

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

December 2014

Dear Friends and Allies,

A very warm and merry Christmas season to you!

I'm hoping that some of the beauty of this time of year—and especially of the Story that we celebrate—is coming to you in the midst of the hustle and bustle. Perhaps I can help with that...

There are so many wondrous things going on in the story of the birth of Jesus—the Incarnation, the invasion of the kingdom. But what is striking me about Christmas story this year is this:

The availability of the kingdom of God.

Follow me now, this is going to be really encouraging. Take those famous shepherds in the field—they weren't famous then. They were farm hands, rural guys, no education, no bright future, nothing romantic about them at all. Think low wages, long hours, itinerant workers. It was hard work, tedious physical labor performed way out of sight, out in the countryside. Humble work to be sure; a humble life.

Now, God was planning an angelic appearance—a “multitude of the heavenly host” is going to suddenly appear on Christmas Eve. That part makes sense; I mean, this is the night of nights! But he does it for these guys *and these guys alone*? Why not Jerusalem? Why not over the entire village of Bethlehem, like a fireworks show? Isn't it amazing—these peasants camped out in the woods get the extraordinary gift of the kingdom.

I love it.

Backing up, there was Zechariah and Elizabeth—just an old priest and his barren wife, counting their days in the sunset of their lives. No one special in particular here either. The kind of people whose names roll in the credits after everyone has left the theater. Zechariah is in the temple that day only because his name was drawn out of a hat. Yet they are given a miracle child, John the Baptist as their son. The kingdom comes to them in a *very* special way. (Along with a visit by Gabriel!)

The Jews were a forgotten people in a backwater country by the time the Christmas story takes place in Israel. Their glory days were long, *long* gone. They didn't even speak Hebrew anymore; they had lost their language, their identity and any sort of national pride. These aren't the golden days of David and Solomon; these are the days of refugee camps and poverty in an occupied country. And it is to *this* Israel that the Messiah comes.

Do you see a theme beginning to emerge here?

Ordinary people get the kingdom of God.

And what about Mary, and Joseph? I know that we have come to exalt them over the years, and rightly so; they are now the “stars” of the Christmas story. But when this whole thing took place, they weren’t anyone special. Just a carpenter, a blue collar guy, and his fiancé—who turned up pregnant before the wedding. They weren’t wealthy, or famous, or influential among the Jews. Just an ordinary couple, heading to a small, ordinary village, and the kingdom comes to them in a truly extraordinary way.

These stories all share a common thread, a common theme. And just to make the message perfectly clear, when the “Gospel” started to be unveiled to the masses (ordinary people, by the way), it began with the *availability of the kingdom*. John the Baptist started the revival with these words:

His message was simple... “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here” (Matthew 3:2)

God’s kingdom is here. And when Jesus took over and began to preach, he started in exactly the same place:

He picked up where John left off: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here” (Matthew 4:17).

God’s kingdom is right here.

Both the story of the birth of Jesus, and the “Gospel” he was to teach promise the availability of the kingdom of God to everyone. Including you, and me.

Whatever your needs are right now, I guarantee you they can be met through the abundant resources of God’s kingdom. Your Father’s kingdom. Need angelic protection? Not a problem. Need divine guidance? Plenty available. Need the power of Christ to shield you from darkness; the healing of emotional wounds; restoration in your work? Easily done, from a kingdom point of view. In fact, *there is no need that overwhelms the resources of God’s kingdom*.

Christmas is far more than the celebration of a Savior’s birth. Mankind was created to live with all the resources of God’s kingdom at our disposal. We lost it, of course, and the sufferings of humanity filled the earth. Jesus came to restore the availability of the kingdom of God to us. Salvation, yes—and so much more!

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus assured us, “for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). So—as we go about our advent season, and the celebration of Christmas, let’s re-frame our understanding of what is being offered here. Let’s cry out for the kingdom to come and fill our lives!

That would make for a most merry Christmas!

Love from your friends at Ransomed Heart,


John