

Winter 2005—2006

We trust that things are well with you—and, by the way, God’s word confirms that things can be well, even in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. What brought such thinking to mind is a verse I read just today: “For when the earth experiences Thy judgments, the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9). This ties in well with, “Moab has been at ease since his youth; he has also been undisturbed on his lees, neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile. Therefore he retains his flavor, and his aroma has not changed” (Jeremiah 48:11). Obviously, we pretty much look the same and “smell” the same so long as our lives are pain-free and undisturbed. However, let pain rear its head and we are in for an adventure—an adventure that takes us from the drudgery and fantasy of self-centeredness to a Christ-centered reality of meaning and fulfillment. If Jesus learned obedience through the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8), so can we who have received His mind (1 Corinthians 2:16). What great news it is that pain can become our friend, for ultimately it changes us as nothing else can.

Our problem is that many times we prematurely remove our unpleasant circumstances through unwise decisions. Under such conditions, God sees to it (due to His love for us) that we are allowed to repeat the class. And why would He do such a thing? So we might learn to say with Paul, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17), a perspective that allows us to be less concerned with the variables of life and more concerned with bringing glory to the Creator. After all, it is through the hard times that Christ is most glorified through us (read 2 Corinthians 4:7-11).

If such a perspective had not crossed my path some thirty-two years ago (and yet I continue to know so little about it), the ministry on this hill would have been nonexistent. I would have gone my merry way with one goal in mind—to alleviate, in my own strength, every bump, annoyance, nuisance, bother, irritation, frustration, or anything else that “inconvenienced” me—a goal that would have ended in failure, isolation, and ruin. There is no doubt that God not only saved me from my sin, but also saved me from myself when I came to know Him. For sure no man is an island, and for sure no man (or woman) finds peace living by the mindset, “I did it my way.” God’s way is the only way to a life of fulfillment, for it allows us to give our lives away solely for the betterment of others—not for the benefit of ourselves. What a deal!

Family News

We are doing well, even with the bumps and bruises that have crossed our paths in 2005. But this year served to reconfirm that Jesus is the only true constant in life, and that if peace exists in our home and hearts, we can withstand anything that might come from without. Kim and I are different (in a good way) as a result of the “variables” of this year, for they have served to make us more appreciative than ever of this one reality—that the truth, when presented without contradiction, always prevails. What a warrior my wife has become, and I am so blessed to have her at my side.

Kim, Benjamin, and I continue to enjoy life in rural America. Benjamin remains a farmer and outdoorsman at heart, for his love for the soil and watching things grow is unwavering. He also passionately hunts, with his Daisy BB gun, such things as squirrel, turkey, rabbit, deer, raccoon, opossum, and anything else that moves in the woods. (Note: We were unable to make this year’s coon hunting trip with Grant Black, but maybe next year.) Benjamin truly is a kid that can sing

with authority, “Thank God I’m a country boy.” He should be big enough physically to do whatever he desires—outside of maybe sumo wrestling (ha). He, unlike me, is a big boned kid with football thickness, a fact that has been obvious to all who have seen him in the past few months. He and I are “considering” taking Tae Kwon Do together; an adventure that I am sure will stretch my physical limits to the max (that is, if we follow through with our plans). There is method to my madness, since Kim and I have one objective in mind as we raise our son. Our goal is to win his heart, and we have found that to do so we must, without compromising the truth, enter into his world by involving ourselves in his interests. We are reminded over and over that a child spells love “TIME.” If we can but win his heart, he will take his concerns to us, and ultimately to his heavenly Father, rather than to those who might steer him in the less than excellent direction. All parents who desire to “do it right” agree that properly raising a child in today’s world is tremendously challenging. The fact that we have one shot with our kids (Psalm 127:4) should keep all of us on our knees, seeking to make our homes a haven that our offspring will try to emulate once they have families of their own.

Ministry News

I will continue teaching through the history portion of the Old Testament this next semester. Last semester we covered the first sixteen chapters of 1 Samuel, contrasting Saul and David’s lives. The difference in character, integrity, and leadership abilities of the two is mind boggling! A great group of people attended these Tuesday night sessions, making us most blessed to have such wonderful friends.

We have a very encouraging winter and spring on the horizon as we prepare for weekend conferences and retreats. From all indications, we will have an abundance of believers, of all ages, visiting us from different areas of the country. Our expanded facilities have opened new doors of opportunity, and we look forward to making new friends as well as spending time with so many who have previously visited. To see the young people we have hung out with grow up to be used of the Lord truly makes for a fun time while they are here. In fact, if the Lord should close the doors of this ministry today, we could say from the bottom of our hearts that it has been the most wonderful adventure imaginable. It would be impossible to express the joy we have as we think of all who have blessed our lives by going on with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

As I stated in our last newsletter, we had one of the best summer camps ever (youth ages 13-18)! The youth came ready to learn and were such an encouragement. We had three to four hours of Bible instruction per day, plus they helped build the new lodge. The counselors were amazed at their character and diligence—and our counselors, by the way, were terrific. We, due to our expanded facilities, are asking God to send additional youth who desire to know Christ’s heart and, in turn, stand for the truth in their homes and communities. If you know young men and women who fit this description, we would be delighted to talk with you about their spending a week with us. We can house up to 100, which is twice the number of previous years. We are aggressively pursuing the youth of America, for they are the hope of tomorrow. It is absolutely amazing what they can absorb in a week’s time in the truth. Would you commit to asking the Lord to show you the youth in your community who might benefit from joining us? Thanks.

Brandon Karstetter, who has lived on the hill for some time now, works for us on a more consistent basis. He is responsible for many things, one of which is the book, tape, and CD orders directed our way by means of our website. In fact, he does almost everything relating to the assembly and distribution of ministry materials, which saves a big chunk of my time. Patrick

Johnson, a student at Murray State, lives with Brandon and also helps in a variety of ways. He and Brandon do a wonderful job, regardless of what they are asked to do, and we are so thankful for their hearts and friendship.

Kim and I sense, in the deepest part of our souls, that the potential for ministry here on the hill is greater now than at any time in the past. We are not yet free to express the specific direction the Lord is leading us, but we believe that the coming year will result in a wider range of ministry for believers from a variety of geographical locations. God has confirmed our vision through several avenues, and we are excited to see what lies ahead. Please pray for us, for a wider door of service normally brings a greater degree of adversity (1Corinthians 16:9). Thanks.

Some Events to Consider Attending on the Hill

January 17, 2006 Tuesday night Bible study begins at 7:00 p.m. **February 3-5, 2006** Winter youth retreat **April 7-9, 2006** Annual men's retreat for fathers, their sons, and single men of all ages. **July 9-15, 2006** Summer Camp for ages 13-18 **September 1-2, 2006** Two-day school. Topic: Romans 1-8. **October 14-16, 2006** Annual fall retreat for men and women, both single and married.

Speaking Engagements Off the Hill in January and February

January 20-22 Highland Baptist Church in Meridian, Mississippi **January 26, February 2 and 9** Murray State University BSU For more details concerning ministry information, you can go to our website at www.lifeonthehill.org.

A Word of Thanks

The Father continues to meet our needs through the generosity of the saints. In 2006 I plan to write a detail description of the miraculous ways the Lord has provided for this ministry over the last twenty-eight years. We will make this information available to the general public once it is published. Thank you for your prayers and support. We are so grateful for your friendship.

THOUGHTS FROM THE HILL

I have been reading through the book of Isaiah of late and sense that the Lord would have me describe some of the things that I am seeing this time through. I have always had a passion for the Old Testament books of the writing prophets; in fact, the foundation of the faith that exists within me has as its cornerstone the portion of Scripture beginning with Isaiah and ending with the book of Malachi. One of the reasons I have been so drawn to this section of God's word is the fact that one misstatement, one word spoken in error, cost the prophet his life (Deut 18:20—But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die). There is not a man I know who, at some point in his life, hasn't stated something he would say differently if given another opportunity to say it. But a prophet had to get it right the first time. I don't think any of us can relate to such a scenario, especially living in our society today. We, overall, are so uncommitted to what comes out of our mouths that it is almost a joke to try to hold someone accountable for what he or she has verbalized. In other words, our word is no longer our bond, and there is a price to be paid when a society lives as such. The book of Isaiah proves what I have

just stated, so I will allow the Scriptures to validate my words rather than try to justify them myself.

Isaiah addresses a future problem within the Jewish culture that comes extremely close to describing 2005. To begin with, men will no longer desired to lead (Isaiah 3:6-7).

When a man lays hold of his brother in his father's house, saying, "You have a cloak, you shall be our ruler, And these ruins will be under your charge," on that day will he protest, saying, "I will not be your healer, for in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; You should not appoint me ruler of the people."

And what will bring about such complacency? They will trade their pursuit of the truth for a life of compromise, resulting in both speech and actions against the Lord (Isaiah 3:8).

For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their actions are against the LORD, to rebel against His glorious presence.

To state it differently, their word will no longer be their bond. They will say what they say, and do what they do, with no desire whatsoever for someone to hold them accountable for their words or deeds. In fact, the men will be so little concerned about the repercussions from their misdeeds that they will begin to flaunt their sin in the public arena (Isaiah 3:9), bringing shame to themselves, along with a loss of respect in their homes.

The expression of their faces bears witness against them. And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves (Isaiah 3:9).

There is a price to be paid when men, due to sin and complacency, won't lead. The women, as well as the children, due to their lack of respect for the male sector of society, will begin to lead themselves (Isaiah 3:12a), bringing confusion to all (Isaiah 3:12b).

My people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray, and confuse the direction of your paths (Isaiah 3:12).

The women, in turn, will become prideful and unwise:

Moreover, the LORD said, "Because the daughters of Zion are proud, and walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps, and tinkle the bangles on their feet— Isaiah 3:16),

Also, the children will not only rebel against authority, but oppress those around them (Isaiah 3:12a):

O My people! Their oppressors are children,

God will not stand for such things, so judgment will follow (Isaiah 3:17-26):

Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion with scabs, and the LORD will

make their foreheads bare." In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses, hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils. Now it will come about that instead of sweet perfume there will be putrefaction; Instead of a belt, a rope; Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp; Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth; And branding instead of beauty. Your men will fall by the sword, and your mighty ones in battle. And her gates will lament and mourn; And deserted she will sit on the ground.

Now, before you label me a male chauvinist, remember that it was not I who penned these words, but a righteous God, the Creator, who knows man better than man could possibly know himself. Also, it is unfair for you to deem Isaiah's words irrelevant due to his living during Old Testament times, for a similar scenario is described by Paul in Romans 1. The downward spiral there began with the people suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18) and exchanging the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25). When events similar to these transpire, integrity vanishes, words become meaningless, and man says whatever he desires with no fear of reprisal. Could it be that we are fast approaching such a time?

Obviously, man needs to be held accountable for his words and deeds. This can only occur as godly leaders allow themselves to be held accountable for the same. As a society, we will never experience our potential until such conditions are met.

Walk on!

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