

October 1, 2010 “LIVING ON THE EDGE...with ‘THE EDGE!’”

Dear *Friends & Family*,

(9/13) I returned home yesterday afternoon from a three-day jr. youth retreat (a.k.a. “The Edge”) at **Tel Hai Camp**, where I spent the weekend with 80 6-8th graders. In the space of about 37 hours I preached 4X & performed two dramas, the 2nd of which was a massive “director’s field drama” that I perform each year at our camps, but which got rained out last month at jr. camp. It was a treat & a delight for me to be able to reschedule & perform it. My

truck resembled “**The Grinch’s**” sled, after he stole all of the Christmas paraphernalia from Whoville! Attached to this “sled” was my trailer chock-full-of drama costumes & props. When I got home yesterday, I commenced unloading my personal baggage & then the seemingly never-ending pile of object lesson bins. I have yet to unload the trailer, due to rain. While doing so, I felt I had railroad spikes deep in my heart. These “spikes” were one of the things I spoke about during out last session together on Sunday morning. Every year, at every camp, with every staff member & camper, there exists this deep inner “longing” for the camp experience to continue non-stop throughout the rest of the year. If one loves Jesus, this is so very understandable, as His Word, Spirit, & presence are so very powerful, penetrating, & pervasive at camp, who *wouldn’t* want it to continue?! I likened this longing re: the camp experience to being like that of a nuclear reactor, which *seemingly* has non-stop, uninterrupted power. However, even with nuclear reactors, the “power-producers”, a.k.a., **the radioactive rods**, “get spent”! They must be replaced every two years or so, according to one of my assistant camp directors who happens to work at a nearby nuclear power plant! Hence, I suggested to the kids that perhaps our Lord intends camp to be more like **golden railroad spikes** deeply driven into His peoples’ **hearts**. The “driving in” of them occurs at camp. However, the “drivers” are gone from camp within a few days, but—the spikes remain. These are spikes of **God’s Word**, memories of being in His rich presence, which produce *longing* for more of Him throughout the rest of the year. This is what happened to me this past weekend.

“MY MUCH BETTER HALF”!

Anyone who knows **Kim** & me knows she’s my “**rock**” on the human side. I am nothing without her. I “don’t do well” when I’m not around her & her awesome “helpmate” qualities & gifts for too long! I can see all of you who do know us well nodding your heads! J Yet, I didn’t want to go home yesterday. I was the last person to leave, as I had to finish packing up, loading up, & hitching up my trailer. I wanted to take a walk in the woods with our God, just to be with Him, & to thank Him for coming to us so profoundly over the weekend. Instead, I just kind of took my time getting out of there. I even took “the long way home”. The **afterglow** of ministry was rich, deep, & sweet again. And yet, it seemed even deeper to me than at our recent jr. camp last month. Why? For me, I think it had to do with our Saturday evening service. I preached on “**Cain**” & had him come out of the Time Machine, right after he killed his brother. This is a heavy portion of Scripture for adults, much less 6-8th graders! And yet, the Holy Spirit

directed, inspired, & guided the author of Genesis to record it, both for our instruction (Rom.15:4) & our warning (I Cor. 10:6,10; II Pet. 2:6).

A GOOD..."FEAR of 'REJECTION'"

The first major point I brought home to the kids, was the one that so very gripped me when preparing it last week. I *love* it when the Word of God *grips* me beyond words—this is what I often preach. “Beyond words” is not just an expression. God’s “fear & awe” come over me re: certain truths of Scripture to the point that I cannot speak. I must lay the Bible down, lay on the floor, & futilely attempt to “contain” in my heart & mind that part of Him that I just “saw” via His Spirit in the **written Word**. Surely, Beloved, surely, Cain was rejecting Adam & Eve’s poignant counsel, admonitions, & warnings re: sin & its dire consequences at a very young age. How so? One doesn’t just one day become “instantly” contemptible to God {by nature we’re conceived with it, but its outward expression grows & intensifies over time!} as he did, evidenced by his immediate anger at God for rejecting the *evil* deed his offering (I Jn. 3:12). The Apostle John said he murdered his brother **Abel** because his (Cain’s) deeds were evil & his brother’s were righteous. The only recorded “deed” of both brothers prior to the murder were their *offerings* ! (Of course, John meant other deeds). I emphasized to the kids that so very often in Scripture, humans would render “worship” to God with their lips, while their **hearts** were far from Him (Isa.29:13). This is why the Lord “did not have regard” for Cain’s offering, nor his seemingly “spiritual” actions, nor of Nadab & Abihu’s (Lev.10:1,2), nor Hophni & Phineas’ (I Sam. 2:12,17), nor the Rich Young Ruler’s “sincere” respect, interest, & homage to Jesus (Mk.10), nor those who went “in pursuit of Jesus” after He fed the 5,000 (Jn.6), whom the Savior rebuked for just wanting a “free meal” from Him, nor Herod Antipas, who “enjoyed” listening to John, but had him beheaded over a “song & a dance”. The list is endless. I told the kids I even saw *it with some of them* when I spoke at their meeting at their own church a few months ago. A number of them were chit-chatting during worship. I confessed my own pervasive guilt in this, & how I even asked to be removed from our own church’s worship team re: drumming, as I couldn’t seem to do it for God’s glory only & not for the praise of men! It is a phenomenon I have observed & feared for decades.

That is, one can be so very close to “the holy things” yet treat them lightly, & even irreverently. I’ve seen it with Bible school & Christian school students & staff, worship teams, & church staffs, who are among Christians day in & day out, & “safe within the bubble” of the church. I know. I served on four different church staffs over a period of **14 years**. It can happen to anyone, Beloved, & often does. In the past, God killed some for doing it, as with Nadab & Abihu, Hophni & Phineas. He kept Moses from entering the Promised Land because he dishonored the Lord in front of the people. Even in the New Testament, under the covenant of grace, the Lord has put some of His people “to sleep”, because they didn’t treat the table of the Lord properly (I Cor.11). I told the kids I realized that they were so very young to hear something so heavy from God’s Word, & yet, I told them how many souls “**underneath the surface of the earth**” right now wished they had been warned at a young age—this is where so much of who we are is developed! I related to the kids that five of the most important words in the Genesis account of Cain & Abel were in verse three: “And it came about **in the course of time...**”. Here is where Cain cultivated what he was to become. He tilled **the soil** by

trade but neglected the soil of his heart growing up. You can be sure Adam & Eve took their sons often to the border of the Garden of Eden to show them what they had but lost due to sin. What an incredible, indelible impression this must have made on these young boys' hearts & minds. And yet, something was happening in Cain, or rather, was *noth* happening in Cain, that these warnings did not sink in. After the Lord directly spoke to him re: his measly sacrifice, Cain ignored Him, lied to Him, & rejected His repeated appeals. I believe this is where Cain reached the point of no return & hence "became the property of" the evil one. **"Hands Down"**

I ended with the encouragement that if the kids belonged to Jesus, no one could snatch them out of His nor His Father's hands. Even so, we needed to heed the sober warning left to us re: Cain, re: irreverence toward & rejection of the Lord. When I invited response to this word, so many of the kids came forward, either to kneel or lay prostrate before the Lord in repentance & longing for His mercy. They were "cut" by His doubled-edged sword, but oh, how delicately & sweetly "cut", as only **Jesus, the Master Surgeon General**, can do! We stayed there for a very long period of time, just "enjoying God" as the ***Westminster Confession*** adjures us to do. This is why I didn't want to go home, Beloved. This is what I wish I could do the rest of my life—to be sweetly broken before the Lord, with His broken young. There is nothing like it on all the earth. May He be pleased to continue to use me in this calling. Gratefully,
Michael