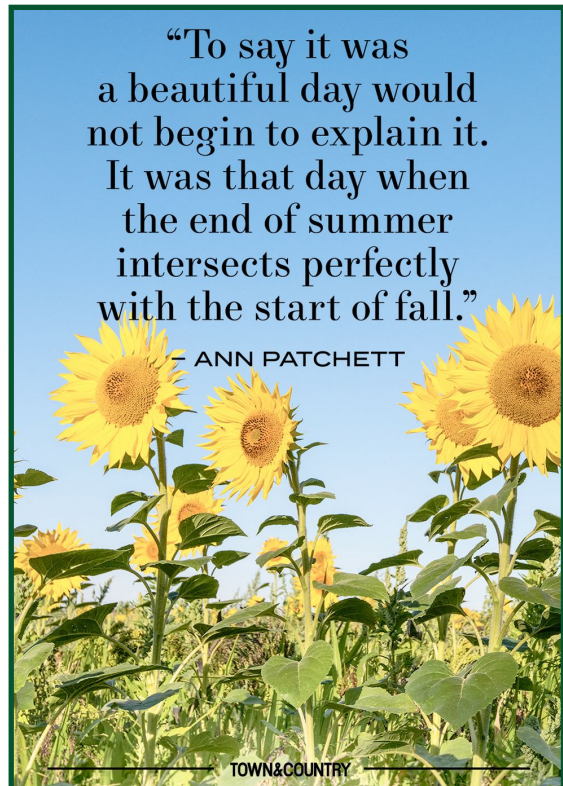
*Christ, our Lord, to you we raise
this, our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the wonder of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light, [Refrain]*

*For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild, [Refrain]*

“To say it was
a beautiful day would
not begin to explain it.
It was that day when
the end of summer
intersects perfectly
with the start of fall.”

— ANN PATCHETT



TOWN&COUNTRY

New Direction

After considerable prayer and deliberation, the Mt Ayr Congregation has chosen to support a branch startup this fall in Lamoni beginning October 24th. The name of the new church will be “Church of Jesus Christ, Lamoni Restoration Branch.” In the beginning, the Lamoni church services will be held at the home of Ron and Di Smith on Sunday mornings from 9:30AM until noon. Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services will continue as they have in various homes with plans that both congregations will cooperate and help each other moving forward.

This is an exciting and challenging opportunity for ministries to grow on behalf of families and people of all ages in the Lamoni area with this new branch, as well as continue the ministries that have been developed in Mt. Ayr for those that will remain in the Mt Ayr Branch and community. Ed Anderson has been selected to lead the Mt. Ayr Branch and Joel Loving will lead the Lamoni Branch.

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Opposition in Life
Deacon Joshua Jordison
March 14, 2021

I want to talk to you about opposition in life that we all face. With this pandemic, there are a lot of schools of thought. I'm not here to say that one is better than another, but I'm going to relay a couple of them for you. You have one camp that says this is a deadly virus that spreads so quickly and easily that we all need to be hiding and avoiding others at all costs. You have another camp that says, no, hiding and sheltering in place is more harmful. The simple fact of the matter is, that they both contain some truth. The virus does spread from person to person. Many have died from this virus. I have seen some x-rays of what happens when people have this virus, and it's not good. There are people who are at risk and they have died. But there are also issues with sheltering in place and the shutting down of schools. I saw a post on Facebook by somebody who I consider to be a fairly reliable source talking about the suicide rates of young adults and also about the physical and sexual abuse of younger children. The simple fact is that we face opposition in all parts of our lives.

A simple example of opposition happened yesterday. I was called in to work extra hours. So instead of getting off at 11, I got off at 2:30. I go in at six o'clock, and that wears me out. Nurses can work 12 hour shifts. That wasn't 12 hours. But for me that made the rest of the day slow. I was very tired. By 10 o'clock there was nothing in my brain. This then made it hard from me to prepare for this morning. Work became opposition to my my preparation. We face work, we face challenges, we face heartache, some have cancers and other health issues, while some face problems that have nothing to do with health.. There's a range of opposition in this world. There are so many people that wonder why would God do this? Why would God put this bad stuff in this life? Why do we have this pandemic? A small thought of mine as I was reading the scriptures was, this is the time to repent. If you search pestilence on gospelrestored.org in the Book of Mormon, almost all those times it talks about pestilence is because the people were being wicked, not following the commands of God. Because of this God sent pestilence to turn them back to Him. At one point it was Nephi who said, "Lord, I'm going to ask for a pestilence if you could send it because these people are so wicked." They kind of got better, but then they turned so wicked again that most of them were killed. Only about 2,000 were left when Christ showed Himself to them, which means that a large number were killed. But back to my question of why bad things happen.

To really understand this we have to go back to why there's opposition, to the very foundation of the world. You all know the story when God formed man. *And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so. And I, God, said, Let them have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them...*

And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul; the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also. (Genesis 1:27-29, 2:8)

We were put on this place to rule with God. It's kind of interesting that the first temptation was to say, "You can be like God." We were like His representatives on earth. When God placed us on the earth He gave us dominion over the earth because we were co partners with Him. You know, He named us and formed us and said, "Adam, you name the animals. You do this, this is your work." *And He told them that all the herbs and fruits were good to partake of except for one tree. My Lord commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden thou must freely eat, whether the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Thou shall not eat of it. Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee. But remember, I forbid it, for the day thou eatest thereof, thou shall surely die. (Genesis 2:19-22)*

It's really important to note that He says you may choose, because that choice is something that from this very point to the very end of time, the Judgment Day, will follow you through. In one of Steve Smith's classes we talked about blasphemy or rejecting the Holy Ghost, that final sin. And as I like to think of it, that just speeds up the process at the Judgment Day, when all men stand before Christ and choose whether they will accept Christ or deny Him. To me the scriptures can be a bit confusing about that time. But there comes a time where all will know of Christ, and have the opportunity to be cleansed by His blood. There is a time when you can decide to deny Christ, and deny the Holy Spirit and reject it, and there is no forgiveness. By committing the unpardonable sin you are just speeding that time up. But the important thing is to remember that at the very beginning of time, agency was given. So what happened? The devil came down and said, "Hey, woman, don't you want to be like God? Don't you want to know things like God knows them? It's going to be so good. So wonderful." And so she said, "Oh, I like that. God put us on the earth to be partners with them. I really wanted to be a little bit more like a god." So she took part of the fruit and said, "Oh, Adam, this is really good. I like it." So they both partook of it. What happened? Their eyes were opened. The Lord came down and said, "Oh, Adam, hey Eve, what did you guys do?" They were hiding. They saw their nakedness. I think of it a little bit like a joke--God coming down, and saying, "Hey, what happened?" -- He knows everything. "But can you explain to me what happened?" They ended up telling Him that they had done what He had forbidden. So what did he do? He sent them from the garden, cast them out to till the earth and live a life of toil and hardship. Later in that account, we find that Satan comes down and starts tempting men, and from that point on, they became sensual and devilish. From that point in history, all the way down to even now, we have bad things happen to us. We have thorns and sickness and diseases and issues that are in opposition to life, and a lot of those things make people think there is no God. But so clearly, we can find out why there is an opposition and why it was needed.

When we go into the first chapter of second Nephi, we find Lehi speaking to his youngest son, and just this morning, I realized something. That we're going to look at



opposition. This is part of the Hebrew way of doing it. Lehi is telling Joseph what he's going to say. He actually kind of explains what he's going to say before he explains it. When he speaks to Joseph, he says, *And behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow. (He isn't taught about the opposition yet, but he's just explained it.) because of the rudeness of thy brethren. Nevertheless, Jacob, my first born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. (2nd Nephi 1:60-62)*

Now, if you are just reading that scripture, you wouldn't get too much out of it, and I didn't at first, but after studying this, I realized it kind of gives an example of what we're going to go through in the following verses. *For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass; neither wickedness; neither holiness nor misery; neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; Wherefore, if it should be one body, it must needs remain as dead, having no life, neither death nor corruption, nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of nought; Wherefore, there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God, and his eternal purposes; and also, the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God. And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. And if ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness, there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness, there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not, there is no God. And if there is no God, we are not, neither the earth, for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away. And now, my son, I speak unto you these things, for your profit and learning: For there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them is; Both things to act, and things to be acted upon; And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; Even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter; Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man, that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself, save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. (2N 1:81-100)*

In those verses, we understand why there is an opposition and why we face the things we do. My morning scripture was the Lord talking to Moses, in section 22 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In the end of the section the Lord tells Moese what His plan is for the World, "To bring to pass the immortality and the eternal life of man." And how is that plan accomplished? The devil needed to come down and tempt man. We needed to have an opposition.

Lehi continues in 2nd Nephi, *...according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel*

of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; Wherefore he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God. And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable for ever; he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said, unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies; wherefore he said, Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth. And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth. And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; Wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; For he shewed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents. And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created, must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained for ever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (2 N 1:101-115)

The opposition in life is that we can have joy and eternal life. The classic example of the staircase Hebraism is Moroni 8:29: *And the first-fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith, unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart, cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.*

The idea of this parallelism or this form of poetry is that you start from a baseline and you slowly build up like stairs. And the final point, is the most important point. The final point of that verse is when all saints shall dwell with God. This is where joy and eternal life meet. When we can dwell with God.

Now let's move to the opposition that we all face in our daily lives. We can go over to another father speaking to another son but he's speaking to him in a little different light. Lehi was talking to Joseph his youngest and saying, 'you're going to be righteous and have a purpose. You're going to dwell with Nephi and I know that your brothers are going to kind of beat you down, but you will be blessed.'

Alma, however, is speaking to his son in the nineteenth chapter of Alma saying, "You have not been righteous." At this point in time Alma has just spoken to his two older sons and said, "You guys have been doing really great." However, in the nineteenth chapter he is saying, Why can't you be more like your brother? You went off. You had a



choice, and you had a job to do, and you decided to run after a harlot. That really screwed things up. And so Alma is going to speak to his son about that, and then he goes into the resurrection. Because apparently, his son was a little bit worried about the resurrection and what would happen. This then moves into Alma speaking about the restoration of all things when we can have happiness, and it will help us understand opposition in all things. *I say unto thee, my son, that the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself. And it is requisite with the justice of God, that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good; And if their works are evil, they shall be restored unto him for evil: therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order; everything to its natural frame; mortality raised to immortality; corruption to incorruption; raised to endless happiness, to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery, to inherit the kingdom of the devil; The one on the one hand, the other on the other; the one raised to happiness, according to his desires of happiness; or good, according to his desires of good; and the other to evil, according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long, even so shall he have his reward of evil, when the night cometh. And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so shall he be rewarded unto righteousness. These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil. Now the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore the way is prepared, that whosoever will, may walk therein and be saved. And now behold, my son, do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin. Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, Wickedness never was happiness. (Alma 19:64-74)*

We see that from the beginning opposition is put in life to pull and push you to and from goodness or happiness. The agency that was given in the Garden of Eden is still the agency with all of you. You can choose whether that opposition moves you to do good or to do evil. However, sometimes it's not purely simple. Sometimes we want to do good and we sin. And if you are like me you can spend a lot of time wondering why you seem to want to good, yet continue to fall. How could that happen? It's because the opposition of the world is constantly pulling you away from that which is good.

We spoke a little bit about this in class this morning. Gaining eternal life deals with enduring, and pushing forward. *And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God*

in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness. And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration, to take a thing of a natural state, and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature? O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration, is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish; good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful...therefore the word restoration, more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all. (Alma 19:75-77; 80)

We have these options to go with the Lord. Part of this opposition, allowing us to have the sin in this life, is that the Lord can atone for these sins--that He can come down and die for us. As we move into the Easter season, which is when we specifically talk about Christ's resurrection and death, this plan of justice and mercy is in full view, because that's the point. You have justice on the one hand and mercy on the other hand. *And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye can not understand, which is concerning the justice of God, in the punishment of the sinner: for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery. Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee: for behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground, from whence they were taken; yea, he drew out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life. Now we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit; And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man, to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God. For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partook of the tree of life, he would have lived for ever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; Yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated. But behold it was appointed unto man to die; therefore as they were cut off from the tree of life, they should be cut off from the face of the earth; and man became lost for ever; yea, they became fallen man. And now we see by this, that our first parents were cut off, both temporally and spiritually, from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will. (your agency) Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness; Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal; that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord; therefore it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death; Therefore as they had been carnal, sensual and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state. And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of*



redemption, (laying it aside,) as soon as they were dead, their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. And now there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state which man had brought upon himself, because of his own disobedience; Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only, on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state; yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed: if so God would cease to be God. And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them for ever to be cut off from his presence. And now the plan of mercy could not be brought about, except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also. Now repentance could not come unto men, except there were a punishment, which also was as eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul. (Alma 19:81-98)

This points to why there's so much bad in the world, and we are afflicted and have sin, we have hurt and pain because there has to be an opposition in this world to push against, so the Lord God can bring all of you happiness--to eternal life, and so His mercy can be used. Now, how could a man repent, except he should sin? How could he sin, if there was no law? How could there be a law, save there was a punishment? Now there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man. Now if there was no law given, if a man murdered he should die, would he be afraid he should die if he should murder? And also, if there was no law given against sin, men would not be afraid to sin. And if there was no law given if men sinned, what could justice do, or mercy either: for they would have no claim upon the creature. But there is a law given and a punishment affixed, and repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth: otherwise, justice claimeth the creature, and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead: and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; And thus they are restored into his presence; to be judged according to their works; according to the law and justice; for behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery; therefore, O my son, whosoever will come, may come, and partake of the waters of life freely; And whosoever will not come, the same is not compelled to come; but in the

last day it shall be restored unto him, according to his deeds. If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God. (Alma 19:99-111)

Some people say that there is no sin and there is no wrong, which is funny because those people often are the ones in this world saying that we Christians are doing things wrong. Many seem to say that there is injustice in the world, but there is no sin. But there has to be a sin, because there has to be a punishment, because there is happiness and joy in this life. God's purpose was to make all of you like Him, to live with Him, to work with Him, and to bring to pass your immortality, and because of that, there has to be an opposition in life.

Today in the church we face opposition. The church is fractured and crumbling, in a sense. For twenty years I've heard a lot of talk about getting the church together. We pray for it and individually seem like we are trying our best to heal the church, and seek to work together. But in twenty years, I've seen little to the effect of the church unifying and healing. Maybe this is the year that it's going to start changing. What is worse is that because of the fractured church, it seems that the saving of souls has become less important. Now I am not one who has been known for the one for all mentality. I am much more the type to cut the rope when I feel that people are dead weight. Truthfully, I can be a bit harsh with people. But that is not the way the Lord wants us to view and deal with people. For the souls of all those on the earth are important. A common element between writers of the Book of Mormon is that they hurt for the souls which are lost. Lehi says that he worries for the souls of his sons and growing family. *And I have none other object, save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls.* (2 N 1:128) It

That's why he is speaking to Joseph and telling him the opposition in life that he is going to face. And that's what we need to be really focusing on right now in the church. Praying for each other and working together. The field is white and ready to harvest. It is ready to be picked. People who are hurting in this world need your love, and need you to reach out to them because the world is continually creeping in with darkness. The house of Israel was scourged. I don't like to often say this because it sounds a bit harsh. But I understand why, in reading the Book of Mormon, the Native Americans were beaten and destroyed like they were and how the colonialism happened over all the world. You know, right now at Graceland, we go through that, and colonialism is the worst thing that ever happened on the entire face of the planet and is white supremacy. But what transpired upon this nation all those years ago happened for a reason. Many have no understanding of that reason. But the Lord's word will always come to pass.

Ron has spoken that when he goes over to Africa, the Ibgo say that they are of the house of Israel. The Lord said he was going to oppress the house of Israel. What do we see that happened to Africa? It was carved up. People were shipped over here and oppressed. The Aborigines of Australia, which I do believe are a part of the house of Israel, were oppressed. People of New Zealand were oppressed. The people of the Pacific Islands were oppressed. It's all in the Lord's work and that will happen. The only issue is that as



Gentiles we can look forward to all of that being returned back on us. Nephi states that the gentiles will be drunk with their own iniquity. The Lord says He will turn what the gentile did to the house of Israel back on their heads.

So as I see this government in this nation turning, I see that happening. At some point, we, in the United States, will be deeply oppressed. But the best thing is the Lord has said in His promises, that the righteous will be preserved and righteousness will go forth. So as you're sitting here at church or if you're on Zoom, we have the choice right now to choose the way of right and the way of happiness. To be working forward and be constantly pressing with the work of the Lord and pushing forward and enduring to the end.

You have the option after this service to go back to life, to your normal jobs and just deal with the world as it comes. On Wednesday you'll go, "It's prayer service." We will come and offer prayers as Joel said, for the afflicted, which I believe is an important thing. But for every physical need that you have, you also have a spiritual need that you will never bring forward. I can guarantee that some of you will never speak of it. But if you were physically hurting you would. That's not a condemnation. But the soul is the most important thing. He speaks that in the resurrection, at the end day, it's not going to be the fact that you have issues in your body. I have to take thyroid medication and if I don't take thyroid medication, after a while I start getting really slow and start getting really cranky. I stopped taking it. I forgot about it when I was on my trip to Europe and about halfway through I was having a miserable time, because I wasn't taking my thyroid medication. At the last judgment day, when my body is restored, that is not what is important. The importance is my heart. Have you had a change of heart? Have you all sitting here really felt that change of heart in you? Are you seeking after the kingdom and light? Are you pushing through that opposition? It's always going to happen.

I got a take-home exam. How much of a blessing would that be to some people? The teacher put the page numbers where the answers could be found. How many times have you gone through an exam, any of you, and thought, "I would have loved that?" Yeah, that takes two to three hours for me, and I still have to do it and it is due tonight. There's always simple opposition in our life. And there are big oppositions that we're facing in this life. But the thing is to push forward, you cannot relent. You cannot let the devil get the upper hand.

Justice and mercy. That is the point of the Book of Mormon. Justice claimeth you or mercy claimeth you, there is no middle ground. It's hot or cold. Push forward. The great thing is that the Lord really does want us to live with Him and so He has given us His son, His atonement for the world. Right? God is in the present. We're coming up on that season where we get to celebrate that time, which is very important, but honestly we can celebrate the crucifixion, the resurrection every single Sunday. Because the entire story is, as the Book of Mormon says, in this life there is justice, mercy, happiness, sadness, righteousness, or unrighteousness and all is in one. Jen shared on Wednesday, that she felt blessed that she had COVID. And she said, because after getting over it, she realized how much of a blessing or happiness it was just

to breathe and just be able to get out. The opposite shows us the happiness in life.

This last scripture I'll leave you with just to sum up everything a little bit. It comes from Doctrine and Covenants 28:10d. *And it must needs be that the Devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves, for if they never should have bitter, they could not know the sweet. The Lord wants us to be with Him. He wants you to choose. He wants you to press forward to accept that mercy. The opposition is there but push forward. There is a reward at the very end. That is what I leave you with.*

The Scapegoat ***Apostle Doug Patterson*** ***April 18, 2021***

The scripture reading this morning comes out of the Book of Leviticus 16:1-8. *And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the Lord, and died; And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired; these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. May the Lord add his blessing to the reading of the word.*

I have entitled this message. The Gelah Azazel, or The Scapegoat. I would like to continue reading where I was at in Leviticus chapter 16, beginning with verse nine. *And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness... Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat... And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat; And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness; And the goat shall*



bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

In the days of Moses, the Lord created a new calendar for his people. That calendar had seven special days. They were set apart for special purposes, called feast days. This day that I have read about here with Aaron and these goats, was a special day. It was a feast day. It was called "Atonement."

The story of the resurrection began. It was the day of the last supper. Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples and offered the sacrament for the first time that evening. Christ was betrayed by Judas in the garden, where He had gone to pray. Friday was the beginning of the season of Passover. It was the day that Jesus Christ became the Pascal lamb, or the Lamb of Passover. Jesus is also the first fruit to be. The first resurrected from the dead to eternal life. We celebrate the Feast of the First Fruit on Resurrection Sunday. We look to that day as having great importance--a day that life was given, and new life was promised to us. On Passover, the lamb was slain and blood was shed to cover our sins, yours and mine. To the Hebrew people there was another feast day that held a greater importance than Passover or the Feast of First Fruits. It was called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day two goats were presented to the high priest, each for a very important role. Yom Kippur or Atonement, was also called the "Days of Repentance." It is the final day of judgment when God judges the people. It is considered the holiest day of the year. It was a day when Jews asked God to forgive their sins. This is called the Sabbath of Sabbaths. This is the day of the "Gelah la Azazel."

The mystery of the scapegoat - "Gelah" in Hebrew means "to carry away." That is what the scapegoat does, it carries away the sins of the people. The word "Gelah" in Hebrew also means "to reveal," as in revealing a mystery. And "La Azazel" means "the scapegoat." The scapegoat was a goat that was designated for symbolic removal of the people's sins with a literal removal of the goat. So when a goat was removed, they believed that their sins were being removed as well. It was cast out into the desert as part of the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement that began during the Exodus with the original tabernacle and continued through the times of the temples in Jerusalem.

Once a year on Yom Kippur, the "Cohen Gadol," or the high priest, sacrificed a bull as a sin offering to atone for the sins he may have committed unintentionally throughout the year. After his sins were atoned, he took two goats and presented them at the door of the tabernacle. Two goats were chosen by lot, one to be "For the Lord," which was offered as a blood sacrifice, and the other to be the "Scapegoat," to be sent away into the wilderness. The blood of the slain goat was taken into the Holy of Holies, behind the sacred veil, and sprinkled upon the mercy seat which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. Later in the ceremonies of the day, the high priest confessed the intentional sins of the Israelites to God, placing them figuratively on the head of the other goat, the azazel, or scapegoat, who would symbolically take them away. A strip of wool cloth that was dyed red would be tied on to the goat, and then he would be released into the wilderness. The high priest would watch the azazel to see if

the red cloth turned white. If it did, then they knew the Lord accepted the sacrifice and that Israel would be cleaned from her sins.

Aaron was commanded to place lots upon these two goats. Lots were cast by using stones. So the high priests would have this little box with two identical stones in there. One of them was marked "For the Lord," and the other was marked, "For the scapegoat" or "For the azazel." According to rabbinical writings, those two goats had to be identical in every way, the same look, the same size, the same color, the same shape-- identical in every possible way. That way, you couldn't tell them apart. The Torah commands that the drawing of lots be applied to them. So this little box would be opened and the high priest would reach in there and choose a stone. The first stone that was chosen was the one for the Lord's sacrifice. But that stone could be anywhere in the box and for the atonement to be effective, he had to choose the right stone. It wasn't something that he looked down and just picked. It was unseen.

Rabbis and scholars in the old days debated whether if he chose the wrong stone, would the atonement have no effect - would the sins remain on Israel? That was a big, strong debate that they had. The concern was whether or not Israel would be free from her sins. The Talmud is the oral law written down and discussed. These are the writings and discussions of the rabbis. There is a passage in the Talmud that talks about during the forty years when Simon the Just served as a high priest (this was around 300 BC) that the lot for the Lord always fell on the goat to the right. When he reached in to get the stone, he picked with his right hand and it always fell to the goat on the right, a sign that the people were following the way of the Lord.

And so this was something that was in the written record in the days of their obedience. In 300 BC we know that they had come out of captivity from Babylon and they came back to rebuild the temple, so these were days of obedience. After the death of Simon the Just, the lot sometimes fell to the goat on the right and sometimes to the goat on the left. During the last 40 years of the temple, this was from 30 AD to 70 AD, the people descended to the lowliest of lows by rejecting Jesus Christ. The lot for the Lord always fell to the left. This represented that the sins of Israel remained on them. The Talmud also talks about the high priest tying a red strip of cloth around the goat's neck or around its horns. The belief was that if that cloth turned white, God accepted the offering. From Isaiah 63:1-2 we read: *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah [the sheepfold]? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? Also from Isaiah 1:18 we read, Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

Of course, this red garment is the blood of our sins. It is Christ covering our sins on this garment, and that is presented to the Lord. And so these two goats were also representing Christ. The red cloth on there represents the sin. In the Talmud, there was an event that occurred 40 years



before the destruction of the temple, which happened in 70 AD. That would make this around the year 30 AD.

We know what happened around that time period. The Bible tells us that Christ was crucified, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. But the Talmud says that some other things happened. It says that the lot for the Lord was not picked with the right hand, nor did the crimson strip turn white, and there was a light in the western side of the tabernacle that was supposed to remain lit, but it did not continue to burn. The Talmud also tells us that the doors of the temple swung open by themselves.

So what is the scapegoat? The English word "scapegoat," means "one who bears blame unfairly," or "the goat of departure," or "the goat of escape." Since the goat was sent into the wilderness to bear the sins of the Israelites, many presumed that this scapegoat, called the azazel in Hebrew is Jesus Christ. Others say it is Satan. They say Satan wants us to view him as a scapegoat: someone unjustly blamed for sin by an unfair God. Some might think it is obvious that Jesus Christ would not be represented twice in a single ceremony, so the azazel, or the scapegoat, cannot represent Christ. Some biblical scholars have speculated about these two goats, one representing Christ and the other Satan. Obviously, the one selected as the offering for the Lord cannot represent Satan, because this goat represented an innocent sacrifice, one free from sin or blemish. The other one, selected to carry away the sins of Israel, could not be representing Satan either. Satan seeks to add burdens upon us rather than carry them away or bear them. The second goat the scapegoat, the one who escapes, is the same goat as the former, not two different goats, but rather two acts, or two representations of the goat.

The reality is that Jesus Christ is represented in this ceremony three times. First, by the goat which is sacrificed, the one selected for the Lord. The wages of sin is death. Christ died for us or in our place. Secondly, as the azazel or the scapegoat it cannot be Satan because he does not bear our sins. He seeks to burden us with more sins. Jesus is the one who carried away our sins. And lastly, or thirdly, Jesus was represented by the high priest, who selected the goat to be given for the Lord. There was a high priest who made the sacrifice for sin. Christ, the great high priest, offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. The goats were identical in all ways, except one was selected to represent the innocent and sacrifice to the Lord. The other was selected to represent the guilty and to carry away the sins of Israel. From II Corinthians, 5:21 we read, *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

Even though Aaron had two goats, they were two symbols of the same goat. This is best understood in the story of the sacrifice on Mount Mariah. Remember the story about Abraham and Isaac? Isaac was being offered up as a sacrifice. Isaac was a type and a shadow of Christ's sacrifice. Both Isaac and Christ were representing both goats. The one called "For the Lord" and the other called "The Scapegoat" or "The Azazel." Abraham was commanded to offer up his son Isaac unto the Lord. The Lord halted Abraham by providing a ram. Isaac was selected by the Lord to be a sacrificial goat, the goat who was sacrificed to the Lord. And when the angel

of the Lord stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac escaped death, and became the scapegoat, or the goat who escapes.

After this scene in the Bible, Isaac seems to disappear. Just like the scapegoat, into the wilderness, or just like Jesus Christ, into the wilderness. Is he gone from the story? Does Isaac return? Yes, he does. Just as Christ will return. In the Bible we read about four trials that happened to Christ. He was judged four times. First by Annas the father-in-law of the high priest who sent him to the high priest, his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

Caiaphas sent Jesus to Pilate. Then Pilate presented him to the Jews. That day Christ was judged according to the word of the Jews. He was sentenced to death. Now in that story were four men condemned to death that day. But there were only three crosses. But there were four men talked about. Four men that had the sentence of death.

There was one man released. This was the season of Passover, which is very similar to the season of atonement, its parallel, its chiasmic form. Christ was crucified in the spring, but it shadowed the fall feast. It shadowed the fall celebration of atonement. When Pilate was charged with judging Jesus, he found no sin. He knew of a custom among the Jews that a prisoner of their choosing could be released during Passover. Pilate presented two prisoners to the Jews, one to be released, and one to be crucified. Even though this was Passover, Christ was foreshadowing this Feast of Atonement, a time when two goats would have lots cast for them. And that's what was happening in this story. Pilate saw Christ as innocent so he selected these two men that day and presented them before the people and they allowed the Jews to set as judges giving them a choice to release one. That day two goats were selected, one for the sacrifice to the Lord, and the other to carry away the sins of Israel. The one was Jesus the Christ. The other one was a man named Barabbas. In some older scrolls of Matthew, his full name is listed: Jesus Barabbas. It is believed that his first name was omitted from the Bible, to remove any connection or confusion with the Christ. The name Jesus as we know is a Greek transliteration of the name Yeshua which means to rescue, to deliver or he saves. We read from Matthew 2:4, *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Barabbas is the Greek spelling of the Aramaic words Bar Abba. Bar meaning son, Abba meaning father, Bar Abba, meaning Son of the Father. Jesus Barabbas is interpreted Savior, Son of the Father, which is the exact same name of Jesus Christ. So Pilate presents Jesus the Son of God, or Savior, Son of the Father. Like the two goats, exactly alike, bearing the same name. The historians of the Bible only focused upon one goat. They focused on the one that was sacrificed, the one that was for the Lord. The other left and went into the wilderness. It carried away their sins. Once the red cloth turned white, the high priests would watch. And as that red cloth would turn white, they knew the sins of Israel had been lifted from them and they were free. They no longer considered what would happen to that goat.

It was finished. That's all that mattered to them. It didn't matter where it went. All that mattered was what it did for them. They never considered that the story of the



scapegoat continued, and this is the mystery. Let's return to the story of Isaac. Immediately after the sacrifice on Mount Mariah Isaac isn't mentioned. The Bible records Abraham and his servants leaving leaving and nothing is said about Isaac returning home to his father.

It's interesting to note that Isaac returns in the narrative when he is looking for a wife. His father's servant goes to a land far away to choose a wife for his son. It isn't a land full of strangers. The servant goes to Abraham's nephew, Laban. The story of Isaac is the story of Christ. Isaac's son, Jacob, would follow the lead of his father, he would go to this faraway land, the land of his father and his mother to find a wife.

If we consider the lineage of Jesus, He was by blood of the tribe of Judah. But by the way of the covenant, He was of Joseph through Ephraim, and this is confirmed twice in the Bible. The children of Jacob were born from four women. The children born of Bilhah, Rachel's handmade belonged to Rachel. The same with Leah's handmade, Zilpah. Her children were considered Leah's. When Jacob was looking for a wife, he found Rachel and he covenanted with Laban for her. This was a legal and binding agreement. And he worked his seven years per the agreement. The next morning, he woke up and had been deceived for Leah was in his bed. He agreed to work another seven years for Rachel. So actually, he covenanted for Rachel twice and labored for her twice. He never made covenant for Leah. Leah was never His covenant wife. Rachel is a covenant wife. All the children belong to Rachel.

In Genesis 46:19, Jacob and his family are journeying to live in Egypt. There was a famine in the land. And the famine came about because the sons of Jacob had violated the covenant. And so this famine came and they had to leave. And of course, Joseph had been found in Egypt. But in Genesis 46, there's a passage that is like the book of Numbers. Jacob's house is being numbered, and he counts their number according to the woman they were born into. If you read in Genesis 46:19, Rachel is the only one called the wife of Jacob.

The second testimony that Christ is also of the tribe of Ephraim comes from a story about Ruth and Naomi, and it has the mystery of the lineage of David within it. Naomi receives Obed from Ruth, Obed is the child that is born from Ruth and Boaz, to remove her widow's reproach. We talked about that in Sunday school. Remember, Elimelech and Naomi were from Bethlehem, Judah, city and state. There was a famine and they left and went to Moab. They had two sons. Elimelech passed away, and both sons passed away. The two sons were married to Moabite women, Ruth being one of them so we have three widows. Naomi has to go back and settle the property that is in Bethlehem. It belongs to her father. She can't possess it because she doesn't have a husband. She can't bear his name. She has reproach. It has to be settled because now that property actually belongs to his near kinsmen. This is a woman who is of grandmother age, so her childbearing years are done. She cannot be married and have a child and be able to do that. And Ruth covenants with her and follows her back to Bethlehem. She becomes an Israelite in that sense, because she said your people shall be my people, and where you go, I shall go, and where you die,

I shall die. Ophir, the other girl, remained. Ruth marries Boaz who was of the tribe of Judah. He was also related to Elimelech but he wasn't the closest near kinsman. So he marries Ruth and removes the reproach of her widowhood and they have a child whose name is Obed,

Now Obed. belongs to Ruth and Boaz but because Ruth and Naomi have a covenant, she gives Obed to Naomi and she becomes a nurse unto him. The women of the community say there is a child born unto Naomi. And now Naomi's reproach is removed, because she has a child. And the child is not Boaz's son, because he has been adopted into the house of Elimelech. And so Obed actually belongs to and is named after Elimelech. Now Elimelech was an Ephrathite who lived in Bethlehem. "Ephrathite" means "people of Ephraim." Jesus Christ carries the blood of Judah and the blood of the covenant of Ephraim, the two kingdoms--the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel. It is like the two goats.

So after the resurrection, besides Jerusalem, where did Christ appear? Among the seed of Lehi, who are also the seed of Joseph. Lehi was a descendant of Rachel. Christ went to a faraway land to search for a bride, not just going among his father's people, but also his mother's people, Rachel's seed. She was his mother by adoption or by way of the covenant. Just like Isaac reappeared in the story with a wife so did Christ in the Book of Mormon, the saints at Bountiful entered into a covenant to be one with Christ. The scapegoat didn't just leave to be forgotten. His role didn't stop when the red cloth turned white. He wandered into the wilderness, he left and reappeared to another. Remember the word given to Moses about the scapegoat from Leviticus 16, *The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited, and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness.*

Turn to II Nephi 1:4-17 where Lehi is speaking. *For, behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; And had we remained in Jerusalem, we should also have perished. But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands;...And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; For, behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance.*

Lehi is telling his sons that this is the promised land, and it's a land not inhabited. It is the same place spoken of in Leviticus, the place the scapegoat disappears to. The sons of Jacob divided themselves in the land into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. They were like the two goats. Yet they were one people like Isaac, the sacrificial goat and Isaac the scapegoat. Judah was the sacrificial goat who never left the story. The Kingdom of Judah went captive until all of the years of their disobedience were paid. Then they were allowed to return to their homeland. Israel, the northern kingdom, was the scapegoat. She was carried away with her sins. To the Jews, she was gone forever, never to be heard of again or at least not until her time of punishment was endured. Her sins had been greater than those of Judah so her punishment would be endured longer. God had set the time of punishment for Judah at 70 years. She had disobeyed the law of Sabbath for 490 years. They failed to let the land rest



every seventh year. Israel's sins were much greater. They had turned from the God of Abraham and began to offer sacrifice to Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech. The priesthood was no longer selected from the tribe of Levi, but now anyone could serve as long as they would sacrifice to Baal.

As Israel turned from the Lord, God allowed the Assyrian nation to conquer and scatter the northern kingdom to the west. God had set a time for such crimes as these: a time, times, and a half a time, or 1260 years. We generally haven't looked at this description of time as a punishment. In Revelation we read about this number as a time when the woman would be hidden in the wilderness. We know this woman to be the bride of Christ, the church. Why did she have to go into the wilderness? Because of iniquity just as Judah disobeyed God's law of the Sabbath and was punished for 70 years, with much tribulations and many trials. Even when King Cyrus of Persia, conquered their oppressors and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, their Promised Land, It took many more trials and years to complete the rebuilding of the temple and the wall surrounding the city. But something was much different with Israel, and our punishment, the northern kingdom was ruled by the seed of Ephraim and we know in Joseph's blessing, he was told that he would be a "fruitful bow." Joseph had two sons, Manassah and Ephraim. When Jacob blessed these two boys, he gave a double portion to Ephraim, over Manassa. Ephraim received the blessing of the firstborn, a double portion. Remember, the arms of Israel were crossed over and the greater blessing came from the right hand--like selecting the stone for the Lord would be chosen with the right hand.

Ephraim was selected. The firstborn son receives a double portion from his father, above all the other brothers, and that blessing was to be given to Ephraim. In Hebrew, the name "Ephraim" means "double fruit" or "doubly fruitful." Israel gives him that blessing, even according to his name. So if he has a name that represents double fruit, Ephraim will be doubly fruitful. So would the punishment also be double. So he would receive a double portion of time, times and half a time, a double portion of 1260 years, which is 2520 years. That's how long Israel's punishment would be. Remember, Judah's punishment was 70 years and 70 years they were separated from their Promised Land. Israel's separation from their promised land would last for 2520 years. That began in 732 BC.

Israel had become so wicked that the Lord allowed the Syrian nation to come in to Israel and to conquer them. The battle took about 10 years but they were fully ripened in iniquity by 732 BC, and fully conquered about 720 to 721 BC. The Lord allowed an enemy to come in and to conquer them and to scatter them and to destroy their kingdom, and that date has been fulfilled. Israel, like Judah has now come back out of their wilderness--has come out of their captivity. From 732 BC 2520 years later, or a double portion of time, times and a half the time, brings us to the year and to the date, June 21, 1788 AD. Does anybody know what happened that day? That was the date that sufficient states ratified the Constitution of the United States. One covenant fulfilled the death of a nation, and a new covenant was established to bring forth a new nation. Not just another people in a new

land but the resurrection of Israel, the children of Israel in a promised land.

Their new covenant was called the Constitution of the United States of America. "America" means "Kingdom of Heaven." Exactly 2520 years later, or twice, time, times and half a time--doubled. Israel was doubly blessed. Now they will be doubly cursed. Wandering in the wilderness for that length of time. Israel was the scapegoat, seen by Judah going into the wilderness carrying away of sins. Judah would watch the scapegoat to see if the red strip of cloth turned white. If it did, they would know their sins had been carried away, far off--removed from their sight, no more to be remembered.

The Bible records the testimonies of Judah. To them, Israel had vanished. They were not forgotten, just not seen. Judah did not forget Israel. They remembered Israel. From Acts 1:3-7 we read: *To whom also he showed himself alive [this is talking about Christ] after his sufferings by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; And, being with them when they were assembled together, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

They were Jews. They knew they were of the kingdom of Judah. They knew the kingdom of Israel had been conquered. They were the scapegoat that went into the wilderness. Their sins were taken care of. That is all they worried about. The Bible doesn't record what happened to the scapegoat. That is why we have another book. The kingdom of Israel was to the north of Judea. Their capital city was Samaria but 700 years prior, the nation of Israel was broken and scattered. Where had they been planted? Into the uttermost part of the earth--in a land far away. The "uttermost" means "farthest away," but it also means "the final place" or "the last inheritance." Where is that land which is far away from Jerusalem? The United States of America. This is a promised land.

From Acts 1:9-11 we read: *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Now turn to III Nephi 5:1-9. *And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; And they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were shewing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place; And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given, concerning his death. And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they*



heard a voice, as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; And it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice, nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice, it did pierce them that did hear, to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn. And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not; and again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; And their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came; and behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; And it said unto them, Behold, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name, hear ye him. And it came to pass as they understood, they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a man descending out of heaven;

The Nephites saw the Son of God descend out of heaven, just as they testified in Jerusalem that the Jews had seen him going up in a white robe. The angels told the Jews, “even as ye have seen Him leave, so shall He return,” and He did, exactly in the Book of Mormon as it was testified by the two angels in the book of Acts. He returned in the same fashion that He left. So Christ was the lamb, or the goat that was sacrificed “For the Lord,” and He was also the scapegoat who carried away our sins. But He went to visit others of his people. He went and made covenant—entered into marriage—with another tribe, with another kingdom. First with Judah, and the second marriage was with Ephraim. Just like the story of Isaac, when He returns, He has a bride.

When Christ returns, will you be His, or shall He choose another?

A New Home *High Priest Robert Rolfe* *June 6, 2021*

Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home. There are five verses, of this poem by John Howard Payne, but most people remember only this line. A new home. Sounds exciting.

My sister-in-law told me today they are selling their house. That means they will be needing a new place to live. They have a 5th wheel trailer, so for a while, they can live in it. But, before winter, they will need a place—unless they move to Texas, or Florida or some other warm place.

By the way, I have a friend that is looking for a place to live. I hope that one of you will help me out. He is very nice, but has provocative opinions which he doesn't mind sharing. Like me, he likes to tell stories. There are negatives. He is not employed. I'm not sure he has ever had a job in his life. AND, he is wanted by the authorities for a crime that carries a death penalty. I think he is innocent, but the authorities still have issued the arrest warrant. Anyone able and willing to allow my friend to live with them? Raise your hand, please.

We all spend a lot of effort in finding a good place to live. The meal we eat the first Sunday of the month, is essential to finding a good home. John 6:33-35 says, *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.* Does this sound like a good deal? Never being hungry or thirsty again?

Another name for this condition is eternal life. That is part of God's job description. *“This is my work and my glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”* (DC 22:23b) *But the blood of Christ is the only purchase of eternal life, but obedience to Christ is the appointed way (the only way) to do it.* Did Jesus teach this truth? Yes He did.

But Jesus also said this: *“Verily I say unto you, it is not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, that shall enter unto the kingdom of heaven (or eternal life); but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. For the day soon cometh, that men shall come before me to judgment, to be judged according to their works.* (Matt 7:30-31) Whatever happened to being saved by grace? What is the critical factor in this scripture? Jesus said, in verse 33, *depart from me, ye never knew me!* A sermon for another day--the parable of the 10 virgins where Jesus said the same thing to the foolish virgins. *Ye never knew me!* What does this statement mean? AND How do we obtain eternal life? Many, many people have tried to answer that question over the centuries. There is no better question for which we should find an answer. Another name for eternal life is salvation. Being saved! How do we do that? Men have given many answers. Do you believe you are saved?

Some people use and believe in the sinner's prayer. It reads like this: **Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.** Is this all that is needed? There are many good things about this prayer, but Jesus, when asked, how do I get eternal life, didn't mention this prayer. To the woman in Simon's house, after she had bathed his feet with tears, He said **thy faith hath saved thee.**

Some people today recite Romans 10:9 which reads: *That 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.* Is this all that is needed for eternal life?

Apostle Paul, said we are *saved by grace.* Paul also said, we are *saved by hope.* Which one is it? What did Jesus say about it? Did He say to this rich man, “don't worry about eternal life, you are saved by grace. I've got you covered.” He didn't say that. He didn't mention the sinner's prayer. He didn't mention confessing with our mouth that Jesus is



the Resurrected Christ. What did He say was necessary? I call your attention to the 19th Chapter of Matthew starting at verse 16: *And, behold, one came and said, Good master, what good thing shall I do, that **I may have eternal life**? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? (In His response, notice Jesus quoted that part of the 10 commandments that deals with our relationship with each other.) (In the second table) Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Honor thy father and mother. And, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

*The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? There is no better question each of us can ask our Lord, than “what lack I yet?” Jesus said unto him, **If thou wilt be perfect**, (This is one of many scriptures that have the expectation of perfection.) *go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me*. I wish that Jesus could say this to me.... You have just one more thing that you lack. Remember, many of the other disciples gave up all they had to follow Jesus. There is no indication that this man wanted to keep his wealth to help others.*

The Book of Mormon teaches that righteous men seek riches for the good they can do. *Think of your brethren, like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all, and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you. But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ, ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them, for the intent to do good; to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick, and the afflicted.* (Mosiah 2:22-24) Giving alms is taught as a good work in the Bible. Lacking one thing! I'm sure there are many more sins than “one thing in my life.” Perhaps you feel the same way about your life. I hope not.

The rich young ruler went away sorrowing. He was very rich and wasn't willing to put Jesus before his riches. Jesus disciples, when hearing this exchange, said “who can be saved?” After all, he was a Pharisee, he kept all of the commandments. They wondered if they could be saved if what Jesus said was the way it was. BUT, it is isn't just riches. Anything we place before God in our lives may prevent us from obtaining eternal life. God wants to be first in our lives. Do not have any other God before me! Your God could be riches, but it could be sports, hobbies, your work or career, etc. We all need to know Jesus in the deep sense of knowing. We think the same thoughts. We do the same things.

How do we come to know Jesus? How do we obtain eternal life? He told the rich young ruler, keep the commandments. 1st John, 2nd chapter, 3rd verse says, *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*. It is as easy as one, two three. George Knotts would love this. Jesus said, we need to **hear** and to **do** His commandments—The atonement, plus obedience!

And many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; and in thy name cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works?

*And then will I say, Ye never knew me; depart from me ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever **heareth** these sayings of mine and **doeth** them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock, and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that **heareth** these sayings of mine, and **doeth them not**, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.* (Matthew 7:32-35)

By the way, you probably already knew this, but the friend that I was talking about at the beginning that needed a home, was Jesus. If you were thinking, “I don't want to have someone live with me that I don't even know,” Jesus must feel the same way. *Depart from me, ye never knew me.* (Matthew 7:33)

About 2 days after Lynda died my first thought was, “I wonder if she made it to heaven?” It is natural to think of our next home, when someone we love has passed on to their next life. My next thought was, “if she didn't, I don't have a chance.” She is probably giving lessons on how to be angels. Roger Potts, my neighbor across the street, called me on this same day and said, “I just want you to know that our wives are planting flowers together. They did a lot of flower planting when the two were living in Lamoni. Lamoni is great, but I think she is now living in a truly great place which is far, far better than Lamoni. It is a home we will love for eternity.

When she was a young girl her father was involved in an extremely serious accident. While at the hospital, the physicians pronounced him dead and they pulled a sheet over his head. Lynda was watching and in a little while, she saw her father's hand move. She cried out, “he isn't dead!” And he wasn't, at least at that moment. He was treated for several months for the accident. He suffered a lot of agony during his recovery. I talked to him once and asked him what he saw while he was “dead.” He replied it was the most beautiful place he had ever seen. On one hand he wanted to stay, but he also knew that he had a wife and 3 daughters that desperately needed him, so he agreed to come back to the earth. But he remembered the home that was waiting for him when his time on earth was over. May it be your eternal home also. Seek for eternal life. Ask your Master, “what lack I yet?”

I found 3 verses of scripture that encapsulates the message today. Closing with these verses, I read: Mosiah 2:9-11 *“I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long suffering towards the children of men, And also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life; I mean the life of the mortal body; I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world, for all mankind, which ever were, ever since the fall of Adam, or who are or who ever*



shall be, even unto the end of the world; and this is the means whereby salvation cometh.”

***Prelude to Blessing
High Priest Joel Loving
July 20, 2021***

Good morning. I have a lot to say but I want to explain that I don't mean I will be lengthy. I mean what I have to say is probably going to be heavy for some of you but I don't think I will talk long. I have some things to say and then I am going to sit down. I'm just speaking from the heart. I don't have notes. I have received a message that I want to share and I'll leave it at that.

The theme for today that I have chosen is "Prelude to Blessing." What does that mean? What is a prelude? I think you know what a blessing is. Prelude is a preparation for something greater. It's a buildup to something of a higher plane. It's a sacred act to prepare for a more sacred act. Prelude to a blessing in some ways is like an anointing in an administration, a preparation for something sacred.

We are going to examine blessing in a new light perhaps for some of you. I am going to read twelve verses. I know that is a little bit long from Luke 16. It is an interesting story told by Christ. In the context of this interaction and dialogue He's been interacting with the Pharisees. They've been doing things in a covetous fashion trying to impress other men. Basically, He's pushing them pretty hard and He gives them a bit of a hard time which they don't appreciate. He's talking about explaining His answer here and He goes into the story of Lazarus and the rich man. It's quite interesting. *For there was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple, and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.* It's an interesting contrast, one who is doing quite well and one who isn't doing well at all. *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried of the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus, evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, For I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear*

not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one should rise from the dead. (24-36)

Reading this I think of the Christmas Carol and Charles Dickens' character Jacob Marley who comes back with those chains rattling and shakes Scrooge as he wakes him. This is not to be for the rich man. If they weren't going to believe Moses and the prophets their chance has vanished.

Now let me ask you a question. This is not a trick question and you may speak out if you want. Who is more blessed - Lazarus or the rich man? You are going to say Lazarus. Who would you have rather been, Lazarus or the rich man? Do you understand what a blessing is? How did the blessing of the rich man earn hell? So maybe blessings aren't what we think blessings are. Maybe there are more to blessings than just the good things that we want and ask for.

It's an interesting question because in this dialogue and in the previous verses the Lord is really talking about how He doesn't judge or think like human beings. We act in ways that will be covetous and impress each other and we know the things that we want. But the Lord looks at the heart and so we can surmise with some accuracy here the heart of both men. It's in the heart where the blessing really occurred.

The rich man took his goodness that had come to him and turned it inward. We might say even away from the Lord in his own direction. Lazarus took the circumstances of his life and in his heart turned to the Lord. So maybe we can say the blessing is not the set of circumstances that you find yourself in. The blessing is the direction of your heart as you deal with those circumstances. One set of circumstances was clearly better than the other but Lazarus heart was clearly more righteous in its approach than the other.

Let me say something really clearly and really important. As we act, as we respond to the circumstances that we're in, we enlist to obey a master. Some of the earlier verses that led to this story that Christ is telling talk about how you can't please God and mammon. It's one or the other. Clearly Lazarus chose wisely and clearly the young man did not. When you behave and choose your emotions, thoughts, words and actions you have obeyed a master. Here is both the blessing and the curse that comes along with the consequences of your choices. For if you have listed to obey the adversary you have shown allegiance to him. You have paid allegiance to him and there are consequences. It is offensive entirely to the Lord and we need to look at ourselves in the mirror and face that honestly and remove sin from every ounce of existence in our lives. We need to use those opportunities and the circumstances we find ourselves in to pursue divinity, to make out of the circumstances whatever they may be something of a righteous choice, the object of our hope, being Jesus Christ and the hope of heaven, the kingdom of God, salvation for all souls, caring.

I believe I've told part of this story before. Some of you may have heard it but it's worth telling again. I took a trip with Neil Simmons to Wisconsin to administer to someone. Neil called me on a Thursday and said, 'I have a friend who is dying of cancer. He wants to be administered to. Would you be willing to go?' We could leave Saturday. It would be an all-day trip, administer to him Saturday night and come back Sunday. Neil is a good man. He has an amazing mind actually and so I went.



On the way back from that administration I was driving and we had a long chat. It was a spirit-filled trip. The Holy Spirit was with us. I don't know how we were able to drive so far without getting gas or having to go to the bathroom being as old as we were, but nevertheless we had this very, very long conversation. In it he told me this experience. I want you to remember this experience for the rest of your life. I'm talking from my heart to your heart, from my soul to your soul now.

He had a vision or a dream, and in this vision or dream the setting is that he was standing at the end of the hallway and at the other end of the hallway was Christ who was naked from the waist up. He was at some sort of basin and was washing himself in this basin. Neil started walking toward Him and as he approached Christ, he could no longer walk. He had to go to his knees until he was crawling on his knees and then he had to go on all fours until by the time he reached Christ he was literally face down on the ground. Christ turned around grabbed his hands and helped him up and put Neil's hands on His shoulders and then put His own hands on Neil's shoulders and around his neck. He looked at Neil with His penetrating eyes full of love, full of compassion, full of awareness of every moment of Neil's life and He said, 'What would you have of me?'

Neil was surprised. He wasn't ready for that question. He didn't know what to say. It was an awkward moment for him. He wasn't sure how to respond. Here you are literally in the clutches of Christ face-to-face, eye-to-eye. What would you say? Have you thought about that? Neil said, 'How should I pray? Teach me to pray.' Isn't that a strange question coming from a highly spiritual man. He's an Evangelist/Patriarch. He's very wise and very knowledgeable and intelligent. Teach me to pray. Really? What do you think Christ's answer was? Some of you may have heard this before so you already know.

He said prayer is sacrifice. What? Prayer is sacrifice. Now, I hope you are able to keep up with me here because when I heard those words, I was flooded in my mind with not only the awareness of what He was saying and the truthfulness of it but also how I had prayed pretty much my whole life. This is not about asking you to feel guilty about what you prayed for. You have prayed very righteously and very sacredly but all of a sudden, I realized I don't think that sacrifice is part of my prayer life enough.

Then Neil said Christ said something even more important which I suspect and I don't mean to prick you in the heart but I suspect it will. If it does, I say this with all the love I can muster for you. Christ said, 'Your people or your generation don't really know a lot about sacrifice.' How true. How unfortunately, devastatingly true. I've been to our prayer services and so have you. You and I have both offered the prayers where we're asking the Lord to heal and to fix. We're thanking Him. These are all sacred, good righteous things to say but where's the offering? If I may say, what do you express that makes it worthwhile to the Lord? What is it you offer to the Lord? What's in it for Him? Lord, can you bless these people? Can you bless this? Can you look after this? Can you take care of this? Can you bless our leaders? Can you bless our country? Can you bless our congregation? Can you help Joel?

We ask the Lord a lot and we should. It's His creation and He's in power but there is something about this experience of Neil's which should speak to us and to you for the rest of your life in the way that you pray. So here would be an example. I'll just say a prayer right now.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessings of our life and for this time that we have and for this opportunity that I have to talk with you, one-on-one. In this case one with many-to-one. We are struggling in life. We need your help. We can't do it alone and so we're asking for your help. We're asking for your Holy Spirit to touch us in ways that are powerful and meaningful. In response to this request, I want to promise and offer you something - my life, my moments that I cherish so much with my friends. I want to give those to you. I want to give something to you, Lord. I want you to receive something out of my existence. I want to offer you something. I want to sacrifice something on your behalf. Although I am tiny, no more than a speck of dust through the eternity of time that passes quickly, I want to take whatever I am and turn some of it, return some of it your direction by my choices, by my agency, by the freedom and the liberties that you have given me in this country which has been dedicated by people who have sacrificed enormously so that we have this opportunity. I thank you for their lives but in response to the sacrifice they made, I want to also offer and sacrifice and give for the sake of others, for the sake of you, for the sake of our children, for the sake of our children's children and their children's children and the Kingdom of God. I give myself to you, Lord. In Jesus name. Amen.

What do you think of that prayer? I don't consider myself very much of a prayer but there's a ring to it isn't there? There's something maybe God wants even as you share with Him what you want. Maybe there is something from you that only you can give, that only you can choose to give freely. He won't compel you. He won't force you. It's your gift which makes it all that much more valuable to Him. You didn't have to but you wanted to and chose to even when it was difficult, even when it was hard.

I experienced the hardest day of my life that I can remember at this time several months ago in February on the coldest night we had had. I work at a place called Zoomers which sells RVs and travel trailers. I had been asked by the owner to go about an hour and a half south of St. Louis to pick up a motorhome that he had purchased on auction. So Myron Neal drove me and I went to this parking lot where this motorhome was already idling and ready to return to Lamoni. I was to drive it back. I don't drive a motorhome very often. I have not been in them too much. I knew where the brake was and the gas pedal and the steering wheel so I pretty much could do it. We filled up with gas and started the trek back. Now this is normally about a 5 or 6-hour trip. It was 4 o'clock when we got to the parking lot and started the trek back home to Lamoni. I had a couple of bottles of water that I put next to the seat and turned the heater on in the motorhome but it didn't work at all. You could see the air out of every breath that I took. It was very cold. The water bottles froze within a half hour of beginning this trip. Also, about every 15 minutes the transmission went out. I was on I 70 trying to go 65 miles an hour and the transmission kept



going out. That's a fun experience getting off on the side of the road safely. It happened about 5 times but we finally stopped in Columbia and realized, I don't know anything about Freightliners but this was one of those that the transmission was supposed to last forever. What the heck are they talking about? Anyway, we realized that (believe it or not) it was the battery cable that had to be hooked solid to the post so that the transmission was getting its proper 12.8 volt reading so that it could do its thing. If the battery cable came loose the transmission went out. Anyway, we got that secured and it drove fine from Columbia all the way back to Lamoni except for the interior temperature. As my hands and feet froze, I was worried that I couldn't hit the brake properly so I would pull over and go back in the truck that Myron was driving and warm up. I would take my shoes and gloves off and when my hands and feet were warm then I would go back into the motorhome and drive further down the road until I was too cold to continue.

I am diabetic and I don't have a very good heart and I needed a blessing but I realized something. What was the blessing that I should pray for? That I arrive in Lamoni safely and alive? I realized something surely that was part of what I did pray about but I realized something about blessing. Prelude to blessing. Preparation for something greater. I prayed that I would have the strength and the faith aimed toward the glory of God to endure those temperatures and that trip. I prayed that I could be, as ridiculous as this sounds and I know it does sound ridiculous, a blessing in my faithful, dedicated response to God who had given me life.

The blessing was not just at the end. The blessing was the journey and facing the difficulty and the obstacles and the challenge of those moments from the beginning and throughout the challenge to conclusion. That's where the prelude to blessing begins. The meaning and the depth of life as it overcomes the obstacles and reaches its destination with God in His Kingdom, in His company where the tears are wiped away. Or, you're here on earth and have had to endure some suffering and you've had to endure some unpleasant circumstances. Let us take a lesson from Lazarus and turn our hearts toward divinity and say thank you for the opportunity we have in spite of the bad stuff, in spite of the lousy cards that we were dealt. Let's say, I will turn to you with faith and I'll be as strong as I can and as long as I last and as long as this heart will pump blood and as long as it courses through my diabetic body. I will live for you, in honor to you. I prayed this mile by mile as I drove.

At 3 AM I was let out at Kacey's front steps where we were staying at this point. It was snowing and I stumbled and fell several times walking up the steps on the sidewalk but I was full of joy that I was given the strength and I was able to come through to the end. We don't know what the end is. We don't know what circumstances we're going to face but the choice is to do our best in whatever those circumstances are for as long as we can, until the very end.

Have you been diagnosed with an illness? Make the object of your hope Jesus Christ. Have you dealt with a death? Make the hope of your soul, divinity and everlasting life and God Himself. Have you dealt with any difficulties, any hardships? That is not the curse or the blessing. The blessing and the prelude to the blessing is your attitude in the

midst of that circumstance and recognizing that God looks to you to be the blessing. That's the point.

This is my last point and then I am done. Who's the prelude to blessing? It's you. You're the prelude to blessing. You can bring blessing to God. You can not only bring blessing to God but you bring blessing to those who are His, who are with Him. You can still bring blessing to them. O, they are in the hereafter? Bring blessing to them by your behavior and your response today, by your dedication, by your repentance, by your humility, by your broken heart and contrite spirit, by your obedience to the commandments. Do you hear these words? You are prelude to blessing Jesus Christ, to blessing God and His Kingdom. YOU are the prelude to blessing. Let's live it. Let's give God the thanks for it. Let's pray appropriately with an offering of sacrifice as well as gratitude and thanks for the blessings that He is so willing to abundantly share with us all is my prayer.

P.S. At the conclusion of this message, and because I was not using notes, I neglected to include a passage of scripture intended to put this into perspective. I leave it here now for your consideration. It comes from Alma 17:69 & 70 as Alma speaks to his son as only a loving parent could. *Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord for ever; counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good: 70 Yea, when thou liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou riseth in the morning, let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. Amen.*

Jesus is our Hope
High Priest H. Alan Smith
July 18, 2021

As a Call to Worship Brother Joel Loving read 2nd Nephi 13:29. *Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men.*

As we were driving along the countryside on the way up this morning all of those old memories came rolling back. What a beautiful time of year it is seeing the crops growing and the beauty of the rolling hills. I remembered when we popped over the hill and could see the water towers that our girls always used to say, 'Oh, we're back in Mount Ayr. We can be safe again.' That was always their feeling about being here so it is good to be with you this morning.

For you young ones here if your mother tells you something over and over and over again does that mean that she really wants you to do it? If she repeats it over and over again, do you know that that means that she'd like you to remember that? I'm going to read a scripture this morning about hope and I want you to count how many times the word *hope* is used in this scripture. Then I'll have you tell us at the end. This is the scripture from Moroni 7:46-53. It talks about hope a lot so God must be, at least Moroni must be wanting us to recognize how important hope is.



How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you, that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal; and this because of your faith in him according to the promise; Wherefore, if a man have faith, he must needs have hope; for without faith there can not be any hope. And again, behold I say unto you, that he can not have faith and hope, save he shall be meek and lowly of heart; if so, his faith and hope are vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly of heart; And if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity, he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail; but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth for ever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons of God, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is, that we may have this hope, that we may be purified even as he is pure.

How many hopes did you hear? Nine? Very good that's the same number I counted. Thanks for listening so carefully to that scripture.

You know we live in troubled times but that's not new at all for Christianity. There have been problems with persecutions for Christians and for the Restoration but one thing the gospel has to offer in these times is hope. It's a wonderful opportunity to offer something of worth to our family, our friends and our neighbors along with the reason for the hope that is within us.

What is hope? Dictionary definitions talk about a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen; a person or thing that may help or save someone; grounds for believing that something good will happen; optimism; confidence; expectation; assurance.

I love this promise from Jeremiah 17:7-8. *Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.* I guess this year it might be hard for us in the midwest to imagine a year of drought, but I've been here when we have had a year of drought before and had to ration water. Or, maybe you can just visualize a stream running along with trees next to it and then a big arid area around it that's dry. The tree out there in the arid area is really struggling but the one here planted along the river is still yielding fruit. It's still growing and that's what the Lord is

telling us. If we'll put our hope in Him that's the kind of life we can have. That's the kind of blessings that we can receive in our life that continues to bear fruit even in the time of drought.

Now I'm not much of a scientist but I did a little bit of study about what happens to a tree in times of drought. The surface of a leaf is filled with tiny openings called stomata. I didn't know that. When stomata are opened water vapor and other gasses such as oxygen are released into the atmosphere through them. That's also how they take up the carbon dioxide that the plant needs. Without the carbon dioxide the plants cannot make the carbohydrates that are necessary for their growth. In times of drought some plants react by closing their stomata so that the water vapor can be conserved. For plants, balancing the need to conserve water with the need to take up carbon dioxide can be a real problem in times of drought.

If we have hope we too do not have to close up in a protective mode which freezes us in fear in times of drought. In fear we can't do the things that God wants us to do. We can't get the things we need to keep us really living and we can't give the things which are needed by others. We can't bear the fruit that's especially needed in times of drought. So, what do we need so that we can do this? We need to put our trust in the Lord and have hope.

Since we have the hope from knowing Christ and what He can do and will do for His creation, we can flourish. We don't have to be fearful. As the hymn says, 'What foe have I to fear with God at my right hand.' We can be positive that the Lord has us in His hand if we will come to know Him and follow Him.

My Mom and Dad and Sunday School teachers must have done a good job of instilling this hope within me, but I didn't realize it until I was a freshman in high school in Westlaco, TX. We talk about times of unrest today but 1964 (that's a long time ago) was a time of unrest too. There were race riots happening all over the country worse than the things that we've seen, the strife that we've seen recently. The United States was at war in Viet Nam and the nation was racked with protests against the war. President Kennedy had just been assassinated the year before. The most powerful earthquake in US history had shaken Alaska. I remember seeing the pictures of all of the destruction that happened there. China had exploded its first nuclear bomb.

We were talking about the unrest in the world in my English class and the teacher asked all of those who felt there would be a time when there would be peace around the globe to raise their hand. I stuck my hand up and looked around the room and no one else had their's up. I thought, what's different about me? I didn't want to stick out, but I realized that I had a hope in Zion. I had a hope in the Kingdom of God. I had been born with a hope that things could be accomplished and the Lord's work could be done and there could be a time without all this unrest. I had hope when others in my class didn't and I've come to realize it's my responsibility to help others find that hope.

The Apostle Paul wrote that hope is an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast. What does an anchor do for us? When we're in the storms of life it can hold us steady and keep us from being washed against the shore, keep us from



being destroyed. The Prophet Ether made the same analogy and may have expressed it even better in the 5th chapter of Ether. It says he had been crying from morning to sunset exhorting his people, the people of God, unto repentance. He says this in Ether 5:4. *Wherefore, whoso believeth in God, might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.* Do you catch that same understanding as we had in our earlier scripture? We can always be abounding in good works. We can always be bearing fruit if we have this hope. If we believe in God we can with surety, which means we can for sure, hope for a better world.

Hope provides strength to face challenges. It helps us look at situations differently — to have the strength to ride out the storms of life. Hope is an anchor that lets us abound in good works and glorify God no matter what the situation around us. As Peter put it it's not just enough to have hope or to be optimistic about what is coming, we have to understand the reason behind that hope. We need to know the reason for the hope that is within us. 1st Peter 3:15 says, *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer with meekness and fear to every man that asketh of you a reason for the hope that is in you.*

If we really understand our relationship with God then we have hope in our lives. If we have hope in our lives people see that and they ask what is the reason that you have hope. Peter asks us to be ready to explain that, to share with them the reason that Jesus Christ is our hope. We are not to boast about the hope that we have but to humbly share the reason that we have hope. It's because we know Jesus and we know we can rely on Him. As Alma said as he was giving the parable of faith and the seed that was planted. Having hope is the desire to believe the words of Christ. If we don't have that hope that those words are true than we won't do the experiments. We won't do the kinds of things that will help that word grow in us and help us to an understanding and even a knowledge of our Lord.

What is the opposite of having hope? Moroni tells us this in Moroni 10:16 . . . *if ye have no hope, ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity.* Without hope we're hopeless, we're desperate, we're despondent, we're defeated. They all come from iniquity which is a separation from God. In other words, if we're separated from Him it's hard to have hope. When we are separated from Him we become hopeless, we become desperate, we become despondent but if we can know Him and build that relationship with Him then we don't have to be hopeless.

If you are hopeless you can't see how things can change. You feel there is no way to come back to Christ and His people. If that's the way you feel, who has your ear? Satan is the accuser and says there is no hope for you. If you feel hopeless he's the one who is whispering in your ear. If there is something that you have done that is too bad there's no hope, you can't be free of that. But Christ is the opposite. He's our advocate with the Father. He died that we could be forgiven and come back into the relationship that He wants us to have with Him. When you begin to lose hope, remember who is whispering in your ear. When you begin to

become the accuser in your relationships, you need to step back and see if there are ways that you can be an advocate for that person becoming a better person instead of accusing them. Jesus' message was "go your way and sin no more" not "you lousy rotten person." It was give up that feeling of having no options. You can make the change. Go from here and sin no more. If there is anyone who has lost hope this morning here, Jesus says to you, 'Trust in me. There's hope for you. I have paid the price for your sins. I am your advocate with the Father. Go and sin no more. There's hope for you.'

With that background this morning I'd like to share some experiences that has brought the hope that is within me and reinforced that almost 60 years ago when I discovered that I had hope that other people didn't. I have had many experiences in my life. A lot of you have heard many of these before but I just wanted to share some of those with you this morning. Moments when either I've had experiences that have brought me hope or moments when I've been able to share the hope that is within me with someone else that has seemed to make a difference in their lives.

I guess one of the testimonies I grew up hearing was that of my Father and his experience about the hope that can come into people's lives. He was sitting in a class at a retreat and suddenly he felt like he was taken out of that situation into a beautiful new environment. Everything that he saw was just beautiful. He saw a pinprick of light that began to approach him. As it approached he saw a figure in that light and then he recognized that this was his Lord and Savior. He felt his own unworthiness so he put his arm up in front of him and ducked behind it because he didn't want to look. He thought that he was unworthy to look. The Lord indicated to him to look down on the ground. There was a piece of coal. Dad's father worked in a mill and shoveled a lot of coal. Bituminous coal was the dirtiest coal there was. He picked up this really dirty piece of coal. He was told to hold that up and as he looked he saw the finger of the Lord touch that coal and it changed from coal to a diamond. The most beautiful exquisite diamond he had ever seen. He came to understand that his responsibility as a Seventy was to hold the lives of people up to the Lord that the Lord could touch them and change them completely. There was hope for lumps of coal to be what God had intended them to be in their creation.

I first understood the pure love of Christ in a strong way when I was at a youth camp in Bandera, Texas – Camp Sionito. We'd had a week together and at the end of that week we had a banquet Friday evening. Everybody had a good time at the banquet. We came out of the dining hall and were standing around outside the concession stand which was near an oak tree. People began singing campfire songs, songs of praise. Some people had wandered away and as they heard us sing they came back and joined us until the whole camp was standing there. As one song would come to an end, someone would start another and as we sang together. The harmonies were just beautiful. We sounded a lot better than we had at campfire. The love of God flooded upon us and we were almost overwhelmed with what it felt like to bask in His love. As you looked around the group if there'd been somebody you'd had a little problem with that week or someone you had come to camp with and really didn't like



you could look in everyone's face and recognize your love for them and their love for you. It wasn't a feeling of, I wish I could stay here and it would be like this forever. It was "Wow! I need my friends and family to know about this." It's like Lehi and Nephi's experience in the dream when they tasted that fruit. Their first thought was they needed to share it with others. I knew then that there was hope for the world if we could all come to understand and feel that depth of love for each other, hope for the kingdom here on earth.

I was visiting with my Grandma Nelson. She was getting along in years and she had two regrets she said. One was they'd had a hired hand work on the farm for years and she'd never really shared the gospel with him. She felt very bad about that. She wondered why she hadn't and couldn't think of any good reason. She felt like that was such a missed opportunity. The other was when she was pregnant with their 7th child, she had a miscarriage. She was happy because she couldn't see how they could handle another child. She felt guilty for that.

She shared that with me one day when we were visiting. I hadn't really responded very helpfully at that time. I was at a reunion later that summer where Brother Harry Black said, 'I want you to stop and think of someone you need to pray for today. I want you to cup your hands and visualize that person and lift them up to the Lord in prayer.' So Grandma came to me and that's who I visualized, that's who I held up, that's who I prayed for. The words to a hymn came to me, 'Yea though I walk through death's dark veil will I fear no ill. For thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still.' I thought those words needed to be shared with my Grandma so I wrote her a letter and explained what had happened, explained that I had been praying for her. I got a letter back from her and she said, 'Thank you for that. I know the Lord can forgive me and it lifted a weight off my shoulders to hear those words.' It brought hope to my Grandma.

Curtis Bowerman was eight years old. He was going to be baptized at reunion in Alberta. His father was a member of the Parliament in Alberta. He was gone from home a lot but he was going to be there for that baptism and Curtis was really excited about it. Saturday came and something came up and his Dad didn't make it so Curtis wasn't going to be baptized. For some reason at the baptismal service my eyes were just drawn to Curtis and I could see how disappointed he was.

I thought maybe I needed to talk to Curtis but I'm not a very courageous person. I walked by his cabin and I was going to go knock on his door and couldn't get enough courage so I walked around the camp again and came back to the door. Again I couldn't get enough courage so I walked around again and came back a third time. Finally I had enough courage to knock on the door and ask Curtis if he wanted to go for a walk. As we were walking down the path around the campgrounds there I said, 'Curtis, I just wanted to let you know something. I know your father loves you and I love you and most of all your Heavenly Father loves you and you need to know that today.' Curtis looked up to me with tears in his eyes and he said, 'Do you know for a little while there I didn't know if anybody loved me.' The Lord brought

hope to little Curtis's life at that particular moment. He was reminded that he was loved.

Back in the 1980s we had the farm crisis. I know all of you around here remember that. The Tingley Bank was closed down here in Ringgold County. Many farm sales were being held as people were forced to sell they because they couldn't handle the debt they had. Roger Lane, one of the members of the congregation here, was in bad financial straits. His father on his deathbed had said, 'Roger, you are going to take over the farm.' So Roger did. He'd been in college but he came back from college took over the farm and tried to do his best. You remember in those times the interest rates were 16 or 18%. They had a couple of bad crop years and in that perfect storm Roger was losing the farm. The sale of the farm and equipment was pretty devastating.

At the same time, Roger's wife Mary Ann had gotten hepatitis and her liver was failing. They didn't have insurance. She had gone to the doctors in Des Moines and they said, 'You are not a good candidate for a transplant.' They had three little children. With everything that was going on their lives would that be a good reason to be a little hopeless?

One Sunday at a Communion Service the Lord had a message for Mary Ann. It was short and sweet. I stood up and said, 'Mary Ann, the Lord wants you to know that he has a very special blessing for you.' That was all I said but for Mary Ann a little bit of hope was passed on in that experience by the spirit of God that attended the words.

Roger and Mary Ann moved to Tennessee where Roger found a job managing a factory. He made good money and they had good insurance. They went to the doctors there and they said, 'Mary Ann, you're a good candidate for a transplant.' Mary Ann had a liver transplant and lived to see her grandchildren. They would call back every once in a while if her liver had a little problem or something else would come up in their lives and they'd ask, 'What was that that you said? What did that message mean?' I would say that I didn't know, I just shared what the Lord wanted me to share that Mary Ann was to have a special blessing. But that gave them hope and it also brought a rich blessing to them and their family.

Nathan was in high school and we lived here in Mount Ayr. He spent a summer at a music camp in Michigan so Valle and I and the girls drove to Petoskey, MI where he was in camp. We were going to go to church on Sunday. There were a couple of Restoration Branches both about 40 miles away from camp. Nathan had been catching a ride with a church member to one of their branches, so we thought that that Sunday we would go visit the other one. It was up in northern Michigan out in the boonies. In fact, we almost couldn't find it. It was down a path in the woods, but we found this nice church building. We took part in the service and afterwards the pastor came up to me and said, 'You're an elder aren't you?' I said, 'Sure.' He said would you help me with an administration and I agreed. This mother brought her baby to be administered to. Her husband was a trucker and that morning he'd come in off the road and the wife had showed him the baby's diaper rash. The baby's bottom was bloody the rash was so bad. It was the worst diaper rash he'd ever seen and he said, 'We've got to take him to the doctor.'



His wife replied, 'I'm going to take him to church first and have him administered to.' I didn't know anything about this background, but we had a really good spirit as we laid our hands on that young baby's head and asked the Lord to bless him.

One of the ladies there at church invited us to come home for dinner across the line into Canada so we went to Sioux St. Marie for lunch. We were sitting there eating and she got a phone call. She came back in and said, 'I have to share what just happened. The mother took her baby home and changed the diaper and the bottom was completely healed. The father saw that and said, 'If God can do that I need to make some changes in my life.' He took his cigarettes and threw them away. Just a little response to that love and hope that was brought into his life because of what the Lord could do for his child.

I have hope for the church. We are sometimes struggling to find our way but I know that if we will remember the scriptures that say, *Let nothing separate you from each other and the work whereunto you have been called; and I will be with you by my Spirit and presence of power unto the end.* (D & C 122:17b) If we will remember the covenant that the people gave to each other in the school of the prophets: *I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in token and remembrance of the everlasting covenant in which covenant I receive you to fellowship and the determination that is fixed, immovable and unchangeable to be your friend and brother to the grace of God and the bonds of love to walk in all the commandments of God blameless in thanksgiving forever and ever.*

If we remember those things, I feel a lot of our problems would be solved. If we make sure that we are feasting on the words of Christ so that we know His promises and are allowing Him to work in our lives we can realize that He is the one. It's His church and not our church. He can overcome any problem that our humanness can make. He's in control. His purposes will not be frustrated. It's only our opportunity to help them that can be. We need to put hope into practice.

I've had the opportunity to put that hope into practice in the last few months. I celebrated 10 years of doing well with my liver problem at the doctor's. Then he called me back in two days and said, 'By the way you now have liver cancer.' Even with it being caught early and the possibility of a liver transplant the statistics for living five years are 50/50, maybe a little better than that. For me to live, someone else has to lay down their life — a thought which is a little bit daunting. But when I got the word, I wasn't afraid. The "C" word didn't make me tremble. I have many things I'd like to accomplish here but I know I'll be busy wherever the Lord wants me. I'm convinced that the promises in the scriptures are true. 'All things work together for good for them that love the Lord; perfect love casteth out all fear; trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not unto thy own understanding and in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths.'

I take strength from 1st John 4:15-18. *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have*

boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love. . . There's not even any fear of judgment. We can stand boldly if we understand and allow that perfect love and that hope to work in our lives.

So let's summarize. No matter what we face whether this is the final moments of the end times which many of us think it may be or just another one of those tough times the world has gone through, we can have hope — hope in Christ and His promises. What is to be our response when we see men's hearts failing them for fear? *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.* (Luke 21:27) The promise is wonderful. *And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.* (28) Does that give us hope?

Among all people we should be most hopeful. We have the assurance that Zion will be. We need to be sharing our hope with our neighbors. When they share their fears, we need to find a way to share our hope. It's a wonderful opportunity to testify of Christ. Instead of closing down for fear in drought we need to be plugged into that trust that allows us to keep bearing fruit. We need to have a reason for the hope that is within us and share it as I have tried to do with you this morning. As the hymn reminds us, 'Keep your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.' With hope in Christ we can look at a world and what's going on with a completely different perspective. What blessed assurance that is.

We're Marching to Zion

Come, ye that love the Lord, and let your joy be known;

Join in a song with sweet accord,

Join in a song with sweet accord

And thus surround the throne,

And thus surround the throne.

Refrain: *We're marching to Zion*

Beautiful, beautiful Zion;

We're marching upward to Zion,

The beautiful city of God.

Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God;

But children of the heavenly King,

But children of the heavenly King

May speak their joys abroad,

May speak their joys abroad.

(Refrain)

The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets

before we reach the heavenly fields,

Before we reach the heavenly fields,

Or walk the golden streets,

Or walk the golden streets.

(Refrain)

Then let our songs abound, and every tear be dry;

We're marching through Emmanuel's ground,

We're marching through Emmanuel's ground

To fairer worlds on high,

To fairer worlds on high.

(Refrain)



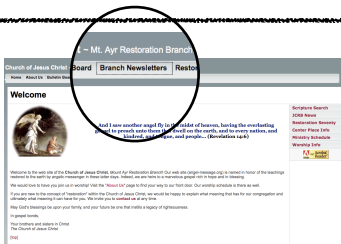
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And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:6-7)

(Continued from page one)

We continue as members of the body of Christ, to pursue with one heart and one mind loving and serving the Lord, led by His Spirit each step of the way wherever we are.

We are especially grateful for the leadership of many, including Michael Jordison who assisted this decision and process through many hours of deliberation and careful planning in order to provide discernment of the Lord's Spirit. His pastoral care and approach was instrumental in handling many of the delicate, but important issues. We should always be grateful for the blessing of his giftedness afforded us by the Lord's wisdom and grace.

We now open a new chapter of expanded opportunity for ministry in our communities. We pray we are each led by the Holy Spirit in these important times. The real question moving forward is not "What can we do?" but "What can the Lord do if we repent, love and serve Him in obedience and humility?" We can't wait to find out and invite all others to joins us in Mt. Ayr or Lamoni. Either way, let's all join Him in the work so desperately needed today in our world to prepare for the coming reign of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

In Christ,

Joel and Michael, Co-Pastors