

Ammon Latham's funeral – LeGrand Baker – June 18, 2010

Last Monday, a week ago today, Ammon and I sat in my study, as we had done so many times before, and read the scriptures together.

Ammon was only 17 when I met him, but he was already a junior at UVU. Bryce, who was then a missionary in the Provo Mission brought Ammon to my home and introduced us.

We became instant friends. From then until he went on his mission we met at least weekly to read the scriptures together.

Ammon was fascinated with the concept of the temple; so that's what we read about. We did not discuss what happens in the temple but rather what the scriptures say about what happens in the temple. It was like discovering and examining individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and then waiting until he received his own endowment before all the scattered pieces fell into a perfect pattern. Everything that is taught in the temple is explained in the scriptures. So without Ammon knowing the pattern beforehand, we read about the explanations. I had the great privilege of attending the temple with him and his family when he received his endowment. Last Monday, when we were reminiscing about that, he reminded me that on that day he had felt a perfect peace. He said that as he watched the drama unfold he would think, "O, this is where that part goes, cool" and then watch again for the next one.

Ammon loved the temple, and I am convinced that if he were here, standing in my place, he would want to tell you why he loved it so much. Believing that as I do, I would like to describe it to you from what I believe would be Ammon's perspective.

Psalm 25, which is my favorite and I believe it was Ammon's favorite also. mentions three different endowment experiences. The first was the instructions we received and the covenants we made preparatory to our coming into this world.

The second is the generic endowment we receive the first time we go through the temple. For most of us, that experience was somewhat strange and we came out of the temple that first time wondering just what happened.

The third is the same as the second, only very, very different. Ammon never experienced that generic endowment. He understood what it meant from the very first time.

For most of us, that third version is an ongoing maturation of our own awareness. As we mature in the gospel the endowment ceases to be a generic thing that is about every body in the room, and it becomes an intensely personal experience.

It becomes the context into which one can fit his own patriarchal blessing, as well as many of the teachings of the modern and ancient prophets. This information about one's Self, set in the matrix of the temple drama becomes a beautiful representation of one's own eternal autobiography.

As an introduction to that autobiography, Ammon learned that long before he came into this world he not only was able to make intelligent, thoughtful choices but that he participated in the preparations of this beautiful world. He learned that he shared an unfailing loving covenant relationship with his Heavenly Father and with the Savior.

Ammon learned that even in the beginning, he had made covenants with them about what he would do in this world and in the spirit world that follows. He also learned that the very first covenant God made as we prepared to come here was also one of the most important. The Lord told Adam:

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it,

God had to forbid it. The laws of justice and mercy insist that he do so. God could not have commanded them to eat that fruit, or even told them that it would be OK, because if he had, then he would have been responsible for their expulsion from the Garden and coming into this world.

If he had been responsible for putting us here, he would have been equally responsible for getting us back. That would have left us without responsibility, without agency, purpose, or the freedom be our Selves. We would have come, not to act, but to be acted upon.

Then, in that context, God made this covenant with Adam: “for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Moses 3:15-17).”

Because, from our this-world perspective, death is sometimes a fearful thing, those words are usually read as a curse rather than as a blessing. But they are not a curse, they evoke one of the greatest blessings of the atonement.

They say, “If you choose to go down into that dark and dreary world, then, after you have learned what you are supposed to learn, then you may return. The Lord has provided a way for us to come home again— the promise is, “thou shalt surely die.”

Death is one of the greatest blessings of the Atonement.

Ammon also learned about other eternal covenants including the powers of priesthood and kingship, and the sanctity of marriage.

For Ammon’s sake, we need not be concerned about that one. It is evident that some marriages, like some friendships, are eternal in both directions.

The sealing ordinances must be performed correctly and with proper authority in order to make that union valid in the eternities. However, there is no doctrine that I am aware of that even suggests that people in the post-earth-life spirit world may not associate with and enjoy the companionship of those they love--- before as well as after those vicarious ordinances take place. There, in that magnificent world of worthy spirits, Ammon will find his eternal companion, that is, if she has not found him already, and that last idea that is not at all beyond the limits of

possibility.

As one looks at it as a whole, rather than in just its bits and pieces, one discovers that the temple drama has only one message. Ammon understood and still understands that message.

It is that throughout our entire eternal existence, our relationship with our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ is that of a loving, caring, father/son relationship, that is also an unfailing friendship sealed by covenant.

I have no doubt that now, with Ammon where he is, that friendship has already been sealed with a sacred embrace.

We may mourn for him and for the temporary loss of our dear friend, even as he mourns for us in our sorrow. But we may also rejoice with him, as he experiences the full fruition of his hopes, as he enters into a world that he finds wonderful, but no more surprising than when he first entered the temple.

I have no doubt that he is as comfortable in that world and with the company he now enjoys, as he was when he first entered the temple and felt the supreme awareness that this was the way to come home again.

Ammon returned from his successful mission only seven months ago. He was a brilliant and very good young man. We certainly were not ready for him to leave us. However, God is never taken by surprise by any of the events that happen in this world. Through the power of his Spirit, God had already prepared Ammon for the events of this day, as well as any young man could possibly be prepared. He told me before he went on his mission, and he told his family much more recently that he would die soon so he could get on with more important things.

I have an assurance that Ammon is here with us today because he wants to be with us, and he rejoices in the presence of his friends and his family both those whom we can see and those we cannot see.

When today's funeral services are completed, Ammon and those who are with him will return to that magnificent world from which they came.

It is my prayer that we may be comforted by that knowledge, rejoice with Ammon and those who are here with him, and anticipate with gladness the fulfillment of God's assurance that our relationship with Ammon is not ended. Because a very long time ago the Lord also promised each one of us:

If you choose to go down there, and learn what you can only learn in that physical environment, then when the time is right, "thou shalt surely die."

I love you Ammon. I have always and shall always love you.

Testimony: The Saviour's Atonement brought us life, brings death, brings resurrection, and his

mercy and grace = eternal life.