

Christians and Camping

We have spent a brief time here in the mountains and left behind the world to a certain extent. Camping is in the blood of God's people. God has often called His people to camp and pitch their tent. This means leaving much behind and taking with you only what is needed. In Genesis chapter 12, we read, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

⁴ "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. (Genesis 12:1-9) Abraham traveled over 1500 miles and camped along the way to reach the promised land.

Abraham and we as Christians are often called by God to leave things behind: our country and our people to venture out to serve as He has called us to do. Abraham left his country, his father's household and traveled to the promise land. He left so God could establish a new people. A people whom God called His own. We appreciate little the things that come easy or the cost is inexpensive. Abraham paid a great price and was grateful to God.

Often American Christians value their salvation little for the cost is slight. On the other hand in the countries where Joyce and I worked those who come to Christ placed the greatest value on their salvation. They have left families. Often families disowned them or even killed those who became Christians. Christians in (RANs) Restricted Access Nations value their salvation for they have come out of a dark faith into the light of Christ. Just as God brought Abraham out of Ur, a land that believed in many false Gods to Canaan the promised land of the only true God. God often has to take us away, away from what we know and what is comfortable to stripe away those things that are not of Him to get us to see our need for Him. Camping means leaving behind what is not needed and taking only what one must have and traveling light. What would our camping trip have been like in Abraham's time? No trucks to haul all this stuff up the mountain, finding and carrying water, and then the need to find and carry food for people and the animals. It was a lot more work then, let us appreciate what Abraham had to do in his long journey to Canaan.

I remember when Joyce and I live in Papua New Guinea, she related to her family it was like camping but not getting to go home and clean up. We could also tell when someone was new to the country because their socks were still white. We were very remote and any type of protein was hard to come by. When you were new if a fly landed in your coffee, you took out the fly, threw away the coffee rinsed out the cup and refilled it with coffee. After you had been in the country for awhile you merely

flicked out the fly and keep drinking the coffee. When you were well seasoned to like in the bush, when a fly landed in your coffee, you simply commented, “Ah, protein” and drank the fly and the coffee. I was not quite that bad, but I tell you the story for you to see when you are no longer in your country and with your people God begins to change your perspective of what is important and what is not. God takes people out of their “comfort zones” in order to retool their thoughts and get them to see what is truly important, which is their relationship with Him.

If we focus our life, our thoughts and actions on Christ, then we have removed ourselves from the world around us so we can retool our minds and see Christ more clearly and serve Him better. Christ does not have to always take people from their country and their people to strip away the things that are not important so they will carry only what they need as their focus shifts from this world to eternity. We need to remember we are sojourners just passing through and camping along the way.

Wealth can blind people to their need for God, to eternity and their need to be sojourners in this world. But, there are those who see their wealth as a tool for serving God. God called such man, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf to build a town of refuge on his estate for the persecuted Christian Moravians fleeing their country of Bohemia. The Roman Catholic Church was against those who wanted to focus on the Bible and Christ and eternity. They left their country and their people and families to serve God. They established a new community where they could live focused on the Bible and Christ. The Moravians soon began to send out missionaries from their center in Saxony beginning in 1732, they sent missionaries camping to every corner of the globe. Many would pack their belongs into coffins for they knew where they were going they might have only a few years to preach the gospel before disease could take their lives. They left their country and families to serve God and bring the message of salvation to the lost. There were even

three Moravians who sold themselves into slavery and when the slave ship landed in the West Indies the whole of the ship had come to Christ. What gave the Moravians this focus for send out missionaries and to serve Christ? For over 100 years the Moravians continued a prayer vigil 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and sent missionaries to every corner of the world because they believed that service to God and people's salvation was more important than life here on earth. They viewed eternity as their true destiny. They pitched their tents wherever God called them to go.

The writer of Hebrews wrote of Moses, ²⁴ “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:24-27) Moses camped through the desert as he left Egypt behind so God could work in his heart and prepare him for service. He left his country, the people he was raised by and his people by birth so that he might find God and find his purpose in life. After God retooled Moses' heart he led God's people out of Egypt and they camped for 40 years while God build a new nation that would be His people.

Like Abraham God blessed Moses for his obedience and faith. God told Abram, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**” (Genesis 12:2-3) Moses carried on God's blessing to Abraham that by obedient faith people would be blessed with knowing God. In Hebrews it says Moses “considered the reproach of Christ greater

wealth than the treasures of Egypt.” (Hebrews 11:26) Just as the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Abraham and told him of Sarah’s coming pregnancy, we know that Abraham believed in God and the coming of the future Messiah. Abraham may not have fully understood, but he lived by faith. So too, we read in Hebrews that Moses also believed in the coming Christ and desired to please his God.

The Apostle Paul continued God’s blessing to Abraham to be a blessing to people so they would know God. For this purpose he journeyed to Asia Minor, Greece, Italy and Spain. Paul left his country, his people to serve the living God. He not only camped a lot on his journeys, but he was ship wrecked, beaten, chained, imprisoned and stoned. We read from the Book of Acts, “Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city *Lystra*, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.” (Acts 14:19-20) Like Abraham and Moses, Paul left behind much and took only what was needed, often only his faith and determination to serve Christ. He understood he was a sojourner and that his true destination was heaven.

Hudson Taylor came to Christ at 17 and was determined to go to China. He worked for over 4 years to learn medicine in preparation to leave his country, and his family with the eternity of the Chinese people in view. He was poorly viewed for a number of years with little success. Hudson gave up much to continue in God’s calling in his life, traveled much of Shanghai province camping as he went. He was robbed as he slept on the steps of a temple for he had no money for a room in his early years. He left much behind and taking only what was needed. Eventually, Taylor began to make inroads and he formed China Inland Missions, which continues to this very day as Overseas Missions Fellowship. Because Taylor went camping thousands came to Christ. He continued serving the Chinese until he was 68 years old and his health

failing. Millions over the next hundred and fifty years would come to know Christ as their Savior through the missionaries of CIM.

The Apostle Peter went first to his own people, the Jews of Jerusalem. Many heard the Word of God preached and came to Christ. He then commissioned many of these men to carry on the gospel work among Jews. Peter then left his country and his people to go camping through Asia Minor. He met up with Paul and they had their famous disagreement, which helped strip away what was not necessary, the traditions of the Jews, so that Peter might reach the gentiles with the gospel of Christ. Peter reached out to the gentiles, “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’ ...⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.” (Acts 10:34-35 and 44-45) Peter’s ministry to the gentiles began. He camped through Asia Minor and eventually reached Rome where he wrote his first letter inspired by God.

Jim Elliot was born of Scottish parents who had immigrated to Portland. Jim’s parents were strong Christians who spent time teaching their children the Bible. Jim sensed at an early age God’s calling in his life. Jim arrived in Ecuador in 1952 to reach the “Auca” people. So you understand the word “Auca” in the Quicha language means “savage” and this tribe was considered violent especially to outsiders. Jim’s focus was on eternity for both himself and these unreached people. Jim camped in the rain forest to be near the people God had called him to. He gave up nonessentials to share the essential gospel. When people expressed concern Jim replied with, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” As the Apostles Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I

am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.” (Philippians 1:21-22) both Paul and Jim had the same focus and desire to live obedient. Jim left his country and his people that other would come to Christ. When the Auca men attacked Jim choose not to fight back because he had told a friend earlier that he was prepared for eternity and heaven and they were not. Through his death and the return of the wives of the dead missionaries God changes everything as the whole tribe began coming to saving faith.

The common thread of all these men both ancient and modern is that they were willing to heed the call of God. They gave up nonessential earthly possessions. They were willing to leave their countries, their families and live without so people could know Christ.

I hope what I have shared with you this morning has provoked you to think. Let me ask you, “When you became a Christian what did you leave behind? What sacrifices have you made that others might hear of Christ?” You may be thinking I am a typical American Christian; I have not really sacrificed very much for my faith. I have kept my faith in Christ private outside of church. You cannot change the past, but you can change the future. God did not have Moses lead His people out of Egypt until he was eighty. So if you have not reached the age of eighty, I ask you, “What is God asking you to leave behind today? This very day.” You can choose to walk away from the pleasures of sin for a short season, you can choose to give some of your material wealth, you can choose to love others who need Christ so that you can enjoy life here because your focus is on the treasures of heaven for eternity. The question before each person here is, “What will you do? How will you let God use you?” My beloved, this day and the future lays before you. Live your life to the fullest for the kingdom of God and our Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

