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Liberation Descending in the Form of a Dove

Posted on January 12, 2015

*The Liberation dove and
the difference between
nonviolence and peace.*

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

*"The cross places God in the
midst of crucified people, in the
midst of people who are hung,
shot, burned, and tortured"*

—James H. Cone

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9–11)

I'd like to invite you to step back into a world that revolved around Jerusalem within the first century, and to draw your attention to a few significant details in Mark's retelling of Jesus' baptism.

Especially focus on the spirit's descent in the form of a dove; Jesus's declaration of Sonship; and "the Voice's" declaration of love for Jesus, with whom he is "well pleased."

Some Observations

Let's first tackle this declaration of Sonship.

Jesus' favorite title for himself was the Son of Man. He uses this title for himself more than any other within the four canonical gospels. The roots of this title, and its apocryphal usage, go back to Daniel chapter 7. In Daniel 7:13–14 we find:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Jesus took this text, held dear by an oppressed people who themselves dreamed one day of world domination,^[1] and announced that he was this Son of Man finally come. However, the world he was bringing was going to look a little different to what the Jews had expected (more on this in a moment).

This is the cultural significance to a first century bestowal of the title "Son of God" within a Jewish context. The one declared to be "Son of God" would be the new king of Israel just like David of old. This was

the "Son of Man" who would be declared the king ("Son of God") of an everlasting kingdom. (Jesus, though, would even turn the notion of human hierarchies, including "kings" and "kingdoms," on their heads.^[2])

Notice the use of "Son of God" for the world-dominating King of Israel:

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed [David], saying, "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me [David], "You are my son; today I have begotten you." (Psalms 2:1–7, emphasis added)

Mark knows the political significance of what he is retelling. He pushes the point home even further by mentioning the phrase "with you I am well pleased." This, too, was a politically charged phrase within an apocryphal context. Notice the book of Daniel's point, which the foreign kings, through uncomfortable means, came to know:

And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the wild beasts of the field, and they shall feed thee with grass as an ox: and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High is Lord of the kingdom of men, and he will give it to whomsoever he shall please. (Daniel 4:29, LXX, emphasis added)

And he was driven forth from men; and his heart was given him after the nature of wild beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild ox, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven; until he knew that the most high God is Lord of the kingdom of men, and will give it to whomsoever he shall please. (Daniel 5:21, LXX, emphasis added)

Mark is ensuring that his audience does not miss the point when he calls Jesus the son of God. This is the return of the long-awaited king of Israel, the son of God, the one in whom God is pleased to give the kingdom.

Now comes the first twist in Mark. The spirit of the Lord descends on Jesus just as

cont'd on page 3

it did on the Judges of old who, according to the ancient stories, repeatedly delivered the Hebrew people from foreign oppressors.^[3] But rather than a violent portrayal, such as in the book of Judges, this delivering spirit of the Lord descends on this new “judge/deliverer” in the form of a nonviolent dove.

A Dove!

The Jesus narrative announces the arrival of a new world where humans are no longer going to practice dominance over other humans (much to the dismay of those who longed for the day when Jerusalem would rule the world^[4]), a world that will be birthed through the nonviolence of a dove.

I do not mean that this world will be born peacefully. No, this new world will not come in peace to the status quo. It will discomfort the status quo. It will challenge the status quo. It will even shame the status quo.^[5] This is a world that will turn the present world upside down.^[6] This is a world where those who are last in the present order of the world will be first, and those who have been privileged as first in the present order will be treated equally with the last.^[7] It will provoke the present order to pick up a sword to defend itself.^[8] Yet it will remain resolute. It will triumph over raised swords with dove-like nonviolence that will set the present order of things on fire.^[9]

And what hope does this deliverance, this liberation that comes in the form of a dove,

bring?

A new order. A new world. A new humanity where the presently marginalized, excluded, and oppressed are blessed while the insiders, the privileged, the powerful, and the advantaged are invited into an existence that is, at bare minimum, problematic for their current status quo (see Luke 6:20–26). This is a world where radical transformation is offered to oppressors, while radical liberation is offered to the oppressed. (Although it looks different to both, it genuinely is liberation for both those who are on top as well as those who are at the bottom.) This is a new world where privilege is not simply offered to those to whom it was previously denied, this is the arrival of a world no longer founded on the very principles of privilege and subordination. This is a humanity where, regardless of race, gender (male or female; cis or trans), wealth, education, or orientation, we see and embrace one another as part of ourselves. Each a beautiful reflection of the divine in a human kaleidoscope of wonder. No more us and them. We begin to discern how we are all siblings, all children of the same Creator, destined to sit around that same family table once again.

Mark’s Gospel does not begin with a Jesus who settles metaphysical, ontological, and cosmological debates. This is a Jesus who appears by a river along side of an announcement of the arrival of a new world where everyone is welcome, where everyone will be treated with equity

and justice, which will bring beautiful liberation descending in the form of a dove.

HeartGroup Application

A. This week I want you to contemplate the difference between peace and nonviolence. Yes, peace is the end goal. Yet, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is reported to have said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.” We must not mistake the disruption of the current order of things as somehow being a negative. The dove is nonviolent. Yet it does not come in peace to the present order. It seeks to subversively undo the present order. True, it would rather have its own blood shed than stain its hands with the blood of another, yet blood is shed—its own. Conflict between the present order and the new is where this path begins. And although the present order may place martyrs on crosses, the narrative doesn’t end there. The present order will melt in the fire of the radically (and sometimes counter intuitively) different ethic of the liberated new world proclaimed in the Jesus narrative.

B. Journal what you discover as you contemplate the difference between peace and nonviolence.

C. Share what you discover with your upcoming HeartGroup.

Till the only world that remains is a world where love reigns. Keep living in love, loving like Jesus.

I love each of you dearly.



^[1] “At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will” (Jeremiah 3:17). “In days to come the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it” (Isaiah 2:2).

^[2] “But he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves’” (Luke 22:25–26).

^[3] “The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and

MINISTRY UPDATE

The Jesus Dialogue Edmond Adventist Church Edmond, OK January 23-24, 2015

This past weekend I was in Edmond, Oklahoma. I gave two presentations in preparation for a week-long series I'll be giving in this church in March.

One of the things I appreciated was the deep resonance expressed by this church that we, as Christians, do not have it all together. We don't have all the answers. Yet we still believe that Jesus offers something of intrinsic worth to those who desire a world ordered not by domination, oppression, or privilege, but rather by Love; a world where we seek not the greatest good for the greatest number, but the greatest good for all.

This church has invited me to give a series in March where we, in humility, have as much to learn from and be

challenged by the teachings of Jesus as do those outside the "Christian" label. The teachings of Jesus, within a first-century Jewish paradigm, do hold universal truths that offer humanity wisdom toward the goal of a new human society.

Marcus Borg, who passed away this last week, once wrote:

"The point is not that Jesus was a good guy who accepted everybody, and thus we should do the same (though that would be good). Rather, his teachings and behavior reflect an alternative social vision. Jesus was not talking about how to be good and how to behave within the framework of a domination system. He was a critic of the domination system itself."

This church, although traditional and conventional by many standards, wants to move further toward discovering what it means to follow Jesus within the Jesus Narrative's context and along its trajectory, and its members want to invite others from the surrounding community to join them in this journey.

One of the things I found most exciting about this weekend was this church's openness to what we at Renewed

Heart Ministries call "HeartGroups." This series is not intended to simply funnel attendees into some type of "membership," but rather to lead them into small groups characterized by open, mutual sharing, where every person's story is heard and valued. It's what we at RHM refer to when we say "many voices, one new world."

I doubt that any of us really understand what we are signing up for when we, as Christians, actually start taking the teachings of Jesus seriously. For me, following Jesus certainly means much more today than it did 20 years ago. This is a church that wants to go further in understanding and following Jesus, and I'm excited to be a part of it.

Please hold this church up in prayer, especially from March 27 through April 4, as together we look more closely at what it may mean to follow the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the 21st century, till the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns.

Thank you, as much now as ever, for your support of Renewed Heart Ministries. Together we are making a tangible difference both right now and for hereafter.

Quotable Quotes

"Before every person there
marches an angel proclaiming,
"Behold, the image of God."

– Jewish Proverb



he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim" (Judges 3:1). "But the spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him" (6:34). "Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites" (11:29). "The spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol" (13:25). "The spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart barehanded as one might tear apart a kid. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done" (14:6). "Then the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house" (14:19). "When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands" (15:14).

^[4] "But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves'" (Luke 22:25–26).

^[5] "And if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well" (Matthew 5:40).

^[6] "When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also'" (Acts 17:6).

^[7] "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those

hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:8–15).

^[8] "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34–38).

^[9] "Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11–12). "For everyone will be salted with fire" (Mark 9:49). "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49)! ■

Testimony

"I send this response to encourage you to continue to do what you are doing. Your voice is causing people to rethink their long held beliefs and opinions. Your research and writings are causing folks to wake up and to have to wrestle with these issues. To reexamine what Jesus was and is all about. I know you have gotten a lot of pushback over this past year that has been hurtful and discouraging. You are challenging peoples assumptions and that causes pushback. Please don't stop. Please don't stop. Please don't stop. Please don't stop.

A few years ago, Shane Claiborne signed his book for my daughter. He wrote "*continue in Acts of Love and Holy Mischief*". One of the greatest quotes ever. May 2015 be a year where you continue with your acts of love and holy mischief..." – **R.F.**



Small Losses (Griefs Not Observed)

by Rom Wilder

We've all seen the comic strip of Linus and his security blanket...the pitiful pictures of the blanket in the dryer while Linus sits ...watching...waiting for it to once again be in his hands. I'm sure Linus couldn't give you all the reasons why his blanket is important to him, and what I find so wonderful is that he doesn't have to. Children are usually allowed to have what seem to be unreasonable needs and fears ...and they're usually allowed to express them. A healthy small child will scream or cry if you take away what matters to him.

The difficulty comes later...when we have absorbed all the unwritten laws of our culture that tell us as adults we really ought to be reasonable about our needs and fears and we ought not to scream and cry when we lose something. Because of the burying of feelings, many of us find ourselves not only without a way to show our grief, but also without the ability to recognize the losses.

We have memorial services when someone dies, a gathering for rituals which heal more than we could guess, but we have no cathartic rituals to mourn the loss of jobs, homes, or relationships...much less the losses that come with age. There is no gathering of loved ones to mourn with you your inability to run up the stairs, no hymn of comfort for you when you give up your car and driver's license. If your beloved is dying you might get extra hugs of support from your friends, but who weeps with you when you can no longer write letters



or weed your garden.

I see brave people daily - people who courageously graduate from a cane to a walker, who struggle to hear a simple conversation, who shyly ask a clerk to double bag their purchases so that nobody will be able to read through the thin plastic those reassuring names: Depends, Attends, or Serenity. There is no rite of passage when you're losing control of your bladder, but it's a loss and people grieve it, one way or another.

After my father died I found myself brushing my teeth longer and more thoroughly than I ever had. For weeks I wondered what was behind this "ritual" I was performing each morning. Sometimes it made me late to work. I was almost ready to call a shrink when I realized what

was happening. This was something over which I had complete control. I had no control over my father's death. I had no control over all the feelings surrounding his death, but I did have control over how I brushed my teeth. Now when I find myself brushing my teeth longer than usual, I listen...to the things inside of me...to hear what it is I feel I've lost control of.

A few years ago I found a card which said: THERE HAVE BEEN NO DRAGONS IN MY LIFE, ONLY SMALL SPIDERS AND STEPPING IN GUM...I COULD HAVE COPEd WITH DRAGONS.

It seems to me it is the small losses, the daily blows, which wear us down. There don't seem to be appropriate or acceptable ways to grieve those "small" losses.

We Americans take great pride in our Melting Pot mentality, but in melting down the unique rituals, ceremonies, and rites of passage, we have robbed ourselves of healthy release and relief.

Too many people are hurting from losses which we don't know how to confirm, affirm, or handle. Maybe it is time for us to reinvent the wheel...time to gather ourselves together to share and grieve these losses. Maybe it's time to pour some of the melted rituals into new and meaningful molds...molds of acceptable and healing ways to express the feelings we've so carefully denied or controlled. Whether we actually do this alone or in groups, it is important to find ways of healing those gashes in our hearts and psyche where something has been taken away from us...where we've lost what once was so much a part of the person we considered ourselves to be.

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Testimonies

"Renewed Heart has shown me that there is a solution to ALL problems. Everything from war to hate has the same solution. JESUS is the role model. Yes, it is that simple! That's the good news! I've learned that my views of my Father had been distorted and He even loves my guts! That's consoling." - **MB**

"RHM has shown me that God is a Father I can trust! Thank you Herb! Still smiling seven years later! Still sleeping peacefully every night!" - **CC**

"God bless RHM. We are so thankful for your work in sharing the love of Jesus with us. RHM is a ministry that facilitates change in others as they encounter Jesus' love. From all the way back to when RHM first started to these most recent publications, we

have been so truly blessed. Thank you for all you do." - **KF**

"The picture of God I continue to get from you and this ministry is changing my life. Thank you so much." - **D**

"I appreciate RHM so much. It is vital that we see a God who looks like Jesus because we become the God we see. Thank you Herb!" - **E**

The Pre-Constantine Church:

"And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? And shall he apply the chain, and the prison, and the torture, and the punishment, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs?" – Tertullian¹

"Anyone who has the power of the sword, or who is a civil magistrate wearing the purple, should desist, or he should be rejected." – Hippolytus²

"We no longer take up sword against nation, nor do we learn war any more, but we have become the children of peace." – Origen³

"Rather, it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it. We would rather shed our own blood than stain our hands and our conscience with that of another." – Arnobius⁴

"It makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited." – Lactantius⁵

"In disarming Peter, Christ disarmed every soldier" – Tertullian⁶

"When God forbids killing, he doesn't just ban murder, which is not permitted under the law even; he is also recommending us not to do certain things which are treated as lawful among men...whether you kill a man with a sword or a word makes no difference, since killing itself is banned⁷...no exceptions at all ought to be made to the rule that it is always wrong to kill a man, whom God has wished to be regarded as a sacrosanct creature." – Lactantius⁸

¹ Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol III, Tertullian; Part 1, Chapter 11

² The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus; Part 2, 16.

³ Against Celsus 5.33 ANF 4.558

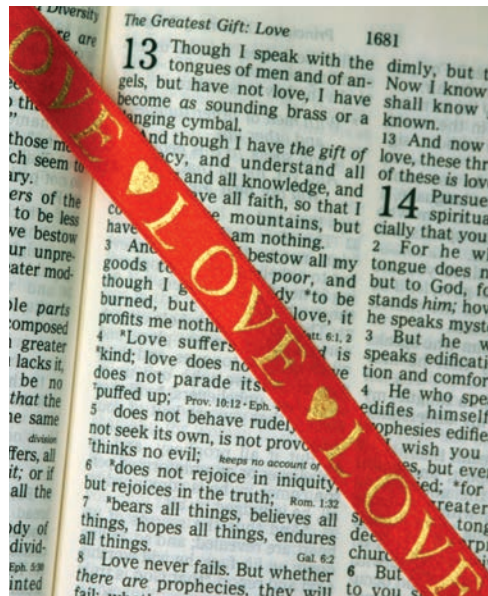
⁴ Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 6, p. 415

⁵ Divine Institutes, 6:20

⁶ De Idolatria 19 ANF 3.73

⁷ Whether today you agree or disagree, for three hundred years it was viewed as inconsistent to be both part of Jesus' movement and participate in Rome's militia or hold a political office in the Roman Empire.

⁸ Divine Institutes, 6.20.15-17



If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Quotable Quotes

"The Christian community, therefore, is that community that freely becomes oppressed, because they know that Jesus himself has defined humanity's liberation in the context of what happens to the little ones. Christians join the cause of the oppressed in the fight for justice not because of some philosophical principle of "the Good" or because of a religious feeling of sympathy for people in prison. Sympathy does not change the structures of injustice. The authentic identity of Christians with the poor is found in the claim which the Jesus-encounter lays upon their own life-style, a claim that connects the word "Christian" with the liberation of the poor. Christians fight not for humanity in general but for themselves and out of their love for concrete human beings."

–James H. Cone;
The God of the Oppressed





Featured Presentation



There's a lot of talk and debate presently concerning Jesus' teachings on nonviolence. In the wake of films such as *Selma* and *American Sniper*, heated discussions have been generated within Christian circles, some on the side of justified violence, others on the side of nonviolent, direct action. Jesus' nonviolence was not rooted in kindness as much as it was rooted

in enemy love. It's a confrontational, noncooperative nonviolence that seeks through various means to win oppressors away from their own entrapment in injustice while empowering and equipping the oppressed to reassert their humanity and worth. It's a force more powerful when one truly grasps what the Jesus of Matthew, Mark and Luke was offering those who are being dominated and subordinated by others. If you would like to pursue Jesus' teachings on nonviolent enemy love as a way, not simply of liberating the oppressed, but also redeeming oppressors, we'd like to offer you this month's featured presentation—*The Way of Peace* by Herb Montgomery.

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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Schedule

MARCH 6 - 8, 2015

Waterloo Adventist Church
Waterloo, IA
319.233.2926

MARCH 27 - APRIL 5, 2015

Edmond Adventist Church
Edmond, OK
405.478.4401

APRIL 24 - 26, 2015

Redeeming Grace
Fellowship Campmeeting
Nags Head, NC
413.325.3648