



# Awakenings

*"Only by love is love awakened."*

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 7 :::::: Issue 1 ::::::

## ***Namaan, a Widow, and a New Moral Standard.***

**by Herb Montgomery**

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" "Truly I tell you," he continued, "prophets are not accepted in their hometowns. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

### **Luke 4.16-30**

*Happy New Year!!*

In 2013 we are going to be taking time each week in our eSights online to take a purposeful look at the actual teachings of Jesus with determined focus. And we are going to kick off this year of focusing on the teachings of Jesus right at the beginning of Jesus teaching ministry, according to Luke.

First let's look at some history surrounding the context of this event that Luke records. Deuteronomy records some pretty



stringent rules regarding placing boundaries between people based on the behavior of certain people groups:

"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live. Do not despise an Edomite, for the Edomites are related to you. Do not despise an Egyptian, because you resided as foreigners in their country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 23.3-8)

We then see a movement, originated by God, away from these old laws (for whatever reason they were originally enacted) already beginning in the time of Isaiah before the Babylonian captivity:

"... For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."  
– Isaiah 56.7

But after the captivity we see in Nehemiah a fascinating, conscientious, and meticulous return to the old laws. To give Nehemiah the benefit of the doubt, I do see a sincere desire to do what is right. But without understanding the "why" behind those original laws, his fidelity becomes a zeal without knowledge. He misses entirely the trajectory we find in the prophet Isaiah away from some of those old laws. Change is always scary and Nehemiah, to be fair, was preoccupied with doing whatever it took to make sure the events of the Babylonian captivity would never happen again. But fear often clouds clear judgment. We begin to see an opposite trajectory being set for a nation than

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that which we find in Isaiah. This new trajectory toward a strict observance of laws God always intended to be temporary, grew to a deep seated racism among the Hebrew people by the time Jesus shows up.

It is not by random whim that Jesus begins quoting Isaiah. Jesus begins taking up the trajectory of Isaiah. It has been commented by many that a possible reason Jesus, in quoting Isaiah, left off the final statement: "the day of vengeance of our God," was because those listening that day at the synagogue would immediately interpret that phrase as directed against anyone not of Hebrew nationality. In other words, "Gentile." But Jesus goes on to make sure his point is not missed. The deliverance He has come to bring is not the deliverance of one race (Hebrews) from another (Romans/Gentiles). No, no. Jesus has come to deliver all races, as God's children, from their REAL Enemy, the Accuser. (See the last eSight, as well as John 12.31 and Ephesians 6.12)

Jesus mentions the widow in Zarephath and Namaan (Gentiles) as being the recipients of God's favor in the days of Israel's rebellion. These were people whom the Law condemned, but whom God favored. Paul, also picked up on this point later:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh THE LAW with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself ONE NEW HUMANITY out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death THEIR hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we BOTH [Jew and Gentile] have access to the Father by one Spirit. Ephesians 2.14-18

People whom the Law Condemned, Jesus looked at, not as transgressors in need of punishment, but as victims, who had been deceived and taken captive by an Enemy, and in need of a Savior. We find this pattern over and over again within the Jesus story. In John 8 we find a woman caught in adultery whom the law commanded that she be stoned. Jesus did not follow the law's strict command here. We find this with the woman at the well in John 4, the woman with the issue of blood in Luke 8. In all these stories we see the same trajectory away from certain old laws by Jesus. He understood their original reason and that these specific rules were always intended to be temporary. It would be well to remember, though, that Jesus was crucified as a lawbreaker.

But this radical new way of looking at others, even Gentiles, was a game changer for Paul. His name was Saul when he was a Pharisee, but he took up his Gentile/Roman name "Paul" once he met Jesus. He went on to write how Jesus had changed everything for himself:

So from now on we look at no one from a carnal point of view. (2 Corinthians 5.16)

The distinctions he

had been trained to categorize people with he came to see as carnal, fleshly and "anti" Jesus' kingdom. Was this a transgression of previous laws? Without a doubt, yes, but notice Paul's justification for it (within the same context of the last verse):

"God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin [transgression of the law; see 1 John 3.4; Ephesians 2.15] for us [both Jew and Gentile], so that in him we might become the justification of God." (2 Corinthians 5.21)

I know this is disconcerting for some. But I want to clarify, following Jesus does not equate to lawlessness. What it means is that Jesus has become our new standard of morality. He is now what defines morality for us. Though we are no longer under the law we still joyfully follow the "law of Christ." (1 Corinthians 9.21) For those who are wrestling to get their head around this, I want to encourage you to read the book of James. It was for this very reason that James wrote his letter. The new followers of Jesus were being accused of doing away with the old laws, of living lawless lives. James is quick to point out that though there were parts of the Mosaic law they were in violation of, they were not "lawless" but following a higher law, the law of Christ. When reading James, make sure you take note of James' use of Abraham and Hagar. James mentions both of these (Abraham's attempted murder and Hagar's false testimony) precisely because under the moral code of Moses both of these would be strictly condemned (Exodus 20.13,16), but under the law of Christ, which had always been, these two were heroes! Did this rattle the cages of those who were heavily invested in the old laws? Absolutely! When Jesus first introduced this concept, they wanted to throw him off a cliff... literally! And ultimately, it was this very paradigm shift that got Jesus crucified. (And it has for every generation since where sincere people genuinely have desired to follow Jesus and only Jesus.)

Paul understood this and He was hounded for it all his days. But he understood. If God is like Jesus, then Jesus changes everything. (Galatians 2.20, 6.14-15) The Jesus story itself had become Paul's new moral compass. His only goal; to be like Jesus.

What does this all mean to us today?

Let me ask you this question.

Whom is it in your life, that you come in contact with daily, whom the "law" condemns?

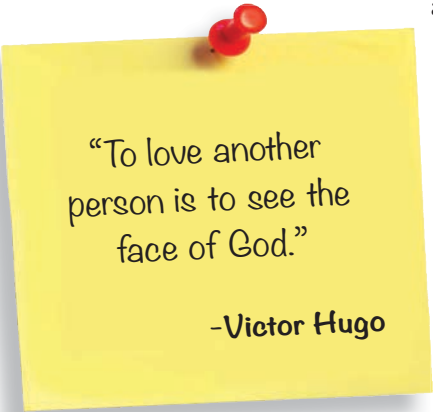
Is it someone else? Is it yourself? Regardless, whomever it is, as a follower of Jesus, Jesus is calling you, dear reader, even if the old laws condemn them, to look at them not as a transgressor in need of punishment, but as a victim in need of a Savior. Whatever the list of people groups, categories, and labels our society (religious or secular) has made, we are called to ignore it all and love as indiscriminately as the sun shines and the rain falls. (Matthew 5.44,45)

Jesus came as Savior giving his life as a ransom for all. We too, are to follow the lamb, wherever he goes, taking up His cross, living our lives not to judge, marginalize or condemn, but to save, redeem and restore.

Who is it in your life that, this month, God is asking YOU to be Jesus to?

Again, Happy New year to each of you. Keep living in love, loving like Christ. Now go enlarge the Kingdom! I love you guys,

*Herb*



"To love another person is to see the face of God."

-Victor Hugo

# Thoughts from Christmas

by Herb Montgomery

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2.8-10

This past Christmas, we took a moment and began laying a foundation for looking at the actual teachings of Jesus (which we are now going to be doing throughout 2013) by grounding those teachings in a detail about the birth of Jesus that many today miss.

What is this detail?

I'm going to say this and if you are like most, you're not going to get the significance at first. But stay with me. I promise it will be well worth the mere few minutes it will take to read through this.

What is this detail that so many miss the significance of?

The good news, the euaggelion that God had come to rescue us from our enemy, was first announced by heaven to earth to... *shepherds*.

Among the occupations of first-century Israel, socially, shepherding filled one of the lowest roles and bore the brunt of their low place in society. Shepherds, too, were considered untrustworthy, and their work, according to the Levitical law and all the myriad of laws of the Pharisees, made them continually unclean. What is the significance of Heaven choosing shepherds, according to first century standards, to announce the birth of Jesus to FIRST? The most obvious implication is that the good news of the Jesus story first came to the social outcasts of Jesus day. Modern, westernized Christianity has equated Christianity for so long with 'respectability' that today the Church (praise God for the few exceptions) has often missed out on people on the fringes. Some would argue that this is too kind. To simply say we have "missed out" ignores that reality that for some they have been more than simply "missed." They have been driven to society's fringes, having been themselves *marginalized* by the very ones who carry the name of this Jesus.

How we understand the story of Jesus' birth matters. Historically, in my opinion, we spent countless hours on apologetics defending a virgin birth, when we miss the biggest implications of the story surrounding this birth. How we hear the Christmas story, read the Christmas story, interpret the Christmas story matters! The Christmas story has within it's details (being born into immense poverty, being announced to the socially outcast, bypassing the religious of the day, etc.) the entire framework in which to lay a foundation for revealing to this world the radically different picture of God Jesus came to bring us. Interpret the details of the Christmas story rightly, and you get everything; miss them, and you miss all.

What are the details of the story saying to us? In brief, all the poor, the insignificant, forgotten, the marginalized, all those who

have been judged as morally inferior by the religious of any time period, are the very people of the world that can gather around this lowly manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them.

"... Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people." Luke 2.8-10

Jesus did not come to affirm the religious in their religiosity, but to call the outcast, the socially marginalized, and those judged by the religious of his day as being morally inferior. And among those who encountered His radical other-centered, self-sacrificial love and embraced His love for them, a love, like living water, was awakened in them which began reaching out to others around them who had been marginalized as well.

At the heart of Luke's retelling of the Jesus story, and I believe it was the reason he (unlike Mark and John) included the details of Jesus' birth, was his understanding that in Jesus the excluded had been included and the "outsider" had been brought *within* the Kingdom of God.

"... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, [outsiders] without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near . . ." Ephesians 2.12-13

In the midst of all that has taken place recently in the news, and in light of the details of the Christmas story itself, especially during this new year, we must not forget what the details of the very story we just finished celebrating are shouting to us.

People are of infinite value to Him who made them and then came to them and gave all He had to rescue them. The God we see in Jesus is a God to whom people are of immeasurable value. From the woman at the well to the woman with the issue of blood, from the woman about to be stoned for breaking the law to the thief on the cross. Jesus himself never looked at people as transgressors in need of punishment (like the Pharisees) but as victims in need of a Savior. This was true even of the "worst" he encountered. If we can catch it, the God we see in Jesus changes everything.

I'll close this week with a quotation that a friend of mine shared with me last month. I pass it on to you. I believe it captures that essence of what the details of the Christmas story are saying about God, about you dear reader, and about everyone else in this world.

Remember, the coming of God was first announced to those judged by the religious of Jesus' day as some of the lowest on the social scale, the outcast, the, by occupation, unclean.

"Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him; because evil is a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God and this remains in him despite every disfigurement." - St. John of Kronstadt

Again, Jesus never looked at those around him as transgressors in need of punishment, but as victims, who had been taken captive



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and who needed a Savior.

In all the hustle and bustle of a new year being upon us, we must not allow the “getting on” with the new year to prevent us from keeping Christmas in our hearts all year round, remembering the scandal that God came into human history completely helpless, as a newborn, into abject poverty, being laid in the feeding trough of a stable, and announced only to a group of socially outcast and unclean. Poverty itself was looked at as a judgement from God upon sinners. Those who were poor were not looked upon as less fortunate, but according to a misinterpretation of Deuteronomy 28, getting what they deserved. And shepherds, according to culture of His day, would be the last ones you would expect God to pass by everyone else for to announce Jesus’ coming. By entering human history this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized, the unclean, the judged and the disdained. And again, the insignificant, the forgotten, those who fail at playing the religious games, those judged as morally inferior, are the very ones of this world that can gather around that lowly manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them.

God is radically different than what we have assumed.

The God we see in Jesus, again, changes everything. †

## Testimonies

Thank you for sharing Jesus with me. – C

You’ve got me seeing Christ’s true character better and better every day, Thanks! – TW

Thank you for your ministry. Your words have helped change my life and my picture of God. – D

Thank you for letting me see my God anew. Your ministry has blessed me beyond words. – DF

You have answered so many of the questions I have had for years. Thank you so much for this ministry. Jesus is amazing! – K

Thanks so much. Your picture of God has truly been a blessing to me and to all I share you with. Thank you for all the sacrifices you and your family make. You, through Jesus, are making a difference. – A

Wow, this is revolutionary and absolutely thrilling! Oh, if only God’s people can grasp this and actually believe it. – WK

## Featured Presentation



To begin 2013, we’d like to offer the final presentation in a new, six-part series we are about to release entitled the The Sufficiency of Christ. Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer, and Lord. He is the source of our life, the definitive clue we have in regards to the character of the Father, our central reference point for all doctrine, the standard for defining all morality. He is the central reference point for our understanding of “church”, as well as understanding how we are to engage with the society around us. It is our prayer that as you embark upon this new year, your heart will be inspired to not only be a “believer” in Jesus, but to renew your commitment in being a FOLLOWER of Jesus as well. This month’s featured presentation, *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Herb Montgomery.

## Schedule

### JANUARY 11-13, 2013

Naperville Adventist Church,  
Naperville, IL  
708.514.5723

### JANUARY 18-20, 2013

Raymond Adventist Church  
Franksville, WI  
262.878.5133

### JANUARY 25-27, 2013

Summersville Adventist Church  
Summersville, WV  
304.872.6958

### FEBRUARY 8-10, 2013

Battleford Adventist Church  
North Battleford, SK, CAN  
306.445.9096

### FEBRUARY 22 - MARCH 2, 2013

Paradise Adventist Church  
Paradise, CA  
530.877.4454

### MARCH 8-16, 2013

Raymond Adventist Church  
Franksville, WI  
262.878.5133

### APRIL 8-12, 2013

Shenandoah Valley Academy  
New Market, VA  
540.740.3161

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