

September 1, 2010

“AND THE LORD CONTINUED TO APPEAR...”

Dear *Rob*,

(8/19) I arrived home last Friday night around midnight after another blessed week of camp, all due to the gracious “coming & moving” of our God. This was my **27th** year of camp ministry, my **20th** at Tel Hai camp, & my **41st** camp there. I was struck yesterday while reading in *Nehemiah*, of his interceding for his unfaithful people. He mentioned Solomon, who, despite his sins & being led astray by his many foreign wives, it was still said of him, “...**he was loved by his God**” (13:26). My, that struck me. Camp is marked by deep, powerful, sweet moves of God’s Spirit after the preaching of His Word. Children & teens come up front to respond. They do what is the most common form of prayer in the Scriptures: they lie prostrate before the Lord, & this, for long periods of time. They weep, hold & sob with each other, pray for each other, repent, fall asleep, etc. This is why I keep returning to camp. There is nothing like it in all of Christendom to me. Oh, how it hurts to ponder (as I too often do) that I’m surely nearer to the end of my tenure of serving there than I am to the beginning. But, let me get back to Solomon. Camp is also characterized by fatigue, loss of focus, & weakness. In the midst of the constant & intense ministry, it is easy to wander in your heart & your mind—to put it bluntly: to sin. Of course, your own heart & the devil are right there to condemn you, oppressing you with thoughts of your obvious unworthiness to be there, much less to lead it. It is a verse like the one cited above, that brings such fresh grace & comfort to my too easily troubled heart. Yes, Solomon sinned greatly, *but*, he was *still* “loved by his God”. I love the way the NASB version states it, & this version is quite literal. Wow. What an incredible statement. What kind of God do we have, Who still loves blatant sinners?! With such grace I can move on. With such grace, my heart swells with requited love to strive even more by that same grace not to sin.

“ALL IN A DAY’S WORK”

SAT: arrive with a team of men to setup the camp all afternoon & into the evening; make a *Wal-Mart* run.

SUN: the ‘calm’ before the storm; more setup details to attend to.

This year, for the first time, I had to return to Wilmington to minister at a funeral of an elderly saint from our church who passed the week before. When I returned to the camp, staff orientation was well under way, conducted by my faithful assistant, dear brother & friend, Ray Bohner. I proceeded to put my two cents in re: orienting the staff. Later, I amassed my object lessons for my sermon that evening, which is for the purpose of imparting vision & encouragement to the staff. Having preached, we then anointed/prayed for them. We were “jolted” by a surprise this particular Sunday evening. Unbeknownst to me, the children’s pastor from our church & a team of people “snuck” up to camp, put on military gear, & invaded our evening meeting. With sound effects of machine guns firing, & hearing yells of “everybody down!”, that’s exactly what we did! This dear brother, a.k.a., Howard Cox, who replaced me as

kids' pastor at our church in 2000, felt to do this to impart vision to the staff & me, re: the warfare involved in the fight for children's souls. It did the trick. Already sobered by the task at hand, my heart was even more deeply *stirred* (The theme of the camp, by the way!).

MON: devotions/more orientation w/the staff; 10 a.m. the campers & their parents/guardians start to arrive. In the late morning, orientation for the campers begins. After introducing the administrative & support staff, the entire camp is dedicated to the Lord for the week. Cheering, costumed characters, loud-hyped up movie music is played; pre-planned skits are done. Horrible puns/jokes are shared, to much of the audience's chagrin! Rules are read. Team assignments are announced, as well as each team's "royal courts". When the girls leave, I always give the boys a "potty-etiquette" talk. We all then head to lunch, followed by cabin devotions. Afternoon: after rough-housing in the pool w/the boys, I head to the chapel to setup the Time Machine & object lessons for my sermon that night. I felt the directive of the Lord to preach a strong, clear gospel message on opening night. Given the widespread biblical illiteracy in our country, & given that so many of the campers had not been at camp before, a clear understanding of the gospel of grace is essential. Preaching to them as I do adults, they responded. Our first night saw the floor covered with campers responding to His Word.

TUES: Wishing for more sleep, it was not to be. Two sets of staff devotions, so as to ensure the campers were never left alone, was followed by breakfast. Later that morning, my Bible Study Methods & Quizzing skill class began which I would conduct each morning for the rest of the week. Morning chapel was next, where, besides doing an occasional skit & running a Bible game, I drummed for the week. Tuesday evening, I rode out on a horse along with another brother, Carl Stoltzfus, who graciously provided & delivered the trusty steeds. We posed as King Herod Antipas' cavalry, seeking to find & arrest John The Baptist. Todd Bube gave an awesome word that night. **WED:** The usual schedule ensued this day as well, except for one thing: for the 1st time ever at Jr. Camp, given the horrendous perverseness of our society, we felt to give a "purity talk" to the 11 & 12 yr. olds (separately). After dinner, our traditional "candy drop" airplane, owned & flown by the Horst brothers of Premier Custom Builders, dropped candy onto the playing field, & as always, the kids went nuts gathering it. Evening: our son-in-law Nathan came & preached a sermon on "Gideon". Before he did, Andrew Smither & I came out of the "Time Machine", portraying Gideon & his servant.

THUR: This was another full day, but it was to be a very sad one, for two reasons: 1. Given the massive amount of props, costumes, & equipment entailed at Jr. Camp, we had to begin tearing down this day. 2. My annual "Director's Field Drama", which I've done for many years, & spent months preparing for, & which always involves scores of off-site actors & horses, had to be canceled due to us receiving four inches of rain that afternoon in about two hours! This is only the 2nd time in many years that the drama was completely canceled. Yes, my heart was sick. I kept reminding myself of the sovereignty, goodness, & love of our God. He has His ways, & they are always perfect. Blessed be His Name. That evening, a gift in the form of a one Devin Blankenbiller, Kim & mine's "4th son", came & richly ministered God's Word to us.

FRI: While trying to keep focused on the campers, the great camp "close-down" begins. Early afternoon all of their stuff must be emptied from their cabins, not to mention ours! Mountains more stuff from the chapel had to be moved to our *hnc* camp storage shed on site. After dinner, the "winners" for the week are announced, pies in the face are "administered" to the losers, whereupon the entire camp heads to chapel for one last "goodbye" ceremony. Parents

arrive & take them home. The staff heads into town for our traditional “thank-you” pizza party for them. The directors take our traditional walk around the loop of the camp, doing a quick debrief & praying together, thanking the Lord for His kindness & gracious moves upon us that week. We then join the staff for one final time together, before heading home.

SAT: When I “come to”, I have “the **Grinch’s** sled” awaiting me in the driveway, i.e., my truck & trailer loaded to the hilt with all of my “stuff” for camp. It takes considerable time & effort to do so, but it is a sweet tradition I shall dearly miss when my time at camp is done. Hence, Beloved, that, in a nutshell, is what a week of camp entails. I left MANY details/events/activities out for lack of space. Camp is hard labor for me, but it is definitely a labor of love. May the Lord be pleased to grace me with many more years of serving Him & His young in it. As always, Kim & I are grate-ful for your help in any form to help us do this & the rest of our itinerant work throughout the rest of the year.

Very gratefully,

Michael and Kim