

Anecdotes by Papi

That's The Answer I Needed To Hear.

In thinking over ones mental list of occurrences in life that could possibly fit in the present anecdotal scheme, one has to be keenly aware of an obvious fact. What is interesting to one reader is not necessarily so to the next. An amusing incident is only thusly so and sometimes contingent upon another's participation of "having had to been there" – I suppose. However, there looms a certain lure in a tale that has an element of mystery that captures the imagination of nearly all readers and is never fully explained. Beloved, my whole adult life seems to be full of these sorts of short and sweet divine interruptions.

Here is one called "That's The Answer I Needed to Hear."

In 1987 Restitution Revivals Inc set up a modest 60'x90' canvas gospel tent in Dalton Georgia. Dalton is situated triangularly in a spot where there are a lot of churches of various denominations in all directions; churches that all seem to support the GOSPEL. Why wouldn't anyone set up a tent there?

I found a suitable spot at the fairgrounds situated by a huge flee market. With the rodeo grounds on one side and all that traffic on the main drag through town I was bound to draw a crowd; to hear the gospel that is! Those folks coming to the weekend flee market alone could fill up my tent. After all I had enough chairs that I could comfortably seat 525 people and the rest could always stand up ... right? I paid the money up front to the American Legion, well in advance for the upcoming stint, since they owned that perfect spot; and the rodeo folks agreed on a flat rate for me to tie into their electricity. I was now in business and obligated to get started. Now there's a lot to do before a tent can accommodate a crowd and working as a single individual to get it done is somewhat daunting. The grass was a little high. I really have to be honest ... it was a lot high, but my little push mower got the job done and after a little ... I mean a lot of racking that perfect spot was ready for the tent.

On this particular occasion there were two friends of mine that agreed to help me put the tent up. This was not always the case however, since I have had to put it up and take it down – right – by – myself! One not privy to details might say so what! “Here’s the deal,” to quote a friend of mine who used to begin all his sentences with that phrase. There were two 25 ft center poles, eight quarter poles, thirty two side poles, winches, chains, stakes, curtains, lights, platform, sound equipment, an organ and all those chairs! Now you understand I did not list everything because this is one of those short stories. However, let us just mention the canvas itself; three sections had to be rolled out, laced together, and raised as a single unit. They each weighed 500 lbs and yes I have unloaded them, performed all the above tasks and reloaded them single handedly. I’ve even had so-called brothers in the Lord motor by and wave while I was doing all this by myself and they had actually attended the services. Go figure! Jesus said you saw me and you did nothing. Beloved I neither begrudge having had any of these experiences nor do I wish to repeat any; but believe when I say I’ve certainly had them. YHVH didn’t tell Moses all he was going to get into when He sent him to Egypt either.

We set the tent and my friends departed their separate ways. Some were never to be seen until several months later. Well in advance to setting the tent, my family and I had visited church leaders and business owners and put up advertisement all over the county and parts of surrounding counties. Some places took the posters down as soon as they were put up. The very individuals who gave us permission to place the advertisements were the very ones that tore them down and threw them in the trash. We watched this several times from a distance when none thought none saw! My children, Daphne and Carl, were heartbroken seeing this devilish deception but opposition to the truth comes in many forms. Maybe they were opposed to someone who had the audacity to give a location and a date with “*a special invitation to come and hear (ME) ... a man called, anointed, approved, and sent of God as an Apostle of Jesus Christ to preach Deliverance – Salvation – and Instruction in righteousness*”!? That is what was on the posters. We put ‘em up and they tore ‘em down. They would, however, leave the ones that advertised Billy Graham that were right by ours; they specifically targeted ONLY ours. Oh, I must have forgotten to mention the Reverend Billy Graham was there for a 3 day event that the “Dalton Church-world” had no problem supporting. Nearly every church in the area had a huge banner displayed in support.

In fact we had several people that came to our tent for a short time because they thought it was where one of Brother Billy's guest speakers was to appear. The invited celebrity speaker was Elvis Presley's half brother Billy Stanley. Undoubtedly every Christian for miles around couldn't miss such an opportunity, a two for one sale, the whole Billy Graham Evangelistic Team and an additional celebrity. It shouldn't matter too much though; we had also driven to Chattanooga TN and recorded some advertising spots for radio coverage as well. And that week long carnival shouldn't be too much distraction. Oh yeah! The folks that rented me that spot forgot to tell that they also rented a spot just short of "spittin' distance" to a traveling carnival. So then according to reasonable assumption we should have had no shortage of people or the finances to pay for this venture. Did I mention just how much it costs to stage something like this? I guess you just had to be there – it **IS** that funny!

My organist was gracious enough to drive back and forth on a daily basis from our home in Jasper GA. The trip was approximately 65 miles one way and she came each evening after the kids got out of school. During this particular revival one of the children, Daphne my daughter, had influenza and Ladonna, my organist ... I mean my wife, had to stop often going home one evening because of the nausea involved. Should there be any reward for preaching the gospel in Dalton or any other place I have been then surely it will be shared with my dear companion and my progeny. She did however stay with me on the weekends in our little camper trailer which is where I spent every night. Someone had to guard the tent and secure the PA system and organ etcetera on a nightly basis. The trailer was a place for me to pray and rest and get ready for the next days services. But people won't ever let you rest! Every place I have ever placed my tent, I have watched people who would not come under the tent, but listened standing outside or sitting in their cars. I guess they were afraid the Lord might compel them to place a dollar in the offering bucket. Nonetheless these same folks would invariably ease up to my little trailer and knock on the door and want to TALK religion. They always waited until I had lugged the organ back into the truck and was about to eat a morsel of sustenance. No wonder the scripture assures us in **Luke 21:19** *In your patience possess ye your souls.*

Amid all these circumstances and a couple more we preached the gospel, sang some songs, and meet some new friends. The crowds were neither very large nor very small; but the offerings were always minimal. I don't know if any of you have

read the Anecdote by Papi entitled “Don’t Worry The Lord Will Take Care Of It,” but in it I reaffirm this position: I never took an offering in another man’s church and when I was under the tent I simply set out two buckets – one for tithes and love offerings, and one for chewing gum. If any one wanted to place any thing in the tithes and offering bucket they were informed as to why it was there and they were welcome to be a participant. Now the one for chewing gum was mandatory and an entirely different story. At times it was a rather interesting story. It goes along with the one where I set out two big buckets full of rocks. My philosophy was that the Lord promised to take care of my needs; and any one who was not obedient to the voice of the Lord concerning giving to my ministry could explain it at a later date.

So then, I ask you again; as in **Malachi 3:8, 9** *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings, Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.* I have known the answer for considerable time now.

Typically I remodeled homes and apartments over the years to supplement the costs of living as an independent preacher so to speak, and to defray the costs of staging one of these forays. Many people forget that the Apostle Paul had to make tents on the side to supplement his ministry expenses. He also revealed that he had “to rob Peter to pay Paul.” The next so-called foray was one scheduled in Canton Ohio. We had rented a portion of the Canton Civic Center, and had contacted the local churches that numbered well over **three hundred**. Once again we had put out ample advertisement and the whole city knew we were coming. One problem ... I had remitted the costly fees due in Canton save a mere \$600.00 which I had agreed to provide upon my arrival and not my departure. That amount was needed to be taken out of the meeting in Dalton along with gas and food money to get to Ohio. We had timed it so that we had just enough time to take the tent down, store it at home and hit the road; no rest to the weary becomes applicable quite often to a prophet with no honor. **Mark 6:4** *But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

The last night of the revival in Dalton had come, we knew we had helped some folks spiritually but the ignorance of believers still lingered and none offered to help. As I was exhausted from preaching, for little do many understand what the anointing of the Lord draws from a man, I was rolling up my microphone cords and preparing to disassemble and go home. A man approached whom I had not

seen under the tent and I thought well praise the Lord he's going to help me put this stuff away. Instead, he sat down on the platform behind me and just watched. When he finally spoke he said "Brother Ragan I want to ask you a question about Jesus." I said, "Ok," and he asked the question; and I gave him my answer. He then stood up and said: "That's The Answer I Needed to Hear." He handed me six one hundred dollar bills and walked off; I never saw him before or after.

Oh, how I love "My Father" in heaven; hallowed be his name. Amen.

Papi

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