

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.” Jeremiah 23:5

# the OLIVE BRANCH

WINTER 2008-09

## THIS ISSUE

Bulletin board.....page 2  
WMB news.....page 3  
Contact us.....page 3  
ABM news.....page 4  
Calendar.....page 4  
CPMA news.....page 5  
VLB news.....page 9  
BTI news.....page 9  
Some final thoughts.....page 10



A publication of  
The Church of God  
Northeast Region

FROM THE OVERSEER'S DESK

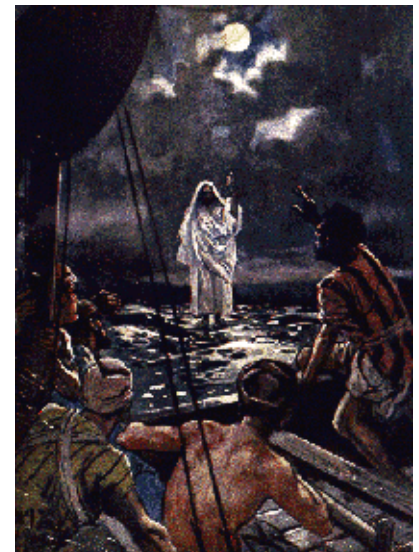
## Constrained

### *From Glory to Glory: Part 6*

In the previous sermon Part 5 in this series, the theme was introduced that one way by which we are “*changed ... from glory to glory*” (2 Corinthians 3:18) is through *transformational experiences*.

These are ones the Lord purposely places in our path as we walk with Him. Sometimes they are new experiences, as was the case with the miracle of the *feeding of the 5,000* when the disciples learned what it was like to be used as His hands ministering to others. Other times, we may feel as though we are repeating the same lesson over again. Yet in each instance, there always is something new to learn – about Him and about ourselves.

He regularly used both approaches in teaching the disciples, and He still uses both methods today – to teach us and to share with us more of His Glory.



When Jesus employed parables to teach His disciples, He often would tell a series of stories – each conveying the same general theme, but from a different perspective. One example of this method of teaching is His parable of *the birds of heaven* (Matthew 6:26; Luke 12:24), followed by His parable of *the flowers of the field* (Matt 6:28-30; Luke 12:27.).

OVERSEER continued on page 6

# Milestones

## ENGAGEMENT



*Sis. Jessa Nowling and Bro. Levi Stephens*

Bro. Levi Stephens, regional VLB coordinator, is engaged to Sis. Jessa Nowling of Anchorage, Alaska. The two plan a June wedding.

## VICTORIES

### Sis. Grace Louise Bizzle

Grace Louise Bizzle, 90, of Marienville, PA passed away Jan. 18 at Clarion Hospital. A longtime member of The Church of God at Monongahela, PA, Sis. Bizzle had served as WMB director and prayer group leader and was active in the Dorcas Club.

### Sis. Lizzie M. Bowser

Lizzie Mae (Fair) Bowser, 92, of Cadogan, PA passed away Monday, Jan. 26, in Armstrong County Memorial Hospital, East Franklin Township.

A member of the Ford City, PA Church of God, she was born June 20, 1916, in Clarion County. She was a daughter of the late James R. and Blanda E. (Shook) Fair.

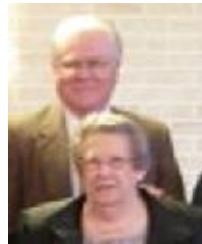
Sis. Bowser did a lot of community service.

She enjoyed playing games, fishing, being with her family and friends, and enjoyed life to its fullest. She is survived by a daughter, Dorothy June Gross, of Ford City; two sons, Thomas Albert (Constance) Bowser Jr., of Cadogan, and Richard Eugene (Shirley) Bowser, of Kittanning; a sister, Blanda June (Walter) Troyan, of Cadogan; 20 grandchildren; 47 great-grandchildren and seven great-great-grandchildren. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Thomas Albert Bowser, in 1979; a son, Perry Bryson Bowser, in 2007; a sister, Dorothy Shimmons; and two brothers, Cloyd Fair and James L. Fair.

### Bro. James Ryan

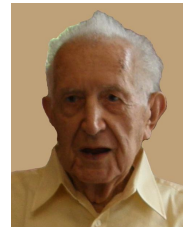
James Franklin Ryan, 92, of Karns City, PA, passed away Monday Feb. 2, at home.

He was born in Minneapolis, MN on June 5, 1916 and was a son of the late Charles Patrick Ryan and Iona Stanley Ryan. He was a member of The Church of God in Karns City.



*Sis. Lizzie Bowser and Pastor Wendell Flick*

He joined the Civilian Conservation Corps as a young man and served at Camp No. 77 near North Bend in Clinton County, PA. He retired in 1981 from Pullman Standard, where he worked for 23 years, as a machinist. He also had been employed at International Staple in East Butler for eight years.



*Bro. James Ryan*

He married the former Katherine Murray Grindel in 1935. She preceded him in death in 1990. Also preceding him in death were a son, James Ryan, in 1980, and two daughters, Frances Best in 2001 and Shirley Ann Smith in 2008

Surviving are children: Iona Ruth Rebic and husband Joseph of Waltspport, OR; Patricia Crivella Sinicki and husband Robert of Allison Park, PA; Melvin Ralph Ryan of Erie, PA; Beatrice Kathleen Nelson of Zephyrhills, FL; Dolores Kifer and husband James of Wadesboro, NC; Alma Kelley and husband Rev. Thomas of Karns City, PA; and Caroline Grossman of Grove City, PA. He also considered as children: Kathy Pranulis and husband Charles of Butler, PA and Kenneth Ryan of Zephyrhills, FL. Also surviving are 39 grandchildren, 110 great-grandchildren and many great-great-grandchildren.

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As we proceed into a new year -- and draw closer to His return -- there is a greater cry of God's heart for souls. Can we realize that our unbelieving family members, co-workers and neighbors will spend forever suffering and away from the presence of God if they don't embrace Christ? That realization should drive you and I to our knees to plead, not only with them to believe the gospel but with Jesus Christ to save their souls.

It is one thing to pray for family and friends, those for whom you have affections. But the Lord wants you and I to pray for all people. In 1 Tim. 2:1-2, Paul said: I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for **all men**; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

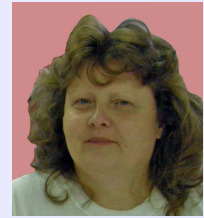
Kings and people in authority in Paul's day weren't bound by civil rights laws and were often unjust. Can you say that you pray for the salvation of people like that -- who may disagree with your politics and even embrace ungodliness?

The Word of God gives us examples of ones who did pray for the worst of sinners:



# WMB

2008-09 Theme:  
"Faithful Servants"  
Matthew 25:21



WMB Coordinator  
Diana Seese

Moses interceded for Israel after catching them in the act of idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai. After he confronted and dealt with their sin, he turned to the Lord and prayed in Ex. 32:31-32:

...Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

While being stoned to death, Stephen followed the Lord's example by praying for the salvation of his executioners in Acts 7:59-60.

Standing among those who killed Stephen was a young man named Saul of Tarsus. His salvation was an answer to Stephen's prayer.

Years later, as the Apostle Paul, he communicated similar concern for Israel. In Romans 9:1-3, he sounds very much like Moses:

*I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

His kinsmen, fellow Jews, were the very ones who persecuted him severely. Yet he loved them and prayed for God's mercy on them.

God honored these men's prayers for the souls of the lost. He'll honor yours, too. Whether friend or foe, moral or immoral, known personally or a stranger -- we need to pray for the lost.

Note: We will be selling crafts at the General Assembly this year on behalf of the Missionary Partnership Alliance. Any crafts you can produce and donate will be appreciated. Please bring them to the regional convention.

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## CONTACT US

*The Olive Branch* is a publication of The Church of God Northeast Region, which serves churches in Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania and new works throughout the greater area. It can be viewed online at [www.tcog-ne.org](http://www.tcog-ne.org).

Please have reports and other **submissions for the SPRING issue** to be received by **April 1**.

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For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

If we would just stop and take a moment to look around us, we would see a world full of pain. We see financial needs, so many marital problems, people that have so many health problems. It may seem so overwhelming for us to see these things everywhere we look, but it never ever overwhelms our Lord. He sees and knows each and every problem and situation.

Remember that old song ... "What the world needs now is love, sweet, love." Think about how true that is. But, of course, we know it is God's love that will make a difference in every situation. It is so exciting to see God's love manifested in someone's life. It is amazing to watch new Christians learn and grow in the love of God.

We can just see the love all over them as they begin to attend church on a regular basis, read their Bible and become active in many areas of church work. Remember, this was all possible because of love. And, as we all have experienced, when we become saved and accept Jesus

as our personal Savior everything does not go the way we expect it to go. But, just to know and have a God that cares and loves us so much makes life worth living.

I'm not sure about you, but sometimes I feel like I'm not spreading that love around like I should. Each one of us knows a wonderful, loving God. And, as we know, there are many that need that love and yet we find ourselves not sharing it. The Word of God tells us in Matthew 25:40, that when we love others, we are loving Jesus.

Also, the Word tells us in John 15:12, *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* Let us be more sensitive in sharing the love of Jesus Christ. Loving people God's way means we will pursue and act upon what is best for the other person. We will ask God to show us what we can do on behalf of others. We will seek to answer the

# ABM

2008-09 Theme:  
*Let us love one another*  
*1 John 4:7*



*ABM Coordinator*  
*Nancy Horchar*

question, "How can I build them up and help them grow into Christ's likeness?" When we love people in obedience to God, we find ourselves looking for ways to express God's love to them.

Remember, love is the evidence that we belong to Jesus (John 13:35). My prayer is that we are sharing His love, because this is what the world surely needs.

Jesus loves you! Remember to pay your Emergency Dollars.

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## 2009 Calendar

*Western District Convention* -- March 21,  
Grove City, PA

*Eastern District Convention* -- April 4, Pittsville, MD

*Ladies Retreat* -- May 1-3, Camp Sunrise,  
Markleysburg, PA

*Regional Youth Convention* -- May 15-16,  
Uniontown, PA

*BTI* -- May 31-June 14, Cleveland, TN

*Youth Camp* -- June 19-22, Mt. Chestnut, Butler, PA

*Northeast Regional Convention* -- July 10-12,  
Uniontown, PA **(Note date change.)**

*General Assembly* -- Sept. 8-13, Abba's House,  
Chattanooga, TN

I grew up in Omaha, NE, where the winters bring plenty of snow and sub-zero temperatures. Thinking back on those days reminds me of an anecdote I heard in a sermon delivered in Omaha way back in the 1950s.

The scene was a Sunday School class, and the topic was Christ's suffering on the cross. The teacher was recounting in detail how Roman soldiers beat Jesus, pressed the crown of thorns on His head, nailed Him to the cross and watched Him suffer while the crowd scorned Him. One boy's sense of outrage built up until he couldn't take it any more, and he blurted out, "If the Lone Ranger had been there, they wouldn't have gotten away with it!"

(For those of you who might not know, *The Lone Ranger* was an old-time radio and early television show. The title character was a masked Texas Ranger in the American Old West who galloped about righting injustices with the aid of Tonto, his clever, American Indian sidekick.)

The pastor giving the sermon used the anecdote as an object lesson, pointing out that it was a good thing for mankind that the Lone Ranger hadn't been there to foil their evil plan, because Christ had to die on the cross in order to fulfill prophecy and make the sacrifice needed for our salvation.

But the object lesson really doesn't end there. If recent polls can be trusted, there is an upsurge in what might be called Lone Ranger spirituality occurring in the United States -- perhaps even world-wide. The term applies because they are trying to go it alone. Church attendance is down. Biblical beliefs are being abandoned. Many fellow citizens are looking inward, online, outside

# CPMA

2008-09 Theme:  
*That We Present Every Man Perfect In Christ Jesus.* Colossians 1:28



CPMA Coordinator  
Roger Fuester

and even to TV divas spouting false doctrine for the uplift they once felt in church sanctuaries.

How different from Jesus this is! In Luke 4:16 we read. *...and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and stood up for to read.* But today, people no longer take him as an example. They settle for what is loosely called "spirituality" and try to nurture their souls without the timeless traditions of congregational praise, prayer, biblical instruction, edifying fellowship and -- most of all -- Holy Ghost-filled preaching.

Gathering regularly with other worshipers is an uplifting source of comfort, inspiration and emotional strength. The Bible urges us not to forsake, *the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is* (Hebrews 10:25).

We should, of course, have regular devotional times by ourselves. Just as surely, we need the blessing of uniting with other believers for worship and fellowship. We need to spend time together, *to provoke unto love, and to good works* (v. 24). We need to worship with others. We need one another.

That's why we need The Church of God -- a divine institution that ultimately will be without a, *spot, wrinkle, or any such thing.* Christ

set a very high standard for His Bride. That's why we can't say, "Hey, you don't have to do anything special to belong to us." Church membership isn't a "come-as-you-are party." In fact, membership is not even open to all professing Christians. Why not? Because not all professing Christians are the real thing -- those who would join Christ's Church must take the Church covenant and live right.

There is not another church like The Church of God. Let us rejoice in its exclusivity, but let us do all we can to reach out and be soul winners. So, the next Sunday morning that you look out the window and see that the mercury in your thermometer has hit rock bottom, resist the temptation to stay home, and join your brothers and sisters in worship. That will warm the body and the soul.

Finally, let me remind you that we want to be faithful in supporting CPMA. Our goal is to have each local church be 100 percent. So, make it a point to pay your dues -- still only \$10 per year.

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## OVERSEER

continued from page 1

Repetition may be employed for various reasons – the obvious one is to reinforce what we already have learned. In the case of our walking with the Lord, however; there is another greater purpose: the Lord has yet deeper meanings and lessons for us to draw from those experiences.

In our simple act of daily reading the Word of God and meditating upon it, we find ourselves revisiting what one might call “familiar passages” only to have the Lord provide new *transformational* inspiration, as we see something deeper that we previously had missed (or that He simply had not opened our eyes to see) though we have read it many times before!

We now continue our examination of the events described in Matthew 14. Following the miracle of the *feeding of the 5,000*, the disciples could be considered in a state of ecstasy. They had experienced the blessing of serving as “His hands” in the feeding of the multitude.

Surely there was more they could do to help their Master as the people dispersed. But no, He now sends them away, as well, while He departs alone into a mountain to pray to His Father, as described in Matthew 14:22-23:

*(22) And straightway Jesus **constrained** his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

*(23) And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

The operative word in verse 22 is the word **constrained**. Although He did not reveal at this time what lay in store for them, from His urging them that they go to the other side of the sea without Him; still, it was clear that He had some purpose -- this was *His will* for them. Certainly they wondered among themselves what Jesus intended by this action.

Up until now they had accompanied Him wherever He went. He did send them into a town once to find food (John 4), but they returned to find Him where they had left him.. Now He seeks to be alone with his Father in prayer. We are told of two other occasions when Jesus prayed alone. The first is recounted in Luke 6:12-13:

*(12) And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

*(13) And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;*

He thus had prayed all night, just before He organized the Church – calling the twelve to be His apostles! He also prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion – when He purchased the Church.

Whatever might have been His intentions in sending the disciples alone into the boat, the disciples obeyed Him and set sail for the other shore. How and when He would locate and rejoin them they left in His hands.

**They now were learning to trust Him – His guidance and direction**



*Regional Overseer  
James Smith*

– even when His intent and purpose were not entirely clear to them.

On a later occasion when washing His disciples' feet, He would tell them *“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”* (John 13:7).

He had for them yet another valuable lesson to learn that day: They had worked with Him (as His hands); now they would learn to work together.

Up until this time, the disciples all looked to the Master for guidance and direction. Now they must work together without His presence to guide them. We are not given much insight into just how they organized themselves. The disciples had come from a variety of professions, ranging from a tax collector to fishermen.

One might assume that the fishermen in the group would assume control of this situation, as they were familiar with handling boats on the sea – in all manner of weather. Yet little is said in the Scripture of how they organized themselves.

Instead, the account turns to focus upon the horrific storm that had engulfed the disciples (Matthew 14:24). Their journey had begun as an uneventful crossing of the sea. When they had departed from the shore there was no indication of what lay in store for them.

The Sea of Galilee (some six miles across and 13 miles long) is nestled in a valley of mountains that blocks the traveler from seeing what manner of weather might be over the horizon, until a great storm coming in from the Mediterranean Sea rolls over the western heights. A storm can occur quite suddenly with no warning of its coming –

much like the many trials and tests that come our way as we serve the Lord.

The fishermen in the group no doubt had weathered many storms before. Collectively, as His disciples, they all had been together in another great storm on this same sea, but then the Master had been with them – as described in Matthew 8:23-27.

That event occurred during the beginning of His ministry; they had only recently begun to follow Him. A centurion had just demonstrated great faith in the Master (Matthew 8:5-13) – even to heal someone outside the reach of His physical presence. Yet His disciples had lacked faith to trust in Him, even when He was physically in their midst.

Instead, they had wrestled mightily in their own strength to overcome that storm, without success. Only in desperation had they turned to Him: *“Lord, save us: we perish.”*

What a learning experience that first storm had proven to be as they came to understand, *“What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”* Why must we become desperate before we will call upon the Lord?

Now, in Matthew 14, they once again face another ferocious storm – one that surely the Master could calm, if only the Master had been there with them. But He wasn't with them – they now were alone.

Many thoughts must have passed through their minds. Did the Lord know they would confront such a storm when He sent them into the sea alone? He had more than just sent them; He had **constrained** (compelled) them to go without Him. Surely He had some purpose in so sending them, but what?

According to John 6:19, by the fourth watch of the night (the last,

just before dawn), *“they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs,”* which would place them somewhere in the middle of the sea – as far from the one shore as to the other.

Our most desperate situations often are those in which there does not appear a certain (clearly better) way out of our predicament. Do we press on as we had been going? For how long? Or, should we turn back to go the way we came? It now appeared that the disciples could do neither.

If they did finally reach the other shore, how and when did the Master intend to rendezvous with them? Could they even hope to survive through this storm until He came? What assurances could they find that He would come, and that they would be safe?

**This was a time when they must draw strength from one another – a time to encourage one another to hold on to their trust in Him, and not to give up.**

Perhaps one of the disciples reminded the others of the Master's recent words found in Matthew 10:29-31:

(29) *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.*

(30) *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

(31) *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

He had assured them that they would always have the Heavenly Father's attention. But what could be done now? He was not with them that He might stand and declare: *“Peace, be still”* (Mark 4:39). He could not possibly know of their current need for His divine intervention. Or could He?

**Little did they realize that the Master did indeed have full knowledge of their situation.**

He did know where they were; He did know the circumstances under which they labored: their labor and toiling, the winds that buffeted them – well before He ever drew near to them along side of their boat. According to Mark's account of this experience, as given in Mark 6:48:

**(48) *And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.***

In his *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, John Gill elaborates:

*“He saw them either with his bodily eyes from the mountain on which he was; or he perceived in his Spirit, he knew, by virtue of his omniscience, what distress his disciples were in.”*

The Master was aware of both their need, and of what He would do. He would indeed intercede in their behalf, but in His way – not theirs. He would be glorified and praised, and their trust and confidence in Him (in His instructions, in His guidance) would grow, even in those circumstances where so much was uncertain and fearful.

They had learned in their seafaring experience of Matthew 8 to trust Him who was always with them. Now, in Matthew 14, they would learn to trust Him – even when they could not see Him; even when they did not understand what they were facing or why they must face it.

We find in this scripture not only that, *“he saw them toiling in rowing,”* but we also find Him, *“walking upon the sea,”* and indeed that He *“would have passed by*

## OVERSEER

continued from page 7

them,” had they not cried out to Him.

How many times has He been both ready and waiting to respond to our circumstance, if only we would have cried out? As did the disciples that night on the stormy sea, we must look beyond what we might see with our natural eyes to what we see with our spiritual eyes. The disciples passed their testing that night: they had held on until the Master came.

This stormy experience provided another opportunity to increase their faith. During that first storm when they finally acknowledged His presence and had awakened Him, He had asked but one simple question: *“Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?”* Now to Peter, who had stepped out in faith to walk on the water to Jesus (Matthew 14:28-30) only to have his faith waver, He again asks a penetrating question: *“O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”*

During their first experience, the disciples’ response had been to marvel at *what He could do*: *“What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”* (Matthew 8:27) Following this experience their marveling was redirected to *who He is*: *“Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”* (Matthew 14:33)

In their hour of need, the Master had come to them in a glorious demonstration of who He was and of what He could do. Jesus would continue to draw upon and to reinforce this theme – both while he yet walked with the disciples upon this earth, as well as after He had returned to Glory: that they can trust in Him.

In John 14 (aptly known as the “Comfort Chapter”), He had reassured them as He prepared them for what shortly must come – His crucifixion. This would be for them a “storm of life” far greater than the winds and waves of their two Sea of Galilee experiences. He encouraged (we might say gently “constrained”) them to look beyond that “storm” to what awaited them on the other side with His words given in John 14:1-3:

(1) ***Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.***

(2) ***In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.***

(3) ***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.***

We pray for patience and often quote from Romans 5:3 how that “tribulation worketh patience.” But there is more to that verse than tribulations and trials (tests). Through those trials and tests that we are to overcome, He provides His glory that He would share with us (Romans 5:3-4):

(3) ***And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;***

(4) ***And patience, experience; and experience, hope:***

We may daily be tossed to and fro by the storms of life. How many times does Satan buffet us with thoughts that we are forsaken, abandoned, forgotten? As the disciples learned that night on the stormy sea, NO, we are not!

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul introduced our sermon series theme: *“From Glory to Glory,”* and grounded it in Old Testament *types-n-shadows*.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul proceeds to clearly declare **the way we must**

**walk to experience God’s “Glory to Glory”:**

(7) *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

(8) *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*

(9) *Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;*

(10) *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

How can the child of God endure such difficulty and buffeting? Paul provides the explanation in 2 Corinthians 4:6,13-16

(6) ***For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

(13) *We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;*

(14) *Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*

(15) ***For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.***

(16) ***For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.***

This knowledge we gain as God’s glory works in our lives is more than sufficient to keep us renewed in our walk with Him.

Rather than praying, *“Why has this come upon me this way?”* we can pray, *“Thank you, for the valley I walked through today!”*



# Youth Camp

Our 2009 Youth Camp will be held at the Mt. Chestnut Nazarene Center located near Butler, PA. Dates are July 19-22.

Here is an early preview of this new site's chapel, tabernacle, playground and dining hall.



The Church of God needs leaders who have a clear understanding of the work Jesus left her to do. He gave authority to her to teach and preach the truth.

BTI is solely dedicated to teaching the truth to all who want to learn, thus equipping the Church to fulfil the Great Commission.

**Rev. 2:17: He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written,**

# BTI



2008-09 Theme:  
That We May Know Him  
Daniel 11:32

*BTI Coordinator  
Wendell Flick*

**which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.**

## *Some final thoughts...*

*He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? Psalm 147:16-17*

The preceding verses are certainly ones people in our region can relate to this winter. Ironically, a recent reading of them brought to mind a more temperate sermon illustration. Perhaps you have heard it...

It's the one that involves an imaginary lineup of all the world's citizens on the beaches of southern California. The contest is on – anyone who can swim to Hawaii wins the prize. Given the varying health, age and physical ability of the participants, some never make it off the sand. Others swim for a bit before sinking into the waves. A few Olympic-quality swimmers make a bold effort and go far out to sea. Yet, they, too, eventually slip beneath the surface.

The moral of the story: Some people might give a better go of

it based on their own abilities and circumstances, but no one can swim from California to Hawaii. So to, no one can – in his or her own ability – bridge the gap between mankind's sinfulness and God's holiness.

Who can stand before His cold (His judgment, His standards, His plan)? No one can. That's why we need Jesus.

Yet Jesus is out of vogue now in some religious circles. Many would rather talk about a vague, universal "god." Others would rather spend their religious energy in social service or in advancing some cause, which may or may not be biblically acceptable.

Even among true Christians, Jesus can occasionally slip into second place behind religious/church activities.

That reminds me of a true story from Corrie ten Boom's famous book, "The Hiding Place." In her



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story of hiding Jews during the Holocaust she recounts the diabetes-related death of an aunt who had zealously written and distributed religious tracts. The family tried to comfort her on her death bed by reminding her of her history of good works. She wisely responded that she would face Jesus empty handed.

The aunt understood that while works are our natural response to saving grace, they are not the admission price to heaven. Without Jesus, no amount of preaching, teaching, Bible reading, singing, nursing-home visiting, youth-camp attending, praying, fasting will take us all the way to heaven.

It is true. There is only way we can stand before the Lord's cold.

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

*Isaiah 61:10*

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