

June 1, 2012,

## WHY DO I SEEK my LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

Dear *Friends & Family*,

This past March, Kim & I made our annual taxman-Mecca to Lebanon, Pa. It marked our 20<sup>th</sup> year of doing so, as the dear friend & brother who assists us with them each year, a.k.a., Ken Shirk of *Sonrise Tax Service*, is one of the best in the business. This trip, like the various holidays throughout the year, has become a year-marker to me. It has caused me to number my days & to realize how very fleeting life is. For any of you who know Kim & me well, you know Kim is the administrative side of the marriage. She excels in it & I know it is a God-given gift & ability, as she also *enjoys* it! Hence, when we go to see Ken each year [And, it is about a five-hour round trip!], I leave Ken & Kim alone with all of the facts & figures & numbers & I almost always make it a point to head to a nearby *United Church of Christ* & its adjacent graveyard. This year was no exception. As I walked among the gravestones, I began to mourn inside to ache to grieve deeply to sigh as Jesus did, I'm sure, when He contemplated the grave issues of *eternity* as He was among so many men who were hostile to Him. I pondered re: the souls of the remains of the bodies beneath my feet. I couldn't help but wonder & ache where many of them were now. But Michael? You were in a *church* graveyard. Why the concern? Oh, come on, Beloved - we all know better than that. Of course, I longed for every one of them to be in Heaven, & was occasionally encouraged when I read scripture on too few (!) of the stones. I came across one grave, whose dates indicated this soul had either been in the indescribable bliss of Jesus' glory for 130 years or in the endless torments & agonies of *hell*, awaiting Judgment Day, when Death & Hell shall both be cast into the *Lake of Fire*. I'm sure I thought of the masses presently

upon the surface of the earth, who drive by such cemeteries, but do not learn wisdom from those dead, who walked upon the earth in generations gone by, who, themselves surely did the same thing, scurrying past cemeteries as they gave themselves to the worries of this life. Then it happened, I came across a tombstone that had the occupant's date of death as **October 16, 1955**. My spirit sank even lower, deeply sobered by the issues of life & death. This soul died on the very day & year I was born. My heart ached before the Lord: Oh Father, all of the time I have been alive, through the decades of playing as a child, exploring as an adolescent, wandering as a teenager, growing into manhood, finding a wife, raising a family, entering the ministry, becoming a grandfather, etc this soul has been in eternity somewhere! I know from Jesus' Own lips, that if this poor soul died in their sins, that they, right underneath my feet so to speak, were crying out for **water**, & wishing those **up on top of the surface of the earth** could be warned! I then pondered & mourned over my own many sins & weaknesses at present, & how, despite these sobering issues of eternity, & life & death, I still struggle with them! O, how the longing, & love, & gratitude for Jesus' sweet redemption took a deeper root in my soul! Some of you might think, Michael? This is not a healthy practice that you do each year! You should stop! On the contrary, I wish I reflected on such things more often! Teach us to number our days, that we might become wise [Ps.90:12].

### **PINNOCHIO REVISTED**

Another benefit to such a practice, that is, of occasionally visiting a graveyard, is the sobriety it instills & the soul-cleansing it provides for any tendencies in you to love & pursue the enticements, allurements, & vain **glitter** of the world. In the Disney classic Pinnochio [one of my all-time favorites], the evil coachman lures stupid little boys to **Pleasure Island** – a secluded

place filled with every opportunity for sinful human nature's gratification. While the boys are doing so, however, the coachman's sinister-looking **blue henchmen** are behind the scenes, locking the gates so that none of the boys can escape. In the meantime, as the boys imbibe the coachman's brew, they all eventually turn into **donkeys**. They are then imprisoned in **wooden crates** to be sold to the salt mines for slave labor. It is the only children's movie I am aware of where the children are not rescued or saved in the end by some hero. Their bondage of no-return all began when they allowed themselves to be enticed by vanities of the world. However, when one visits a graveyard, & sees how very short life is when one ponders the scriptural truth that after this very short life there are only two possible destinations, both indescribable & unfathomable in their opposite extremities of bliss or horror any inclination in that same person to pursue worldly pleasures, for which the world is headed for judgment & the wrath to come, rapidly vanishes! You even see this in the lost at gravesides during funerals! It is the nature of man to quickly avoid any thoughts of death & to change the subject & to once again indulge in worldly amusements, pleasures, & distractions to avoid such thoughts. Hence, as our God allows me, I plan to continue to visit such places of the *dead*, that I might properly adjust *the way that I live*.

### **GOD'S #1 REASON FOR THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION**

Recently I was deeply humbled by being appointed **Elim Bible Institute's** Alumni of the Year. In the light of that, I was asked to share at their annual breakfast last week. To stand before many of the Elim fathers, men who have for decades fed & challenged my soul & brought me to my knees & face as they ministered God's word to me, was beyond my ken. I had 15 minutes. My message? To encourage Elim to be on the lookout for *man-*

centered gospels which have plagued our nation for decades. From Rom. 8:28,29, 9:22,23, & Eph. 1:3-6, 2:1-7, I expounded how these pregnant, potent, powerful portions of God's Word, which so poignantly express God's gracious acts for His people in the salvation of their souls, i.e.: blessing them with every spiritual blessing, working all things together for their good, setting His affection on them beforehand [i.e., fore-knowing them], choosing them in Christ before the foundation of the world according to His purpose & good pleasure, predestinating them both to be adopted as His children (Eph.1:5) & to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom.8:29), & having mercy upon them versus the vessels of wrath - all of these, without exception, were ultimately done by God to the praise of the glory of *His* grace (Eph.1:6), to exalt *Jesus* in the highest possible way by apprehending a group of people that no man can number, & then conforming them into His glorious image (Rom.8:29), & that, in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us who are in Christ Jesus† (Eph. 2:7). God's *ultimate* reason for doing what He did for us, was *Himself*. He did not have to save anyone, nor everyone. But, He wanted to *show* to all created beings the inexpressible wonders of His perfections, a.k.a.: His *glory*. His plan of redemption displayed this in the greatest possible manner. Had He not chosen to create, & to allow & hence ordain the Fall which led to His redemption plan, His perfections would have just, so to speak, resided in Himself. By this great plan, they were displayed in their fullest measure for all created beings in the universe to see. May He enthrall our *hearts* & minds with these glorious truths & set us *on fire* to share them. There is so very much to cover & expound, but so little time!

Kim & I sincerely thank you for reading this, for praying for us, & supporting us should the Lord so move you.

\*this month commences the busiest summer of my life, with 5 camps on my schedule. Plus, in addition, I was invited to a 6th camp in New Hampshire last weekend. I am praying about it! :0)