

February 1, 2009

Dear Friends & Family,

“A SAD TIME IN THE SANCTUARY...”

(12/20) It's still “last year” at the time of this writing, but given what I experienced yesterday that so deeply affected me, & given that the January newsletter is already written, I'm submitting it to you now. Last year, I began what I hope will be an endeavor for the rest of my life: reading through the Bible continuously, from Genesis to Revelation, in that order. I'm going through my 2nd time at this writing. I recently finished Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, & have begun Ezekiel. I'm reminded of what A.J. Heschel wrote in his preface to his classic work, *The Prophets*: “The situation of a person immersed in the prophets' words is one of being exposed to a ceaseless shattering of indifference, & one needs a skull of stone to remain callous to such blows.” (*The Prophets*, Abraham J. Heschel, © 1962). That has certainly been my experience in doing so. Yesterday, our oldest granddaughter was involved in her first Christmas program. An event like this is, of course, a “must” in a grandparent's retinue of, well, being a grandparent! It was conducted through her pre-school, which is run out of a Lutheran church not far from our own local church. I had driven by this church a number of times in the almost 13 years we have lived in DE, but had never had an occasion to go inside. Upon entering, I was profoundly impressed by a wall-mural by a “Ralph Coleman”, which was painted in 1944. It showed people from all walks & strata of life, who were gathered with Jesus on a hill overlooking a city; old & young, rich & poor; from a clergyman, to a farmer, to a businessman. It is entitled, “Go Forth & Serve”. I asked the pastor if it were possible to obtain a print of this. He said there was one thing “wrong” with it. Huh?! He said the people with Jesus were “all-white”! Wow. He was right! All of the sudden, my “enthralment” with this artist's rendition of the Scriptures “deflated”. But, that is not what I wanted to tell you about in this newsletter. On w/the story. Let's proceed down the hallway to the sanctuary. When I entered it, it had a high ceiling, a wall of glass in the front which let in much natural light, & deeply-colored stained glass windows. Perhaps the most profound artifact in the sanctuary, & rightly so, was a much bigger than life-sized crucifix. It was a bit “modern” & somewhat unrealistic (my son in law Nathan noticed there were no noticeable wounds or stripes on Him), but nonetheless, one could not help but realize Who it was & what it was intended to represent! This would prove to be the “backdrop” (in more ways than one!) of the children's Christmas program. The program eventually began, with the various age groups coming out to present their songs. Remember now, that I had written above that I have been having “head-on collisions” with the prophets. Of course, being a 13 year old in the body of a 53 year old, I was acting a bit “overexcited” when our precious “Reagan Grace” came out! As the program went on, Kim noticed that something though, was going on inside of me, as she asked me repeatedly, “Michael, what's the matter?”. I was asking our Heavenly Father from the depths of my heart to forgive us, to forgive us. “What?! Why, Michael?! What on earth for?! You would ask forgiveness for a group of children singing Christmas songs?!?!! What is *wrong* with you?!?!!” I told you earlier—I've been in the Prophets. My heart & head were “sore” from doing so. Just the day before I had read how the Lord told Ezekiel that His heart was broken & crushed because of Israel's adulterous heart, & because they had forgotten Him, & had given their attention, time, & affections to other gods (that's essentially what idolatry is), not to mention their words & their “means” to do so. And here, right before me, were groups of very young, very impressionable children one right after another, lifting up songs, most of which, if not all, were addressed to Santa, in the “vocative case”, that is, the “addressive case”, as if they were talking, singing, etc. directly to him. And, all of the parents were looking on adorably, approvingly, encouragingly. You just wouldn't “expect” this in a church, in a church during CHRISTmas! What made it even worse & so much more exponentially noticeable, is that it was right in front of this bigger than life-sized crucifix! You may disagree, given the ages involved, but to me, it was a slap in the face of God. Yes, the children had no idea, of course, but the adults who taught them did! Beloved, our God does not like to be ignored. I told Kim when we were in the car afterwards, that of all of the blessings of the doctrines of sovereign grace, & of the Reformers, perhaps the most vital & important & central of all is “Sola Gloria Deo”—“For

the glory of God only"! The first article of the Westminster Confession—"What is the chief end of man? To glorify Him & to enjoy Him forever". When one gets ingrained into their theology (& contrary to popular opinion, we *all* have a theology! The issue is how biblically accurate it is!) & into their psyche that the number one reason they are here on earth is to bring glory to God, that is, to allow His perfections to be displayed in their lives, everything changes! It is a radical turnaround. It affects *all* of their thinking & theology. Then, & only then, do you truly understand what *sin* is. The "nicest" sinners on earth, those who are not hurting anyone, who are living noteworthy lives among the rest of humanity, even doing "good" for them—if they are doing so, however, without recognition & honor to the God Who put them here, it is a most vile wickedness, a most abhorrent rebellion & arrogance exuded in the face of their Maker! "You're overreacting, Michael! It's not that serious!" It is more severely serious than I can possibly convey in this newsletter. Just read the prophets, even "casually" (something I don't advise), & you will see what The Lord did to Israel, via their enemies, to their old men & their young, to their young maidens, & to their children (!) when they forsook Him! He is not to be ignored. He "reacts" when He is not remembered. It is absolutely overwhelming how THE Sovereign Lord of the Universe, Who is Self-sufficient, & in need of nothing or no one, of His Own free will, *chooses to* make Himself "vulnerable" to His creatures, particularly His people! He will not tolerate being forgotten. His fury, which He gloriously restrains, because He is GOD, & not man, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness, etc... nonetheless, like a festering volcano that has lain dormant for centuries, sooner or later, "erupts". The witness of Scripture & history are replete with such examples. I told Kim I would not have been so sensitive to this, & to Him, had I not been in His Word, in His Prophets, just before this tragic event. Oh, may He make us all more sensitive to Him! If His love were not so very deep for His people, His jealousy would not be so "rampant", & His resultant anger so volatile! His jealousy is indeed our security! Yes, I agree. This is heavy! But my heart, mind, soul, & strength are turned toward Him as I ponder & write these things. This is THE Greatest Commandment, is it not, Beloved?

"OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES..."

Speaking of children, I ministered at a Wilmington inner-city youth center in December for the first time. This was another one, again, where I was assisted by our son-in-law, Nate, in addition to that which I described in last month's newsletter. Below are some actual notes of thanks from the kids, "as is":

"I learned something new yesterday...thank you Mr. Mical for coming to our camp."

(Anonymous)

"Thank you for what you did Monday night. You very good Monday night. The one thing I liked was the way you broke the bible down...thank you." (Symone)

"I enjoyed the show last night. It was fun because I got to learn about different things."

(Anonymous)

"Thank you very much for coming to the church and telling us about the Devil (I was teaching them re: how God & the devil impart their 2 different "wisdoms" to humans). So thank you very much." (Rahjae)

"Thank you for sharing what wisdom is about. Also I like how you told us the story with the items (my ob-ject lessons). I wish you can come back and do that with us. I also had lots of fun."

(Keeven)

"Dear Mr. Micheal, thank you for you wisdom and thank you for sharing God's word with us."

(Elizabeth)

And, Kim & I thank you all so much for sharing God's encouragement & blessings with us. Michael

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[Please make all tax-deductible gifts payable to: **Elim Fellowship**, 1703 Dalton Rd, Lima, NY 14485. Thanks!]
[Michael is an ordained Elim Fellowship itinerant home missionary, endorsed by his local church. He makes his living & supports his family & ministry by preaching God's Word & through faith in the Lord & His provision through His people.]

Ministry/events for FEBRUARY & those not listed in last month's newsletter:

Jan. 4: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: Warehouse Youth Group: worship leader

Feb. 1: Church of the Firstborn Youth Retreat, Spruce Lake, Poconos, PA (cont. from Jan. itinerary)

Feb. 3: Hopewell Christian Fellowship, Elverson, PA: Camp Board mtg.; pastors' mtg.

Feb.17: Marlton, NJ: Elim area pastors' mtg.