

MINISTRY UPDATE

The Love Chapter (Remix)

And now I will show you the most beautiful way.

If I build a church that's larger than a football stadium but I don't love people the way God does, I am nothing.

If I write books that sell millions of copies and made Oprah's favorites list, but don't love my enemies, then I am worth nothing.

If I have a Television show where I take money from the elderly and the weak-minded and twist the scriptures around to promise endless health and a faith without suffering, then I am not of Christ.

Love is not violent. It does not kill. It does not carry a weapon. Love does not shed blood, unless it is bleeding for the sake of others.

Love is not arrogant. It does not insult. It does not carry a sign full of hateful words. Love never causes others to doubt God's goodness and mercy.

Love always transforms, always serves, always gives, always kneels down to touch the outcast, the homeless, the orphan, and the sick. Love washes the feet of the proud and the broken alike.

Love does not withhold mercy from those who do

not deserve it. Love freely rains down goodness and relief and hope upon the hopeless.

But where there are wars, they will cease.
Where there is violence, there will be peace.
Where there is hate, it will pass away.

For we know full well that our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us not to kill, and we know that He spoke to us of loving our enemies, and turning the other cheek, and walking the extra mile, and blessing those who curse us, and doing good to those who hate us, and laying down our lives for others, and loving our neighbor—even if that neighbor hates us with all of his heart.

When I was a non-disciple, I thought like one, and I acted like one. But when I became a follower of the Prince of Peace, I put away violent things.

Now, we see but a poor reflection of Christ in ourselves, and in the Church, but one day we will see Him in our own face, and in one another, more clearly.

And now, these three remain: Hate, Arrogance and Love. And the greatest of these remains to be seen.

Amen.

—Keith Giles

(Keith is a teacher, author, copywriter, activist, and servant of Jesus, and dear friend of Herb and RHM. He lives in Orange County, CA.)

Featured Presentation

A New Way

by Herb Montgomery.

Last month Herb had the privilege of sharing four presentations at North Dakota State University. This series has been published on our website under the title *Jesus for Skeptics*. These four presentations uniquely contrast some of the differences between religiously worshiping Jesus and ethically following Him. This month we'd like to feature the third presentation in this series *A New Way* with the hope that your heart will be renewed as you encounter once again, the truth about God, yourself, and everyone around you. For it is in these truths that the reign of Christ is enlarged on this earth, and all Creation is reconciled again to each other and together back to God.



Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus commanded, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things God has given us for free.

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**Renewed Heart Ministries
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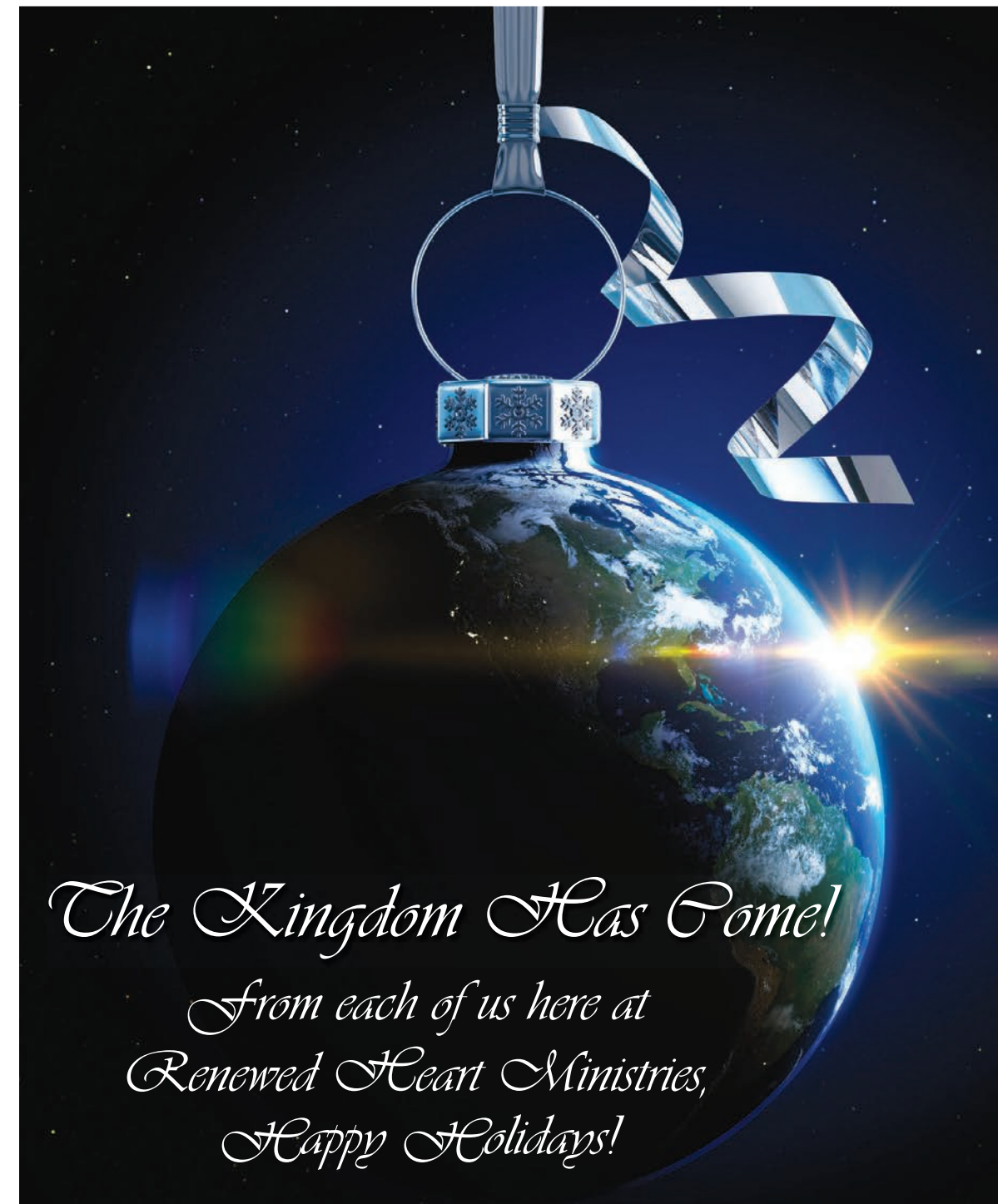
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Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

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Inside This Issue:

Page 2

A Revolution Lying in a Manger: (Freedom, Peace, and Justice)
Part 1 of 4

Page 3

Testimony

Page 4

Weekly Podcasts

Page 5

Ministry Update:
Richland, Washington

Luke 2:8-15

Page 6

Ministry Update:
North Dakota
State University

Testimonies

Page 7

HeartGroups Testimony
Schedule

Page 8

Ministry Update:
The Love Chapter (remix)

Featured Presentation

Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304.520.0030
Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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Herb's Article



A Revolution Lying in a Manger: (Freedom, Peace, and Justice)

Part 1 of 4

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the kingdom of God—in all its apparent weakness, insignificance and vulnerability—and the kingdoms of this world.”

—N. T. Wright
Luke For Everyone

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”
Luke 2:10–11

The holiday season has begun here in America. Whether you celebrate the holidays or not, this time of year for many is a time when the story of Jesus (granted, a very domesticated version) is brought down from our attics, dusted off, and placed in our front yards for all to see. What I would like to do over the next four weeks, though, is offer you a very unconventional, non-domesticated, early version of the Jesus story, before the Roman Empire (through Constantine) was able to co-opt it and use it for the Rome’s own agenda and propaganda. (More on this in the upcoming weeks.) You see, before Christianity became a religion, before the Jesus story was diverted from its original purpose and role during the time leading up to the fourth century, the story that many will be celebrating within Western culture actually could not be more counter-cultural. There are four ways in which the Jesus story cut across the grain of the societal structures of its day. We will be taking a look at each of these and pondering what they may possibly be whispering to us in our culture today. This week, let’s begin with the words in Luke’s version of the Jesus story that were, according to Luke, spoken by “the Angel.”

In order to get the full impact of the words used here, we must entertain, for a brief moment, their historical setting. Luke places these words in the days of “Emperor Augustus” (Luke 2:1). Emperor Augustus (September 63 BC – August 14 AD) is heralded today as the founder of the

Roman Empire, and its first emperor. Augustus’ original name was Gaius Octavius. In 44 BC he was adopted posthumously by his maternal great-uncle, Gaius Julius Caesar, following Julius’ assassination. Together with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus, he defeated the assassins of Caesar. They then divided the Roman Republic (not the Roman Empire) among themselves and ruled as military dictators. After a period of civil war and much political unrest between these three, Augustus gained control in 31 BC. (Lepidus was exiled, and Antony allegedly committed suicide.)

Augustus restored the outward facade of the free Republic. Yet he retained his autocratic power over the Republic as a military dictator. Over the next several years, through strategy and intrigue, Augustus stealthily transformed the Republic into the Empire with himself as the sole ruler. The reign of Augustus initiated an era of relative peace, known as the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). Despite continuous wars and imperial expansion on the Empire’s frontiers, as well as a year-long civil war over the imperial succession, the Roman world was largely free from large-scale conflict for more than two centuries. Augustus dramatically enlarged the Empire. Beyond the frontiers, he secured the Empire with a buffer region of client states, and made peace with the Parthian Empire through diplomacy. He reformed the Roman system of taxation, developed networks of roads with an official courier system, established a standing army, established the Praetorian Guard, created official police and fire-fighting services for Rome, and rebuilt much of the city during his

cont’d on page 3

Schedule

JANUARY 17-26, 2014

Cornerstone Adventist
Community Church
Coquitlam, BC CANADA
604.723.3433

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 2, 2014

Southpoint Adventist Church
Jacksonville, FL
904.448.4030

FEBRUARY 7-8, 2014

Eastgate Adventist Church
Walla Walla, WA
509.529.9933

MARCH 7-16, 2014

Pullman Adventist Church
Pullman, WA
509.332.8782



HeartGroups Testimony

The HeartGroup that meets in the home of Bill and Bonnie

By Bill and Bonny Norton

A little over a year ago my husband and I began a HeartGroup in our home. In the process we discovered that breaking a lifetime of habits in how we “do church” just does not happen overnight! Change comes slowly and starting a HeartGroup requires patience. We often found ourselves discouraged, feeling that we somehow were not “getting it.” The devil would tempt us to just give up on the whole thing. That it wasn’t working. That it was easier to just attend a conventional church. However, we remembered reading that if it takes 9 months to birth a baby, then how can we expect anything less when

birthing an organic church? So we continued to gather together, pray, and plead for God’s guidance and spirit. Almost imperceptibly the change began to occur. This past week we felt like our HeartGroup suddenly burst into full bloom, and it was so exciting to experience the true headship of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Our singing was joyful and heartfelt. Our prayers were spontaneous and occurred throughout the meeting as we felt the need to lift someone up. For the first time there was open mutual participation by everyone, with no one person dominating the scene and others sitting quietly in the shadows. Everyone had something to share. There was a willingness to be vulnerable and honest with one another.

A young woman, who is at a difficult crossroad in her life,

shared her fear and confusion. We cried with her, prayed over her, and had the opportunity to actually help, as a body of believers, with a need of hers.

A young man who usually remains silent and has been struggling in his walk with Jesus, gave a powerful testimony on how the Holy Spirit has been working in his life. Our joy was overflowing as we witnessed this change in him.

There were prayers and concern over an elderly member who is traveling a long distance alone and over another member who is battling a debilitating illness.

After our worship and praise time we enjoyed a hearty meal of waffles, fresh homemade applesauce, and fruit, with every one chipping in to help. Our hearts were truly melded together and beating as one with the heart of God!

MINISTRY UPDATE

North Dakota State University

I can't imagine a better way to wrap up my speaking year for 2013 than sharing with students in a public university setting. This past weekend proved once again the value of embracing the challenge of sharing Jesus and his message of the Kingdom on college and university campuses, which are among my favorite venues.

Three encounters stand out from the weekend. The first was with a young guy I met who had just finished reading Reza Aslan's volume *The Zealot*. And while I appreciate *The Zealot* and agree with much of the historical research in the volume, there are some significant proposals in the volume that shook the faith of this gentleman. The testimony of my new friend was very encouraging to me. While a couple of fundamentalist evangelicals were having a meltdown in the back row as a result of some of the ways in which I was explaining some things, this young man was finding answers to each of the questions *The Zealot* raised for him, and his faith in the nonviolent revolutionary named Jesus and his decision to follow this Jesus was reaffirmed. On that level alone, the meetings were a success.

The secondly was a thrilling conversation I had with a young lady who was very involved in her local Catholic church and their outreach on campus. It was a wonderful exchange of ideas and thoughts, which I believe benefited us both in further pursuing a God who looks like the Jesus we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The final encounter was with a precious young lady who defined herself as a millennial (for those who

are familiar with that term), attended each of the four presentations, and was absolutely thrilled to be both encouraged—and even a little challenged—by new ideas regarding Jesus and what the Jesus of the Gospels may be saying to us regarding how we view ourselves, the world around us, and the character of the God Christians claim to be worshipping.

On every account, I would call this weekend a success. To those who were praying, I cannot stress enough how important your prayers were this weekend. This venue possesses an almost infinite array of challenges. The audience is peppered with minds and hearts who come from so many different backgrounds, who look at things differently, and who bring to the table such different sets of presuppositions. God showed up this weekend, Jesus was revealed, and hearts were awakened.

Over the next few weeks, as the holiday season begins here in America, I will be endeavoring to finish up a draft of a new book and to wrap everything up for 2013 that Renewed Heart Ministries does besides travel and speak. Again, I can't think of a better event to end the 2013 speaking engagement tour with. Thank you to each one of you who supports Renewed Heart Ministries. We are changing lives both for the present time and for eternity by bringing healing, restoration, and reconciliation to people. Your prayers worked this weekend. They will have a lasting effect. I saw providence impacting lives at every turn. Thank you, with all my heart, for partnering with us in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

These four presentations are on our website under the title *Jesus for Skeptics* if you would like to give them a listen.

Testimonies

My husband and I have been reading your book together. Thought I would let you know that we've found it to be very profound. It has touched my heart. Best book on Jesus love for us that I've ever read. I was

surprised how many ideas you present in a different way than I've ever heard presented before. Plan to read this book on a yearly basis. Thanks so much!- *GW*

So grateful someone is verbalizing these things. Thanks for the teaching Herb. - *CD*

I have listened to many of your talks, and I just really wish my church would be this bold, honest, and authentic. Please thank your wife and family for us—we imagine it's a hard life, sharing you with the road—your sacrifice is so appreciated!- *AH*

Testimony

It was through a friend that I heard about Herb and I ended up buying the book 'Finding the Father'. I grew up in a pastor's family and then married a guy who decided to become a pastor - but in all honesty I have to say that Herb's book was the catalyst for a complete shift in my understanding of God. So a huge thank you to you, Herb. It seems to me that God is bringing this message to His final days

church through lots of different channels right now - something so many of us missed. I could quote lots of texts and explain lots of things - but I had missed the essence of the God behind it all. And Herb's life story is tailor-made to illustrate the reality of what that does to our personal relationship with God. A huge thank you - from the bottom of my heart. I can't imagine what my life would be without the insights from his book. May God continue to bless your ministry- *SS*

A Revolution... cont'd from page 2

reign. Augustus died in 14 AD at the age of 75. Augustus was celebrated as a hero after the strife of civil war. Augustus was considered the great source of peace for Rome. Four themes that would permeate his reign were freedom, justice, peace, and salvation. Whenever Augustus' great accomplishments were proclaimed, the proclamation of Augustus' victories were called the *Euangelizo* ("good news" or "gospel"). Augustus, "son" of the "divine" Julius Caesar, was celebrated as a great, universal "savior" for all people who were described as previously being in a hopeless state, and who would have remained so had Augustus' victories not been achieved. The "Lord" Augustus had brought freedom, justice, and peace as a "savior" to all who would welcome his militaristic reign. Scholars today have defined these elements as the *Roman Imperial theology* that was continually propagated throughout the empire in Luke's day through poems and inscriptions, coins and images, statues, altars, and structures. Through these cult-like means, the Empire would justify its violent dominance, as well as its imposed heavy taxation throughout the conquered territories.

Now, go back and re-read the

words Luke places in the mouth of the Angel who appeared that night before the shepherds:

*"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you **EUANGELIZO** of great joy for **ALL PEOPLE:** to you is born this day in the city of David a **SAVIOR**, who is the Messiah, the **LORD**.'"*

No statement could be more revolutionary or politically rebellious. As N.T. Wright has aptly said, "The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the kingdom of God—in all its apparent weakness, insignificance, and vulnerability—and the kingdoms of this world." (*Luke For Everyone*)

Next, Luke has an angelic host appear in the night sky for these shepherds, proclaiming, "**GLORY** to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **PEACE** among those whom he **FAVORS!**" No statement could have been more provocative than what these heavenly messengers said. To all who would have been Luke's original audience, these words would have been heard in stark contrast to the "glory" due only to Rome, and the "peace" Rome promised to those upon whom Rome's favor rested.

What the Messiah of Luke's gospel brings is not an evacuation route

out of earth to heaven, but a revolution where the reign of God is once again established on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). The birth of this baby, lying in a manger, would end in the proclamation that *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever."* (Revelation 11:15)

How would he do it? In a way symbolized by the apparent peacefulness of a baby lying in a manger, born into a life of poverty. This baby, helpless as it seemed, would be the means through which the Roman Empire, as well as all of this world's empires (including whatever empire you find yourself living in today), would crumble, not by militaristic might, but by a humble servant's love. This baby would be the undoing of all the unjust social structures of this world, not through the power of justified violence or the power to take life, but through the power found in laying His own life down, to be taken by His enemies, coupled with enemy-embracing, enemy-forgiving love. When one sees how threatening the Jesus story is to whatever the current societal arraignments of the day are, it's no

cont'd on page 4

wonder the Empire worked so tirelessly to reframe the Jesus revolution into a religion that actually supported the Empire in the fourth century. Through this baby, the truth about God, the truth about ourselves, and the truth about everyone else around us would be proclaimed. In John's version of the Jesus story, John has Jesus, on the day of his death, saying to Pilate, *"You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."* (John 18:37, emphasis added). The revelation of the truth this baby's birth would proclaim to the world would be the means whereby all of Creation might be reconciled once again to each other and back to God (Ephesians 1:10, 2:16; Colossians 1:20).

Over the next few weeks leading up to Christmas, we will be looking at how this baby's birth (rather than the empires of this world) bring to us the justice we hunger for, the peace we so desperately need, and the freedom to make it all happen. We will begin next week with freedom, for it is through the specific freedom given by this baby, lying in a manger, that the peace and restorative justice of the reign of Christ was realized within the early Jesus revolution. The first thing we need is freedom—freedom from the fear that the empires of this world lord over us, freedom from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14, 15). It's a game-changer once it dawns upon your heart. But we'll pick that up in part 2.

HeartGroup Application

1. This week, take a moment to notice the water you're swimming in. Step back and make the comparisons necessary between the Roman Empire that reigned in the days of Jesus' birth and whatever governing structure you happen to live under today. Make a list of five similarities between Rome and whatever ruling structure you find yourself living in (for me it would be America).
2. Now look at that list of five similarities. One such example for me is the repeated slogan that democracy is the last great hope of the world. And although I will be quick to add that democracy is preferable to me than any monarchy, aristocracy, or dictatorship, it still is not the last great hope of the world—Jesus is. Now take a look at each of the five comparisons you've made and prayerfully meditate on how they may compete with Jesus in our heart's

devotion, and on where we have bowed to our own empires today as idols in which we hope for freedom, justice, and peace, rather than the baby "wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:12)

3. Be prepared to share your insights this week with your HeartGroup.

Taking time to contemplate the Advent of Christ and its meaning in its own historical context, as well as ours today, is the most revolutionary thing one can do. It is in the meditation on these themes that the early Jesus revolution was born, and Jesus' followers were "turning the world upside down," "acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor," and saying "that there is another King named Jesus." (Acts 17:6–7) May that also be said of Jesus-followers in our day.

Happy Holidays to each of you, and may the Truth proclaimed by the events that this season brings to the minds of so many be ever present in your heart. ■

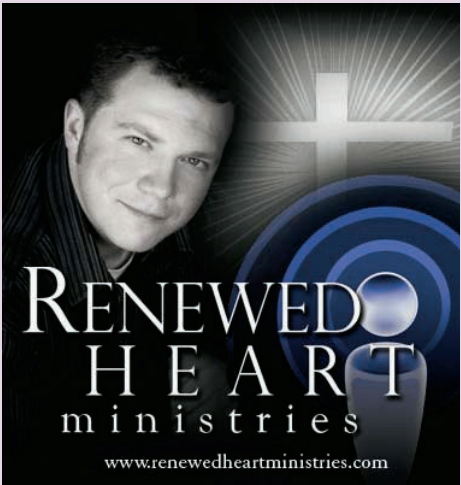
Weekly Podcasts

If you have not had a chance to take advantage of our weekly podcasts, I want to take this opportunity to recommend them to you. As with everything else we do, they are absolutely free and you can subscribe to them at:

www.renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts

Currently we are in the midst of a four-part, Christmas Podcast series entitled, *A Revolution Lying in a Manger*.

Happy Holidays!



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 a gospel of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, *"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."* (Luke 2:8-15)



MINISTRY UPDATE

Richland, Washington

This weekend I had the immense privilege of sharing at a church's annual retreat in Richland, Washington. This church is amazing in the sense that I rarely encounter a congregation that is so in touch with its surrounding community. For starters, Richland is the area that sadly, during World War II, was the home of eight or nine nuclear plants that refined the plutonium that comprised the bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki. Today, Richland is the home of much of the scientific research and development that takes place in the United States; Richland, therefore, is also the home of some really brilliant minds. Over the last twelve months, the church I was at last weekend has baptized four "PhD"-level atheists. That alone made me sit up and take notice and ask what this church was doing that was making this kind of an impact. After spending time with this church over the weekend, it all makes sense. This church "gets" how to reach post-moderns—and does it quite well.

I was invited to share our series titled "Illuminating Shadows." This is a four-presentation series on the challenge that many find in harmonizing the God we see through the lens of Jesus Christ with the

picture of God we get through the lens of the Old Testament. (This issue is not reconciling the God of the Old Testament with punitive justice. That's easy. The challenge is reconciling Him with the nonviolent Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as with that Jesus' teaching on restorative justice.) The neo-atheism of today is rooted in the subjects of this discussion. In our culture today, based on the Old Testament, many are claiming that God is a nationalistic, violent racist who is genocidal, misogynistic, homophobic, and in favor of slavery. Yet when we look at Jesus, if God is like Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3, John 14:9), we get an entirely, radically, different picture of God. This series is thought provoking, paradigm shifting and heartwarming all rolled into one. If you have ever wrestled with questions over the God of the Old Testament, then this series is for you.

I'll be posting it on our website later this week and sending out an email when it's available. Keep a lookout for it.

For all those who were praying for last weekend, thank you. Without your prayers and your support, we at Renewed Heart Ministries could not do what we do. Thank you for partnering with us in enlarging the reign of Christ, putting on display the radical beauty of God's character of love.