

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Weber's Message of July 12, 2009
"Oasis in the Desert"**

[Today's message is an overview of our most recent summer camp's theme – "Oasis or Mirage?"]

[Topics: Mirage; Oasis; Summer Camp; Encouragement]

Excerpt: [Pastor Glen was the Chaplain at this year's summer camp at Big Bear, CA where he preached at chapel services, taught the Christian Living class and supported the staff members and counselors.]

The theme at this year's summer camp was – Are you an oasis? And how we all live in a desert. But there are also mirages out there. A lot of time was spent at camp talking with the young people about things that look "good" but are actually a mirage, meaning it's not real. We asked them about what are those things in your life that will distract you from being your best and what God would have for you?

Now there are all kinds of things that young people are drawn to – things that take away from being successful. For example, how many high school graduates want to go to college but at the end of their senior year they get pregnant? In most cases, this messes up both the boy's life as well as the girl's.

Now their whole lives are changed. The boy owes child support or they get married at age 18 or 19. They have this baby to take care of. All kinds of things like this look at first like an oasis but are actually a mirage.

At camp we try to help them to make those decisions and to think ahead. Now we had this fabulous guy come from Denver, along with his son and daughter-in-law, who were counselors. You would describe him as a 10-year old kid stuck in a 70-year old body. He's just so full of life. He's doing mind-twister puzzles with the campers so that they can learn how to think ahead.

Part of the process of choosing an oasis over a mirage is that you have to think ahead of what are the consequences going to be. And so he also taught checkers. Bad checker players make one move at a time and always get beat. Good checker players always plan ahead three or four moves. So in playing checkers with them, he was teaching them to think ahead.

Now who would think that one of the most popular activities at camp was a checkers tournament. So we had a checkers champ in each dorm and then a checker champ for the Junior boys and Junior girls and the Senior boys and the Senior girls.

Now, here's a definition of a mirage. A mirage is a naturally occurring *optical phenomenon* in which light rays are bent to produce a displaced image of distant

objects. So light waves are bounced and refracted, which means they get bent. This makes something look different than it really is.

On opening day at camp, they played a video clip of a sequence at Death Valley. A camera follows a car that goes by on the highway and in the distance the car appears to go into a big lake right in the middle of the highway. And it's a mirage. And this car appears to go into this lake and completely disappears next to a road sign.

Now the person shooting the video drives his car up to this road sign while rolling his camera and pans from the sign down the highway where the previous car had apparently disappeared into the lake. Of course, the highway continues into the dry bone desert of Death Valley. There is no water there. And the counselor made the point to the kids that sometimes when things look like they're there, there is actually nothing there. It's not really real – it's just a mirage.

The background slide of pastor Glen's notes on PowerPoint is a photo of some icebergs floating in the water. But when you look closely, you will see an iceberg that is sticking above the water and floating in the sky. That's not reality. That's a mirage.

This is called a "superior mirage," because it's above the horizon. The more common mirages are called "inferior mirages," because they are seen below the horizon line. Now here is a picture of an oasis in China's Gobi Desert. As far as you can see there is sand. In fact, the sand goes for one thousand miles from one edge of this desert to the other. The Gobi desert lies behind the Himalayan mountain range. The rain drops out of the clouds as they cross over the mountains and hence you have this huge desert on the other side. But in the middle of this desert picture is this beautiful oasis.

Now there were numerous lessons that we taught at camp. Here are two of them. The first one was – do we see God's oasis or the mirages of life? We started out by talking about the Garden of Eden and how Adam and Eve had this beautiful oasis there. And Satan came along and said, "Did God really say you can't eat from that tree?" And he sold them a mirage. He said, "If you eat from that tree, you'll be like God." So they did and as a result they got kicked out of the oasis.

Later on pastor Glen talked about Abraham and how God begins to restore his relationship with mankind through the children of Abraham – the nation of Israel. And God offered them the land of Canaan – an oasis. Israel came up to the Jordan River and sent 12 spies into this beautiful land. And they come back and say, "It's a glorious land, a beautiful land." But did they go into this glorious land? Did they go into the oasis?

No, they looked at the oasis and saw a mirage!! They said, "There are giants there. There are walled cities there." And so they talked themselves out of going in. And as a result, they spent 40 years in the desert.

Fred and Maryann talked to the campers about Jesus and his temptations. And how Satan came along and offered him mirages. Jesus was not offered bread by Satan. He was offered rocks and Satan said, "You can turn them into bread." And Jesus said, "No, thank you." Jesus didn't fall for the mirage.

The second lesson was – you can be an oasis. We are an oasis as God lives in us. They needed to understand that. The camp is 7500 feet above sea level. The kids are on a mountaintop completely away from everything. They're not allowed any cell phones, any i-pods, and any other type of electronics. You have no idea how hard this is for this generation. We might think – who cares. But you take away the electronics from this generation and it's like cutting their arm off. They say they can't sleep without listening to their music.

So we teach them about Jesus at camp and when they come down off the mountain, life hits them. We want them to know that when they come away from camp, they can continue to have that exciting and joyful relationship with Jesus Christ that they experienced there.

All of you need to come up to camp on the last day just to experience the worship service and watch 180 kids worship God with all their hearts. They worship openly and they are into it. And they are touched by God. And there are tears shed in many cases.

We want them to know that they can be an oasis because Jesus is in them and because the Holy Spirit is working in their lives. They don't have to be a desert; they can be an oasis to other people. And so we try to equip them. We, as parents and as congregation members, need to keep nurturing and doing things with our teens and young people to continue to stir that oasis in them, to continue to stir the Holy Spirit in them.

It's possible to be alive and well while others around you are having hard times. Now most of you know that. But we want to reinforce that in our young people.

Now let's turn to **Isaiah 44:1, "But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen."** At camp, we emphasized a lot how God has chosen them. Pastor Glen taught them in their Christian Living class about the passages out of Ephesians 1 that says how God chose you to be adopted as his children. He's called you out. He's worked through Jesus so you can have a relationship with the Father.

2) "This is what the LORD says – he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. 3) For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."

And God did that. God poured out his Spirit on our offspring. Some came to camp very dry. Some of them came to camp doubting God. Some of them came to camp struggling with some hard times and difficult issues. And God just poured his Spirit on them through the love of the staff and the counselors. And you could watch them begin to blossom.

There was one young man at opening night session that sat on the back row with his arms crossed and his head down. His body language said, "I don't know who got me here, but I'm going to get them. And I'm not going to participate."

At one point, they asked for all those who love Jesus to stand up. So now the pressure is on him. He was the last kid in the room to stand up. But he kept his same body language as when he was seated. However, by the end of camp he was responsive and was like a whole

different kid. And there were many others just like him. And you could see God's Spirit work with them as they began to change.

4) "They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams."

It's amazing what can happen to a young person in just 6 days. It's absolutely amazing what happens when you pour the Spirit of God on them and you love on them and you tell them that they are valuable to God. Now the messages they are hearing from friends and from school and sometimes even from parents are horrible.

We also took them through "Servant's Prayer Journey" where they put a set of headsets on and spend an hour listening to Anne Stapleton, co-camp coordinator with her husband Mark, as she walks them through this whole process of analyzing their life. She talks about the messages they hear. She helps them analyze if they are true or untrue. The campers place a sticky note on this board they carried around with them the various messages they hear about themselves. One side of the board is labeled "True" and the other side is labeled "Untrue."

And then she had them place their notes on one of two giant boards – one labeled "True" and the other labeled "Untrue." Pastor Glen went over to the "Untrue" message board and read the messages that were on it. Some said, "You're stupid." "You're ugly." "You're too fat." "You're an idiot." "You're never going to succeed." It went on and on. Pastor Glen figured that there were approximately a 1000 sticky notes of negative messages on this board. These were from about 90 to 100 senior campers. They were not from the junior campers. On the other board there were approximately 700 to 800 positive messages.

But when you pour the love of God on them and you tell them how God feels about them, all of a sudden they start blossoming. Things start changing in their life in just 6 days. It's amazing. Pastor Glen has been going to summer camp now for many years and these kinds of results still blow him away – to see kids come to camp so hurt and so broken and then go home as a totally new person. This shows us as to what we can do as a congregation to nurture and love people.

5) "One will say, 'I belong to the LORD'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and will take the name Israel."

We had kids at camp who said that they want more of God. It's amazing to watch the boys have an experience with God while either worshipping or talking to their counselor. They start making commitments to God. They realize that they belong to the Lord.

Now we do "zip line" at camp because it forces young people to take those steps of faith. We had a senior boy who was scared to death to go on the zip line. Rick McNair, his counselor, was talking to him encouraging him to go. Now his whole dorm had already gone. But he still refused to go.

The whole staff is now trying to encourage him by telling him that he can do it. – that it's safe. He had his harness on already. They finally asked him to take one step on the platform that leads to the release point. So finally the camper takes that one step. And over the course of 7 to 10 minutes, he walked to the edge of the platform and was hooked up. And eventually he made the choice to step off the platform and go down the zip line.

The mirage was telling him that he couldn't do it. How many things in our life are telling us that we can't do that? "You're not valuable enough. You're not spiritual enough. You're too

young. You're too old, etc." It's helpful when you have others encourage you. But if you have no one rely on the Holy Spirit to encourage you to try it once and let God work in your life.

You see there's an oasis out there waiting for you. So all of us have new things to learn. Each of us at New Hope can be an oasis in the desert of our community. With God working in us, all of us can be that oasis that connects with others and loves on them and nurtures them.

And when they come in all broken and hurt, we can pour out the love of God on them by encouraging them and being there for them. We can encourage them by showing them that there is hope in the middle of their crisis – that there is an oasis in the middle of their desert.

General Group Question: In context of today's message, what's the difference between an oasis and a mirage? Why is a mirage so deceiving?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Have any of you experienced a mirage? Briefly tell everyone what you saw or what you thought you saw.
2. What are some of the mirages in your life that can distract you from being your best and what God would have for you?
3. How does Satan try to deceive us? What can we do to thwart his efforts? Who can we look to for help?
4. How can you as part of a congregation be an oasis to teens and young people who attend there?
5. How can you be an oasis to your family, neighbors and co-workers?