

The Joint Conference of Restoration Branches November 10, 2005

SERMON by Seventy Ron Smith

I thank you all for the beautiful music tonight. The wonderful spirit and the love that you have already shown by coming together and smiling and sharing with each other—seeing old friends. I would like to read tonight from John 15:1-12

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

Nixon Opino knows what it means to be a new creature in Christ. Nixon lives in a mud hut on the shores of Lake Victoria in the country of Tanzania. I met Nixon this last summer, and I had the opportunity of baptizing Nixon and his wife, Happy, with the Holy Ghost. As Nixon shared his testimony with me (it was actually after that experience when he shared the testimony with me) I found out that Nixon did not use to be the person that I saw before me. Nixon was a teacher. He had a school, and they are young (pre-school that he teaches). Nixon had a problem. His problem was with drinking, and Nixon was a habitual drunk to the point where he was not able to fulfill his duties at the school. On the day of his baptism Nixon had three beers in the morning. But when he was baptized he said, “The desire for alcohol left me,” and he became a new creature.. He took me to his home, and I was able to meet his mother and his brothers and sisters and talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ He wants more than anything for them to be able to respond to the gospel that he found.

William Weery knows what it means to leave all and follow Jesus. William lives not too far from the shores of Lake Victoria, but in the country of Uganda. William was a pastor of a congregation—a Christian denomination—and he went to a meeting in Bali with a number of other pastors. It so happened that the person who was supposed to speak at that meeting was Eric Odida. Some of you know Eric Odida. The Lord had been telling Eric that Uganda needed to hear the gospel—needed to hear the restored gospel. He had a contact in Uganda and so he contacted this person and got an invitation to speak before a congregation of pastors of Christian denominations there.

Eric went early on Saturday (the day before) because he felt like he owed it to his friend to tell him what gospel he was going to preach the next day, and so he spent the day talking to his friend and telling him about The Book of Mormon and the restored gospel and the angel message (the angel who had come to earth as prophesied in Revelation, the 14 chapter. On

Sunday morning Erie was not invited to preach. Instead William Weery was invited to preach and so Eric sat in the congregation and listened to William Weery speak about Joseph of Egypt. Now there is no subject that Eric Odida loves more than the promises made to Joseph of Egypt, and Joseph's Land and all of the prophecies about Joseph's family, etc. As he was listening to William Weery speak, the Lord told him that it was William who he was supposed to come and speak to. It wasn't the other people that he had come to speak to.

After the service, he made an arrangement with William to speak to him, talk to him about Joseph and many other things. William, after he was introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ as it was restored, decided that he wanted to be baptized. He told Eric that he would like to be baptized and bring his whole congregation into the restoration. Eric said, "Well, we haven't had a lot of luck with that. When you respond to the gospel, it needs to be you responding to the gospel, not your congregation. When they respond to the gospel, it needs to be them responding to the gospel, not someone telling them this is the way to go." William Weery resigned as pastor. He gave up his livelihood so that he could be baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

William lives in a stun—pigs and garbage in the streets, goats—tin roof over his head. He is a widower and takes care of his children and is raising his brother's children after his brother abandoned them. So he has a household that I was never able to count how many. William told me, "You know, before I heard about the gospel, I used to pray and ask the Lord, Why is it that when preachers I hear preaching the gospel, they don't preach what I'm reading in the Bible, because I wasn't surprised by The Book of Mormon. I love the gospel." And he gave up everything in order to be baptized. I had the privilege of baptizing William Weery with the Holy Ghost, and also ordaining him to be a priest. And he has a congregation of people who are learning about The Book of Mormon, learning about the restored gospel, and when it's organized, I have no doubt that he will be ordained as an elder.

Tom Nuweery knows what it means to be called of God. Tom lives on the top of a mountain, again on the shores of Lake Victoria. He lives in Kenya. He's about the poorest person that I know in the world. They walk a long way for their water every day. They eek out a living—he now has a fishing boat and some nets. They grow some cusava (?) But Tom was one who responded who responded as one of the sheep. One of those that when they hear the voice of Jesus, they respond—they know. Doug and I first met Tom in Kenya, and he sat beside us for several days helping to interpret as we answered questions on the Bible. As we were talking, he leaned over to Doug at one point and said, "You know, I feel the Spirit telling me that I need to be baptized for the remission of my sins." He said, "I have been baptized before, but it was just to get into a church. I need to be baptized for the remission of my sins." We would have baptized him at the time except we didn't know where there was any water. We were kind of naive. We made arrangements for him to come to another place, but he wasn't able to come. One of us sent him a Book of Mormon in the mail. We had an address for him. And he wrote letters to us over the next year saying, "I don't have anybody to teach me." But he said, "The Spirit is teaching me, and I'm finding some really interesting things in The Book of Mormon." He told us about his excitement about finding the Lord's prayer and about finding the Sermon on the Mount, about finding the things that connected him with the gospel and Jesus Christ.

On our next trip over, I was determined that I was going to see Tom. We did. We went to his home and he met us with joy and said, "Will you teach them about The Book of Mormon?" He said, "I have been trying to teach them, but it's in English and they only speak Luo (?). If you would speak the words, I could translate and then they would understand." So we spent an afternoon trying to tell about The Book of Mormon.

Many of you have heard his testimony. When I got done telling everything I knew about The Book of Mormon, he said, "Can I say something about that book?" We said, "Sure" So he addressed his little congregation there. He said, "When I first got this book, I had a question. And my question was, does God have any book that's inspired for scripture besides the Holy Bible? I didn't have anybody to teach me, so I tasked the Holy Spirit. And after a few days I had a dream. In my dream I saw a beautiful thing that was built. Up on top there was water. There was a lot of water. It wasn't falling off. It wasn't in any type of container. It was just staying up there. So I had to go closer to see why the water wasn't coming down. I went over and as I got close I heard a noise out of the water, and I knew that I should ask my question. So I asked, 'Does God have any book that's inspired for scripture besides the Holy Bible?' And the voice out of the water said, 'What's that book in your hand.' And he said he looked down and in my hand I had the Holy Bible, And the voice said, 'Read Hebrews 8:8.'" So he looked up Hebrew 8:8 in his Bible and he read:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

The voice said, "What do you think the new covenant is?" Tom said, "I thought it was the New Testament." And the voice said, "What is that other book that you have in your hand?" And he lifted it up and said, "It's The Book of Mormon." And the voice said, "That's the New Covenant." I nearly dropped my jaw. I don't know why. Why shouldn't the Lord talk to him and reveal things to him that I had never even dreamt of? We still didn't baptize him. We didn't have any water. But he was baptized later.

On the day he was called to be a priest, Brian Mundy was sent from the home of Sam Agwanda to go and tell Tom Nuweexy that he should come to the conference so that he could have his call to the office of priest voted on by the conference. When he got there, he went up to Tom's hut and began to speak to him, He said, "You have been called to be a priest." And Tom said, "I know. I have already been ordained." Brian asked him to explain. He said, "The other night as I was reading my Book of Mormon, I was trying to find out how I could explain it better to people and I fell asleep. My Book of Mormon was open on the table. After awhile I saw a light come into the room, and there was a man standing in the light, clothed in white, and The Book of Mormon stood up on its end on the table—all by itself. I tasked the person what this meant." He said, "The Book of Mormon Will stand on its own." There is a long story to that, but that's what he told me. He said, "You are to be a priest" And he held out some oil of some kind. He described it like cooking oil He took some of that oil and anointed his head and put his hands on his head. And Tom said, "What about my white brothers?" And the messenger said, "I will let them know"

Three young men—three different countries—what do they have in common? They have a lot of things in common. They are all poor, but they are all part of the Church of Jesus Christ. We need to understand that the Church of Jesus Christ consists of all those who repent and come unto Christ. Doctrine and Covenants 3:1 a, b

"Behold, this is my doctrine: Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church; whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me; therefore, he is not of my church."

There is nothing that we can do at this conference (or not do at this conference) that is going to change that. There is nothing that we can do at this conference (or not do at this conference) that is going to keep these ministers from spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can decide that we don't want to be a part of the Church of Jesus Christ, if we want to. We can decide that we are going to make lots of rules and try to define exactly who it is that we are going to commune with and who we are not, but! Can tell you it is not going to make one bit of difference to these young men because they are going to spread the gospel because they believe that

God has called them to do the same. They are going to be in restoration congregations whether we are part of that or not. But we have an opportunity to determine how it is that we want to be part of the Church of Jesus Christ. We have the opportunity to determine how it is that we are going to come together so that we can bear the fruit that Jesus asked us to bear.

I read from John telling how Jesus gave a parable that He was the vine and you are the branches, and my Father is the husbandman. And it is my Father's job to purge the branches. If the branches don't bear fruit, He will throw them away. And if they do bear fruit, He will cut them back and trim them so they will bear more fruit. I guess when you have grapes, they grow on new growth so you have to trim them back. And if you want good grapes, you have to keep at that.

I took the liberty to re-write the first few verses of John 15. I hope you will bear with me as I read the altered version. This is not the Revised Standard Version—it is just a revised version. Not the Inspired Version, either. See how you like it.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, other branches take away. And every branch that beareth fruit, other branches purge if they are not worthy. Now as you are cleaned by virtue of striving for perfection, herein is the Father glorified that you identify only with those who interpret my words correctly. This is my suggestion that you have love one for another”

I am not too good at comedy, of course. That goes without saying. What's wrong with that picture? What's wrong with that picture is that if we don't trust God enough to trust Him to be the husbandman—to trust God to be the one who will do the purging. If we feel like we have to do the purging first before God gets there, we are not reading the scripture right. Okay? It's not the other branches that do the purging, it's God who does the purging. And Jesus said, God is the husbandman and He will do it, if you are not bearing fruit, He will throw you out. So our job is not to do the purging, our job is to bear the fruit. It's a wonderful analogy. Did you know that every grape that grows is full of juice? What does that juice represent in our tradition? The blood of Jesus Christ. Every grape that grows is full of the blood of the atonement, and God wants us to bear that kind of fruit. He wants us to bring people to Jesus, so that Jesus can fill them with the juice—fill them with the blood—make them whole, make them sweet, make them pure. He can't do that if we keep purging each other first before we have a chance to grow any fruit.

Jesus said that you are clean by the word. I have heard it said that we need to be sure that everybody else in the church believes exactly as we do because, of course, we are right. I think everybody should believe exactly as I do because, of course, I'm right. But if I actually had to sit down and talk with Jack or someone else, I might find out something that Jack doesn't believe just exactly right. Okay? He might find something that I don't believe exactly right. Does that mean that I can't accept Jack's ministry? That he can't be part of the church because I don't see exactly eye to eye with him? What was it that Jesus was saying when He was asking us, when He was telling us, when He was pleading with us to be of one heart and one mind.

Were his disciples of one heart and one mind? Did they understand exactly what was going on? The night before He died, they were arguing about who was going to be greatest in the kingdom. They didn't get it. Right? And these were the people that He sent. This was who He chose. That's who He sent out. People who didn't understand the most basic thing about the gospel—that He wanted them to love one another. Isn't that amazing?

Phillip said, “If you would just show us the Father, then we would believe.” Phillip was an apostle. Okay? He wasn't just a regular member, he was an apostle. And he was saying, “Just show us the Father, and then we will believe.” Jesus said, “Oh, Philip, have I been with you so long and you not known me. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father, and I want you,

Phillip, to believe me. But if you won't believe me, at least believe me for the work's sake." It didn't matter that Phillip didn't understand the relationship between Jesus and the Father. He was still called to be an apostle, and he was called to go and to bring forth fruit—to bring people to the vine so that they could be filled with the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the atonement, and they could be a new creature in Christ. That is the call.

Jesus, in the 13 chapter of Matthew says over and over several times, gives us stories about how He thinks the kingdom ought to be. I know that some of us have some pretty definite ideas about how we think the kingdom ought to be. But I think that we ought to at least look at Jesus and see what He said. He gave a story about a man who sowed some wheat in his field. You can see this in verses 22 and following.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; But while he slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants said unto him wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the wheat into my barn; and the tares are bound in bundles to be burned"

And they asked Him what that meant later on. He told them that the field is the world, and the seed are the children of the kingdom. He left no doubt about this one. The children of the kingdom—who is that? Who is that—the children of the kingdom? Is He talking about somebody else? No sir, He is talking about you, and He's talking about me. He's talking about those who have been given the keys to the kingdom of God—the children of the kingdom. The tares are the children of the wicked. The enemy that sowed them is the devil. You recognized that right away. The harvest is the end of the world. That's now, folks. The harvest is the end of the world, or the destruction of the wicked. Well, that's hopefully just a little bit beyond now. The reapers are the angels or the messengers sent of heaven

Brothers of the priesthood—That's you guys. That's us. This is nobody else that He is speaking of. The messengers wanted to tear out all the bad stuff because they saw that there was evil there. He said, "No, don't do it. Let them grow up together. You have to let them grow up together because if you tear out all of the bad, you will also destroy that which is good." He was really clear. You don't have to tear out all the bad. That's not your job. That's God's job, and at the harvest then He is going to say, "Okay, these guys come here, these guys go there these guys get in the barn, these guys get in the furnace." That's His job. The question is, "DO we trust Him enough, or are we going to go out there and tear out the tares on our own" We have the choice. He didn't tell his servants that they couldn't go into the field. He just said that if you do you will tear up the good which is there as well. We cannot afford to do that. That's my feeling.

Later on in the same chapter He gives another parable. Matthew 13:48

the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels; but cast the bad away."

The kingdom of heaven is the net that is cast into the sea. When God calls us to be of one heart and one mind, He's not saying "Break the net and shove out the bad." That's not going to make us of one heart and one mind. When He calls us to be of one heart and one mind, He's saying if

you are in the net, stay in the net and be part of the gathering process—bear fruit. Be good fish and at the end the good is going to be saved and the bad is going to be cast away. It's a good plan. Good suggestion.

We are made clean by the word. That's what He says. We are made clean by the word. We are not made clean because we understand the word, we are made clean because Jesus is the Word, and He's the one who cleans us. It is not something that we do by ourselves. It's wonderful to understand the truth. It's wonderful to have the truth. I love going to people who hear the truth and say, "Wow, that's the truth."

When we were in Tanzania, we were singing *This is the Day*. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made. I will rejoice, I will rejoice and be glad in it. We sang that until my fingers (I was doing the guitar) about dropped off because we did so many verses that I had never heard. This is the truth, this is the truth that the Lord has made. This is the gospel, this is the gospel that the Lord has made. This is the church that the Lord has made. These are the books that the Lord has made. Folks, they had more verses—and they were rejoicing and being glad in it. And we have that opportunity as well because we have the truth, we have the word which makes us clean. And it is the word that makes us clean, it's not who we can disagree with on the word, it's not who we can agree on the word, Our job is to be one.

You know if Jesus intended us to be one with only perfect people, how many of us would there be who would be one? Right? He didn't intend for us to be one with perfect people. He intended us to be one with people like me, and people like you, and people like Brother Opino, and people like Brother Weery, and people like Brother Nuweery. We need to be one even as Jesus and His Father are one. We have the responsibility to figure out how we can do that without chasing everyone else away. I think that Section 119 of the Doctrine and Covenants is extremely appropo to our day. Section 119 was given in a different thy, but it was a day when there had been (which is described as) a dark and cloudy day preceding. I think that we have seen some dark and cloudy days in the last twenty years. D&C 1 19:4a-c

"That the work of restoration to which the people of my church are looking forward may be hastened in its time, the elders must cease to be over careful concerning the return of those who were once of the faith but were overcome in the dark and cloudy day, fearing lest they should bring in hidden heresies to the overthrowing of the work; for verily, there are some who are chosen vessels to do good, who have been estranged by the hindering snares which are in the world and who will in due time return unto the Lord if they be not hindered by the men of the church. The Spirit says "Come"; let not the ministers for Christ prevent their coming."

That's to us as much as it was to the elders of those days. Let's say, "Come." Let's do nothing that would prevent those from coming who have been baptized or who want to be baptized, or who need to be baptized because they need to come to the covenant with their Heavenly Father. They do not have to be perfect. It is the word that will make them whole. It is getting together under the ministry of God's Spirit that will do the cleansing. He will bring forth the fruit if we will allow Him to do the purging instead of doing it ourselves.

I was teaching in Nigeria and Brother Hensley Mbanaso (whom many of you know), I was with him. And he said that they were going to have a youth retreat and that there were going to be a bunch of pastors from several Christian denominations there, and we would like for you to have a class. He had said that early on when we first got there, and I had kind of forgotten about that class and was concentrating on the youth retreat—trying to make things work out according to schedule—which there was no schedule. It was very different, but! don't have time to talk about that now. The night came for the class and Hensley said that they were ready for their class. I said, "Oh, what did they want to have a class on?" He said, "Church government." Well, I

shouldn't have ask them because I would not have chosen church government as a class for non-members. That's just not my thing.

I took the Doctrine and Covenants out and I started through it and showed them—well, I did some other things first. I took the Bible out and showed them where there were apostles and prophets and

evangelists and pastors and teachers and priests and deacons and elders and high priests and bishops, and then I went to D&C 17 and said that here is what those guys so in the church. I got to the end of my class and opened it up for questions. They said, "How many bishops are there in the Restoration?" I know of about two. "How many apostles are there?" In the Restoration? Well, we don't really recognize any of the apostles right now. We believe in them. "How many seventy are there?" Well, it depends on how you count—there are eight to ten that I know of. Man, I was sweating it. I was saying, "Lord, what am I going to tell these guys?" All of the sudden it occurred to me that I should read Section 58:3. So I looked it up and I read it to them.

"Remember this which I tell you before, that you may lay it to heart, and receive that which shall follow. Behold, verily I say unto you, For this cause I have sent you that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come; and also that you might be honored of laying the foundation, and of bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand, and also that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. Firstly, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble; and after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf; come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come. Behold, I, the Lord have spoken it."

Never had I read that passage with such power And when I got to that part about "hearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand," I was able to bear record of the land upon which the God of Zion shall stand. Folks, you are sitting on that land right now. It has not been moved out of its place. It will not be moved out of its place. Its here and you are honored, if you wilt, to bear record of that land of Zion. I told them about the way that the Lord's invitation had gone firstly to the rich nations, to the learned, the wise, the noble—those of the first world—and then with the day of God's power how it was going lathe poor, the halt, the lame and the blind.

The next night they wanted to have another class. So, I never learn. I said, "Well, what would you like to have your class on?" We would like to have our class on church government. I had said everything that I knew about church government John Larson was with me. He said that he would teach a class on church government. He hadn't been in the class the previous night. So I said, "Fine, John, it's yours." So John got up and did a really nice job. He took a blackboard and listed apostles, prophets, and down at the bottom he had elders, priests, teachers and deacons. He went through and gave some analogies about how these were the local ministers of the church and these were for the whole church, and how they had various things that take care of everybody.

Re got about halfway through and somebody said, "Well, how many bishops are there? How many apostles are there?" John did something different than I would have done. He went to the board and he drew a line between the two. He said that in the state of organization where we are right now, we are only offering you the local organization. We can only offer you elders, priests, teachers and deacons in your local congregation. And the place exploded. Everybody was talking at once. They said, "We need the storehouse, we need the ministry of the bishop, we need apostolic ministry, we need patriarchal ministry." Prince (who is an elder) got up and

said, "You know, you guys, you are always worry about the foundation of the gospel. The foundation of the gospel is sure." He said, "We need the other ministry that you keep talking about" They started to make plans to send missionaries to Independence, Missouri, to tell them to get their act in gear so that they could have the type of ministry which they are missing I promised them that I would come back and I would share that concern with you. And so I have.

Why have we gotten so complacent about not having a bishop? Why have we gotten so complacent about not responding to the financial suggestion? Suggestion? That's the financial law, when learning it. Why have we decided that it's okay to be without a storehouse? We who are the richest nation on the earth—we who could afford one—we have said no to the world. No, we are not going to do that. We are going to let concerns about what somebody else believes take precedent over being able to share with the storehouse. Brothers and Sisters, we have a choice. We can be concerned about those things, or we can choose to bear fruit. J said, "This is my (not suggestion) commandment that you love one another." Brothers and Sisters, let's be part of the Church of Jesus Christ. We do not have to re-create that church. Not at all. What we have to do is to figure o how we are going to be part of it. I hope and pray that in the deliberations this week-end that we will take the first steps—however tiny they may be—towards being the church that can bear the fruit that Jesus requires. It is yet day. For many the opportunity to assist is soon going to pass. May God bless you as you consider His words and be one.