

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

The eye in the sky...

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As I was out and about one day visiting various troops and personnel in Afghanistan, I found myself looking through an amazing piece of technology known as the "Eye in the Sky." The Eye in the Sky is a simple balloon with a very high-powered camera which is utilized for surveillance.

Now, the Eye in the Sky can see from great distances, and it can observe all kinds of things. It is Orwellian in a manner of speaking – big brother is indeed watching you. That being said, looking through the Eye in the Sky was one of the most fascinating experiences I have had in the entire time I have been in Southwest Asia, which now spans roughly 2 years and encompasses 3 major conflicts during the course of the last two plus decades (Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom 1, and Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan).

Upon my first glance though the proverbial Eye in the Sky, I immediately thought of the classic movie, "1776," when founding father John Adams cried, "Is anybody there?! Does anybody care?! Does anybody see what I see?!"

I couldn't help but think, "Who else sees this? Does anybody see what I see? And if they do see it, do they care?" What I saw kept me positively transfixed for the entire time I was inside the command center of the Eye in the Sky.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and in this case, it was completely true. In 1995-1996, I participated in a residency course for ministers called CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). We studied and discussed "the living human document" and for as long as I can remember, I have been a people watcher. So, I am also a man of faith who finds human behavior fascinating. Thus, I can't help but wonder about the great sea of humanity, the struggle for survival and the watchful eye of God.

"Does anybody see what I see? Is anybody there? Does anybody care?"

I wondered. What did I see?

Nothing that could be described as scintillating or other worldly, but what I saw that kept my undivided attention for the entire time was this – I saw the struggle for survival up close and personal. I saw families and children living in various forms of squalor in a war-torn country (if it could really be called a country).

Afghanistan is more a compilation of ancient, disjointed villages than it is what we in the west would think of as a traditional "country." It is mostly a nomadic and tribal society, with different regions of the country having their own traditions (See Wikipedia). Huts, or houses in much of Afghanistan are traditionally made out of mud, clay and straw. The "rich families" have a series of rooms located around a private rectangular courtyard where women and children work, play and live.

Does anybody see what I see? I saw children playing with sticks because they didn't have anything else to play with. I saw a mother lay her baby in the sun, outside and alone on her back porch (made of mud and clay) with two other small children (toddlers probably ages 5 and under), and walk about a half mile away, alone, to draw water from a well. She returned about a half hour later with a huge vase-like container of water on her head.

I saw a mother and two sons with a donkey and a small cart gathering nasty, semi-dead desert weeds that they would bundle and eventually burn to heat their huts. I saw another family in a "rich" house that had a walled/ fenced court ard, and small children playing with sticks and wandering seemingly aimlessly among chickens and goats and other animals.

Who else sees this? I wondered. What does the Creator think about Afghanistan and her masses? Does anybody see what I see?

At the ripe old age of 94 American elder statesman Bernard Baruch, was asked who he thought was the greatest personality of our age. He said, "The fellow who does his

job every day; the mother who has children and gets up to get them breakfast, keep them clean and sends them off to school. The fellow who keeps the streets clean ... the unknown Soldiers – millions of them."

Who then, is really a "hero?" What defines heroism? What is the big deal about people living in mud/clay houses just existing day to day? Why should anyone find that fascinating?

Perhaps the greatest war mankind wages is the war against fallenness, the very struggle for survival. And we all fight this war to one degree or another.

G.K. Chesterton was right when he observed, "I marvel at the modern's rejection of the Christian doctrine of fallenness, when it is the only Christian doctrine that is empirically verifiable."

Since the days when Cain killed Abel the ground has yielded thorns and thistles and I watched that fallen world literally from a bird's-eye view. I watched those children; children who are born into squalor and I thought about their future. What would they do with their lives? What would their lives look like 20 years from now? What would become of the boys? What would become of the girls? Would they marry, have children, experience freedom? Would they live in houses of mud and clay like their parents before them? What kind of jobs would they have (if any)? What is it about this sight that captures my attention so keenly?

Perhaps, because it was a direct look through, if you will forgive the expression, the eye of God. It was a glance at the sea of humanity, the fallen nature of mankind and the struggle for survival. It was like looking at Genesis Chapter 3. The most basic, fundamental war mankind fights is the struggle to live and the struggle to live free.

We all struggle to have not just physical life, but abundant life – a life lived with freedom and joy. And our fallen world wars against that struggle every day.

Are we fighting an uphill battle? Are prosperity, abundant living and freedom just temporary illusions?

The battle is indeed uphill and to some it

may seem impossible, but freedom has never been an illusion. Every cell, every atom and every particle of human existence cries for it. God gave us freedom and He made us for it; it is His great gift to mankind. It is a significant part of what was lost in the fall. It is ultimately why we are in nations like Afghanistan in the first place, because there are spiritual and physical forces in this world that despise and abhor true freedom.

All human government, for all realistic purposes, takes on one of two possible forms – either democracy (in one of its many forms) or tyranny (in one of its many forms).

The central issue of the American Revolution was one that has come up time and again in human history and it is this – Is man a free moral agent before God or is man subject to the dominion of human government?

The whole Constitutional experiment sprang forth in a revolution that had a rallying cry of "No King, but King Jesus." A large part of the war that mankind has fought since the dawn of time boils down to that simple question, Is man a free moral agent before God and thus entitled to the freedom of godly self government, or not?

What does this have to do with the war over fallenness? Fallenness is a doctrine without which the entire Christian religion and the doctrine of redemption collapses. When Adam fell, he left the whole world in the power of the evil one. And all of creation has been at war, at least spiritually speaking, ever since. Our war is indeed the war against fallenness, the struggle to regain what was lost in Eden.

I saw a glimpse of the result of that war, that day, and that is why I was transfixed. Scripture makes it clear that what was lost will not be fully redeemed until the return of the conquering Messiah. Scripture also makes it clear that we are called to be actively engaged in the world around us, fighting that war ... fighting the good fight of faith and doing our gut level best to redeem that which can be redeemed.

CAMP SHELBY AREA WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The following worship opportunities are available through Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center.

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General Protestant
Sunday, 9 a.m., Greer Chapel
Sunday, 12:30 p.m., Greer Chapel

Catholic Mass
Saturday, 2 p.m., Greer Chapel

(Confessions at 1:30 p.m.)
Sunday, 2 p.m., Greer Chapel
(Confessions at 1:30 p.m.)

For Jewish, Latter-day Saints and Muslim services, please contact the Post Chaplain for assistance at 558-2378.

Lutheran
Sunday, 8 a.m., St. John Lutheran

Church, 2001 Hardy Street, 601-583-4898.

OFF POST

*Transportation provided for Jewish, Episcopal, Lutheran, Muslim services ONLY (due to time scheduling) Units are responsible for arranging transportation by calling 601-558-2622.

Latter-day Saints
Sunday, 9 a.m., Latter-day Saints Meeting House, 1618 Broadway Dr., 601-268-2438/ Hall: 601-268-9706. Contact the Post Chaplain.

Episcopal
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Jewish
Friday at Temple B'Nai Israel at 801

Mamie Street, 601-545-3871. Every Friday at 6 p.m.

Muslim
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Others
Church of God at Bellevue, Hwy. 589, Hattiesburg
Jesus Christ of LDS, 2215 Broadway Drive, Hattiesburg

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