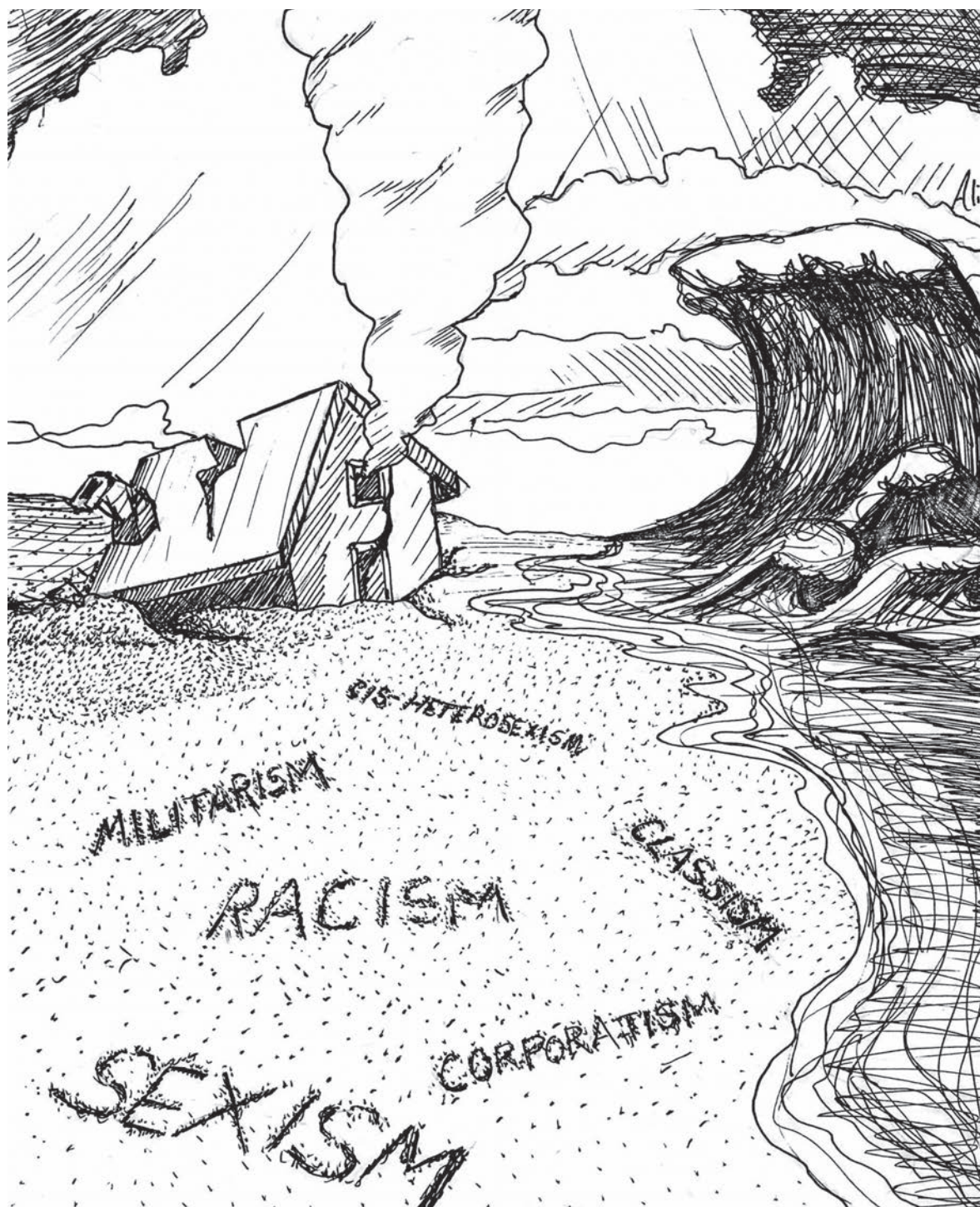




αwakenings

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: April 2017 ::::



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Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

“Everyone hearing my words and acting on them is like a person who built one’s house on bedrock; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew and pounded that house, and it did not collapse, for it was founded on bedrock. And everyone, who hears my words, and does not act on them, is like a person who built one’s house on the sand; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew, and battered that house, and promptly it collapsed, and its fall, was devastating.” (Q 6:47-49)

Companion Texts:

Matthew 7:24-27: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Luke 6:47-49: “As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

The gospels of Matthew and Luke each incorporate this saying into the climax of their accounts of Jesus’s wisdom teachings. Matthew lists it as the last teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and Luke includes it at the end of the Sermon on the Plain. This saying is not part of the

Gospel of Thomas, however. And there’s a good reason why not.

A Little Background

Stephen J. Patterson makes a pretty compelling case that the Gospel of Thomas belonged to the region of Edessa (see *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins*.) The imagery in this saying referenced the geography of Jerusalem and the literal foundation on which Herod’s Temple was built. That imagery would have had no relevance for people who valued the teachings of Jesus, but lived in Edessa rather than Jerusalem.

Bedrock

The temple mount (rock or “foundation stone”) was highly regarded during the time of Jesus. In the Tanchuma (a Roman-Era Midrash), we read this poem:

“As the navel is set in the centre of the human body,
so is the land of Israel the navel of the world...
situated in the centre of the world,
and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel,
and the sanctuary in the centre of Jerusalem,
and the holy place in the centre of the sanctuary,
and the ark in the centre of the holy place,
and the Foundation Stone before the holy place,
because from it the world was founded.”

—Tanchuma (Emphasis added.)

So this saying borrows from the safety and security that the culture had invested in the temple even before their exile in Babylon. If we go back to Jeremiah, we find the community using the temple for a sense of security or safety:

Jeremiah 7:3-11: “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do

cont’d on page 3

Houses Built on Rock or Sand

Originally Posted Online on May 6, 2016

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“Everyone hearing my words and acting on them is like a person who built one’s house on bedrock; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew and pounded that house, and it did not collapse, for it was founded on bedrock. And everyone, who hears my words, and does not act on them, is like a person who built one’s house on the sand; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew, and battered that house, and promptly it collapsed, and its fall, was devastating.”

– (Q 6:47-49)

Houses... cont'd from page 2

not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things?" Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the LORD."

In Jeremiah's time, people were deeply violating social justice and yet believed themselves to be safe from God's judgment simply because they possessed his temple. A "den of robbers" is not a place where robbery is committed but where robbers retreat afterwards to safely count their loot. This was how Jeremiah saw the temple: it had become a place that provided the powerful with safety and security while they continued to rob the poor.

The details were different by the time of Jesus, but the principles were very similar. Once again, the temple had become the center of a political, economic, and religious system that was exploiting the poor, and, once again, this temple was the foundation on which many built their trust and sense of security.

Josephus' writings show just how much people valued Herod's temple. A perpetual sacrifice kept the fire on the temple altar always burning. Even during the Roman-Jewish War of 66-69 C.E., and the siege and razing of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., priests kept the temple fire burning by maintaining a sacrifice on the altar, thus assuring Jerusalem, obstinate in the face of the city burning down around them, that they would emerge victorious in the face of the Roman siege. They kept the fire burning to

honor their interpretation of Leviticus 6:13: "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out" (see also 2 Maccabees 1:19-22). The temple's ever-burning flame in worship to YHWH symbolized continually maintained Divine favor, even during that last war.

"The darts that were thrown by the engines came with that force, that they went over all the buildings and the Temple itself, and fell upon the priests and those that were about the sacred offices; insomuch that many persons who came thither with great zeal from the ends of the earth to offer sacrifices at this celebrated place, which was esteemed holy by all mankind, fell down before their own sacrifices themselves, and sprinkled that altar which was venerable among all men, both Greeks and barbarians, with their own blood. The dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of the priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves." (*The Lamentation of Josephus; War 5.1.4 19-20*, emphasis added.)

This cultural history sheds light on why Jesus's attempts to halt the daily sacrifices when he cleared the temple of merchants were so offensive, and it also explains why Emperor Titus didn't just aim to subjugate Jerusalem when he ordered the city razed, but also sought to destroy the temple itself. The morale, the optimism, the assurance of Divinely affirmed victory among the Jewish people, in their revolt, had to be extinguished.

In the saying we're considering this week, Jesus is standing in the critical tradition of the prophet Jeremiah. He is being very Jewish! As well as encouraging fidelity to YHWH, Jesus is calling his audience to prioritize practicing social justice [his ethical teachings] over mere possessing religious objects.

Today, some Christians need the same reminder. We may not have a temple, but we might have a pet doctrine that we

think sets us apart from other members of the human family, a belief that makes God regard us as exceptional. Yet both Jeremiah and Jesus state that we should rather emphasize justice for the foreigners among us, those who are vulnerable in our socioeconomic, political and religious order, and the innocent being exploited by privileged people. In the patriarchy of Jeremiah's and Jesus' culture, this focus would have meant serving the "fatherless" and the "widow." We must rightly discern who are the vulnerable in our order, today, and, like Jesus, stand with and work along side of them.

Jesus uses this saying to center his teachings rather than the trusted sacred temple. Perhaps Jesus also wanted us to regard his teachings as sacred as the temple and the rock beneath it that his audience revered.

Weathering A Coming Storm

Jesus grew up in the wake of political insurrections by various Jewish factions after Herod's death, and I believe he knew all too well the result of armed revolt against Rome. Josephus describes how Rome squelched liberation movements in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The most immediate example when Jesus was a child would have been the destruction of Sepphoris, a town a few miles north of Nazareth, in 4 BCE. Josephus writes:

"In Sepphoris also, a city of Galilee, there was one Judas (the son of that arch-robber Hezekias, who formerly overran the country, and had been subdued by king Herod); this man got no small multitude together, and brake open the place where the royal armor was laid up, and armed those about him, and attacked those that were so earnest to gain the dominion. (*Jewish War; 2.4.1*)

Rome's action was swift. A portion of the army went to Sepphoris where they "took the city Sepphoris,

[cont'd on page 5](#)





Spirit Alive

**Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
February 10-11, 2017**

In February of this year, I joined friends of mine in Oshawa Canada for a weekend of presentations sponsored by Spirit Alive, a faith-based nonprofit that engages the work of aiding those who have been pushed to the underside and margins of society.

I gave three presentations:

Here and Now

Jesus's gospel was good news to the poor, the oppressed, the disinherited. It was not post-mortem, other-world good news. It was good news here; good news now. We must critique versions of Christianity that are radically privatized and/or intentionally removed from societal change. We must also critique interpretations of Jesus' teachings that are opiates for the vulnerable and encourage present day followers of Jesus to be passive in the face of injustice. Jesus's gospel was simple: it was people taking care of people in the here and in the now.

The Myth of Redemptive Suffering

We must question the value of the suffering of the oppressed in oppressed-oppressor confrontations. We must be careful in our embrace of nonviolence not to mistakenly also advocate passive acceptance of abuse. This is done when we teach that suffering is redemptive. This myth replaces Jesus' preferential option for the oppressed with a preferential option for evildoers. It makes victims the servants of the evildoer's salvation. It is not the suffering of victims that helps evil doers see their ways. It is their resistance even in the face of threatened suffering, their refusal to be passive, that

calls evildoers to make a choice. It is not the acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life, in spite of the consequences, that gives life. The question is not are we willing to suffer? It is do we desire fully to live? Will we maintain our demand for justice and our hold on life even when threatened with a "cross?" This distinction is subtle. And I have not always understood this. I have found that it makes all the difference in how Jesus followers interpret and respond to injustice.

The Gospel of Jesus

What did Jesus actually teach? What was the gospel of Jesus? There is a radical difference between a gospel about Jesus and the gospel Jesus himself taught. A gospel about Jesus is too often focused on attaining post-mortem heaven, guilt alleviation, or privatized and individual spirituality. The teachings of Jesus were good news to the poor, the marginalized, the underside of his own society. He announced the reign of God had arrived! He taught this arrival made itself manifest in people's commitment to one another—people taking care of people. His gospel was the call to place people over profit, property, privilege, and power.

The first representation and the last presentation were recorded. The second presentation, I'm sorry, was given in a the living room of a house church and was not. For a presentation very similar to the second, you can listen to a presentation titled *Jesus Interrupted* that I shared in the Glendale City Church last fall. (See Glendale City Church 2016, renewedheartministries.com/presentation/Glendale-City-Church-2016)

Thank you, Spirit Alive, for inviting me to participate in such a wonderful weekend with you. And to each of you who attended, both old friends as well as those of you I met for the very first time, I so enjoyed our time together. The discussions were rich and the our interactions gave me a lot of hope for the future. Thank you, each of you, for your commitment to the work of making our world a safer, more compassionate, and just home for all. I look forward to the next time our paths cross.

For those who could not be there, you can listen to presentations one and three at: renewedheartministries.com/presentation/Spirit-Alive

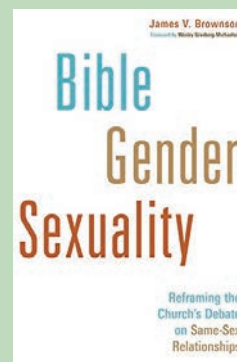
RHM's 2017 Annual Reading Course Book for April

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships

by James V. Brownson

"Grapples conscientiously with biblical texts at the heart of the church's debate over same-sex relationships.

This thought provoking book by James Brownson develops a broad, cross-cultural sexual ethic from Scripture, locates



current debates over homosexuality in that wider context, and explores why the Bible speaks the way it does about same-sex relationships.

Fairly presenting both sides in this polarized debate—"traditional" and "revisionist"—Brownson conscientiously analyzes all of the pertinent biblical texts and helpfully identifies "stuck points" in the ongoing debate. In the process, he explores key concepts that inform our understanding of the biblical texts, including patriarchy, complementarity, purity and impurity, honor and shame. Central to his argument is the need to uncover the moral logic behind the text.

Written in order to serve and inform the ongoing debate in many denominations over the questions of homosexuality, Brownson's in-depth study will prove a useful resource for Christians who want to form a considered opinion on this important issue."

Houses... cont'd from page 3

and burnt it, and made slaves of its inhabitants." (Ibid., 2.5.1) The rest of the army moved through Samaria and on to Jerusalem, burning and plundering any town or village that posed a threat. Once at Jerusalem, they attacked those who had "been the authors of this commotion...they caught great numbers of them, those that appeared to have been the least concerned in these tumults [Syrian governor Varus] put into custody, but such as were the most guilty he crucified; these were in number about two thousand." (2.5.2)

Two thousand were crucified. Stop and ponder the magnitude of that number for a moment. Two thousand. Rome's practice in responding to revolts and insurgencies is reflected in the speech Tacitus attributed to Calgacus decades later:

"...The yet more terrible Romans, from whose oppression escape is vainly sought by obedience and submission. Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a desert and call it peace." (*Agricola* 29-38)

"They make a desert and call it peace." This description adds a haunting nuance to Jesus's saying, "Take up your cross and follow me."

Josephus tells that after Governor Varus put down the uprisings at Sepphoris and Jerusalem, "he returned to Antioch" (2.5.3).

So this was the political environment Jesus grew up in. Jesus wouldn't have needed supernatural talent to listen to the spirit of Jewish, violent, anti-Roman sentiment and see where it all would lead.

I believe that Jesus was endeavoring to prevent this end by offering those around him a different course, a different "way" (see Matthew 7:12-14). Even if the end he foresaw could not be avoided, even if Jerusalem was too far gone, Jesus contrasted his teachings and alternate way with the "rock" the temple was built upon. The message to his own community was

that only his teachings could intrinsically assure them of weathering the political storm ahead.

This leads me to one of the central questions of my own journey. Through everything I have experienced and learned over the years, I cannot shake the question of whether the teachings of Jesus, distilled from their first century Jewish/Roman context and applied to the social storms of our day, could liberate us as they liberated his 1st Century followers. Of course the details and contexts are different. But when I consider his teachings on nonviolence as opposed to violent revolution, his teachings on mutual aid and resource-sharing, his teachings about getting "loose" from an opponent while you are "on the way" (Q 12:58-59), all of these teachings show me a narrow path of survival on the way to the ultimate hope of a new human society, what King called A Beloved Community. In the Beloved Community, the human family has learned to relate to one another in a very different fashion than was practiced in the first century or is practiced today.

First, we must understand what Jesus said in his 1st Century, Jewish, sociopolitical, economic, and religious context. Then comes the hard work of distilling the principles behind his statements. And lastly we must rightly apply and practice those principles today. Rightly applying the principles and teachings of Jesus may be the hardest part in this process.

So again, for all of you who believe the sayings of Jesus have intrinsic value in informing the nonviolent confrontation, liberation, and transformation of our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all, and for all of you who are working hard in your own way toward this end, I hope our Saying this week encourages you. We have a societal storm on the horizon as Jesus's first followers did. In our practice, let's build on bedrock and not sand.

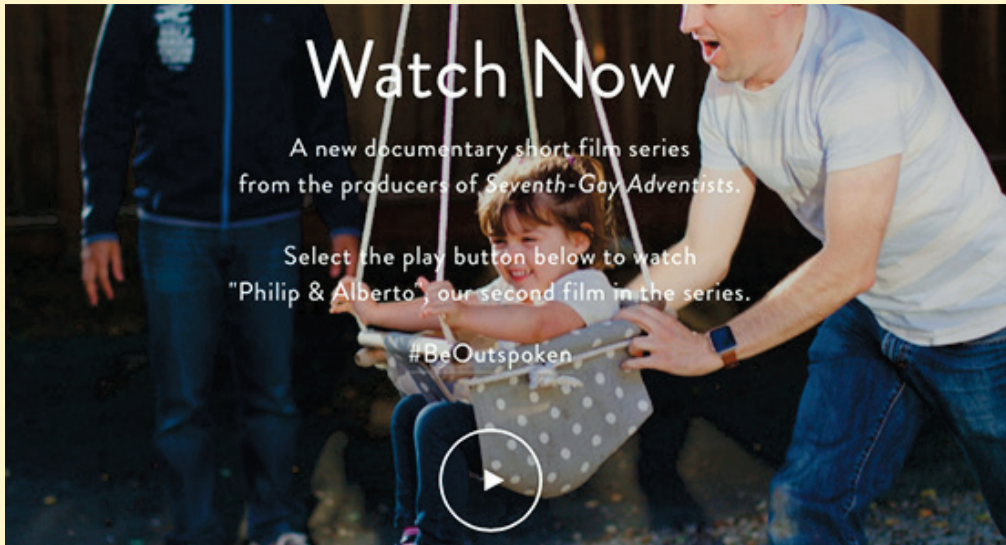
"Everyone hearing my words and acting on them is like a person who built one's house on bedrock; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew and pounded that house, and

cont'd on page 6



We must be willing to learn (as well as unlearn) of the indiscriminate **value** of each other if we are ever to achieve **liberation** from the way of domination, subjugation and exploitation.

www.renewedheartministries.com



Philip & Alberto Watchfire films

We are pleased to be partnering with Watchfire Films again this month to announce the second installment of the Outspoken series.

#BeOutspoken
#AdventistAndGay
#GodLovesMeAndImGay

From the producers:
"We're thrilled to share the next 'Outspoken' segment. This one features Philip and Alberto, an incredible couple who are deeply devoted to their faith, their church, and their daughter, who they are committed to raising Adventist.

They loved growing up Adventist.

They both grew up typically Adventist, and they loved their childhood family memories that revolved around their local church, potlucks, Pathfinders, and Wednesday night meetings. When they started dating their senior year of college, they started talking about

having children on their second date. They always knew they wanted kids, and they always knew they wanted to raise those children Adventist. As they say in this piece, it was partly because it was the culture of their family and how they grew up, but it's also what they believe in. When friends from an LGBT-friendly denomination ask them why they put up with many of the small (and occasionally large) slights that they do in the Adventist church instead of going to another denomination, their response is, 'But we're Adventists. We can't just change that like you change a pair of shoes.'

They have remarkable resilience and grace.

Philip and Alberto's remarkable resilience and grace for their church is one reason why we wanted to share their story. They know that they are likely the only Adventist gay dads that most of the people at their local church know, and so they have to bear witness—gently and patiently. They

believe that one day their regular presence will help those who might tolerate them but not approve of them will help that group of fellow Adventists realize that they have much more in common than not. They are an Adventist family much like any other.

They aren't expecting everyone to agree or share the same theological hermeneutic, but they believe in seeking Christ together and just ask that their fellow church members let them and God talk about their sexuality. Their sexuality doesn't have anything to do with them being able to seek to love and follow Jesus along with their church. And Dalia, their adorable daughter, is growing up with all of the rituals and traditions her dads did in the church. In fact, while they were initially really scared to go to church with her because there's no way to be anonymous when it's clear they are both her parents, she's actually opened a lot of doors and brought them closer to church.

Their way of being outspoken is simply by continuing to show up—with kindness and patience—and be counted.

Please watch their story and hear them in their own words at:

<http://www.watchfirefilms.com/outspoken>

And please find ways to share this story in your own circle. Sharing on social media is great, and you doing so always helps those watching (some of whom you may not even realize are watching) know that you are a safe person who cares about this intersection of faith and sexuality."

Houses... cont'd from page 5

it did not collapse, for it was founded on bedrock. And everyone, who hears my words, and does not act on them, is like a person who built one's house on the sand; and the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew, and battered that house, and promptly it collapsed, and its fall, was devastating."

Q 6:47-49)

HeartGroup Application

This week, I'd like you to:

1. Pick out one of the Sayings of Jesus that you have experimented with over the past few months. (If you don't have one, stop here, pick one, and begin experimenting.)
2. Reflect: How has your life changed from this practice? How have others' lives changed from your practice?

3. Identify the impact. What have been the positive results of your practice? What have been the negative fall outs? Discuss these outcomes with your HeartGroup in the upcoming week.

To each of you out there who are endeavoring to "put into practice" the teachings of the historical Jesus, keep living in love, till the only world that remains is a world where only love reigns. ■

Monthly Budget Goal:

\$15,834.00

February's Contributions:

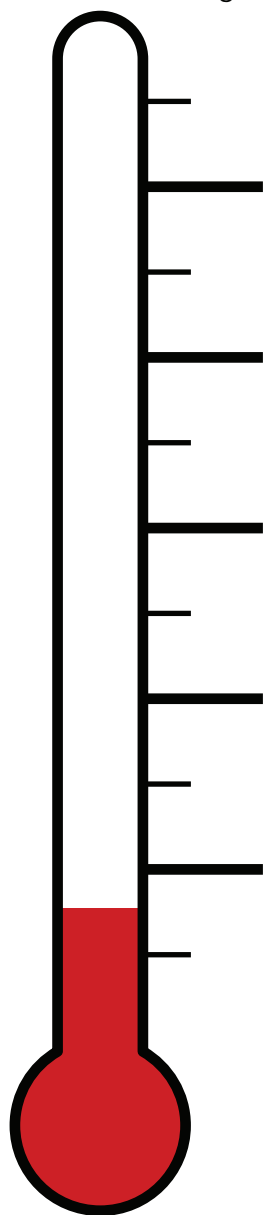
\$8,943.79

YTD Budget: \$31,668.00

YTD Received: \$21,242.09

GOAL: \$190,000

2017 Annual Budget



Appalachian Jesus

A New Series On RHM's Website!

This February in Stanley, VA I also had the pleasure of presenting a new series rooted in an Appalachian theology of liberation entitled Appalachian Jesus.

Luke's gospel summarizes Jesus's teachings as "good news to the poor." (Luke 4:18) If the Gospel Christians teach today is not first and foremost good news to the poor then we have to, at bare minimum, ask ourselves if our Jesus is the same one as the one in the story. Here in Appalachia we have some of the most startling statistics in the United States. Entire counties within Appalachia have the lowest life expectancy rates in the nation. We have some of the lowest education rates in the nation; counties where less than half of the population finishes high school and only 5% of the adult population go on to finish some level of college. In a nation that touts being the wealthiest country in history we cannot ignore that over 43 million live in poverty. In Appalachia, we are home to counties where over half the county lives below the poverty line. This is a region of the country where unemployment reaches record highs, drug addiction is an epidemic, and our schools continue to struggle from not receiving adequate funding. For one out of every four children in my state, the only meals these children receive

are the meals they eat at school.

Gustavo Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation*, wrote, "But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labor and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order."

The three presentations in this series are:

Jesus's Gospel
Appalachian Jesus
Upside Down Tables and Hope

You can listen to this series at:

renewedheartministries.com/presentation/Appalachian-Jesus

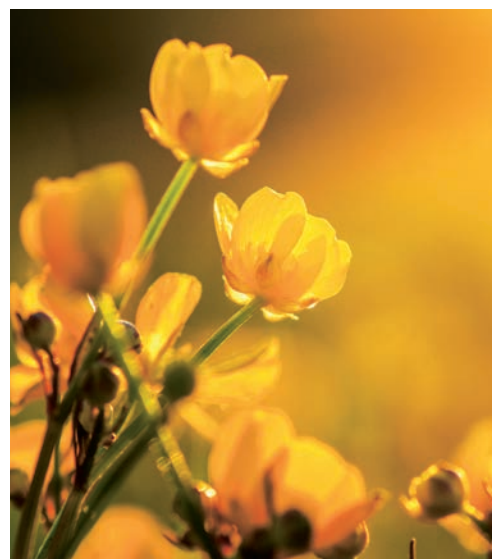


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Thanks in advance. Every little bit helps.



Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we do in various venues. If you'd like to support our work you can make a one-time gift or become one of our monthly contributors by going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking the donate tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily give away to other not-for-profits who are making both systemic and personal differences, significant differences, in lives of those not presently benefited but the status quo.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.

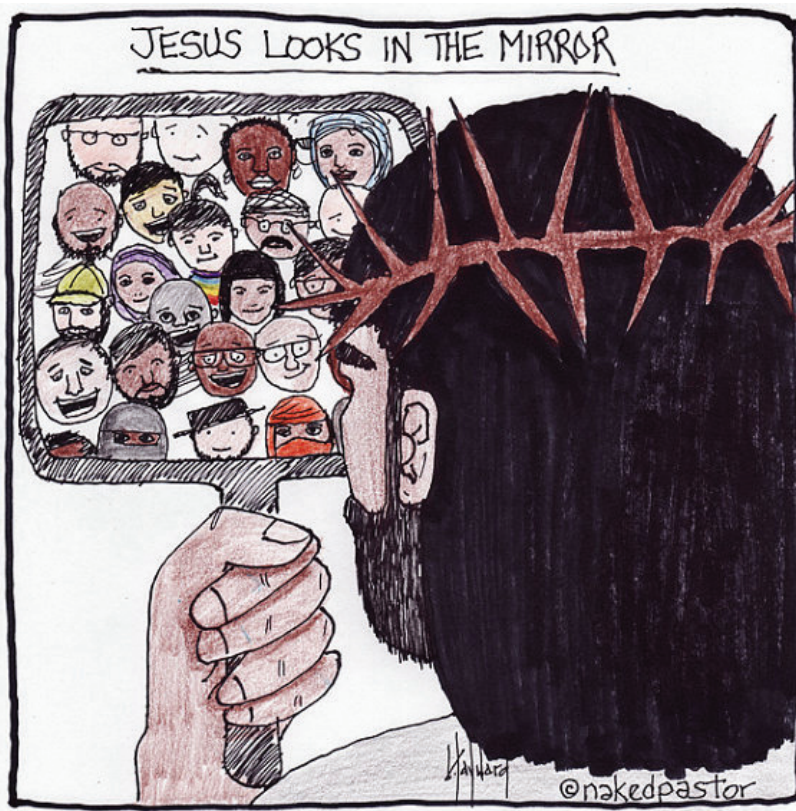


RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

Luke's gospel summarizes Jesus's teachings as "good news to the poor." (Luke 4:18) If the Gospel Christians teach today is not first and foremost good news to the poor then we have to, at bare minimum, ask ourselves if our Jesus is the same one as the one in the story. Here in Appalachia we have some of the most startling statistics in the United States. Entire counties within Appalachia have the lowest life expectancy rates in the nation. We have some of the lowest education rates in the nation. In a nation that touts being the wealthiest country in history we cannot ignore that over 43 million live in poverty. In Appalachia, we are home to counties where over half the county lives below the poverty line. This is a region where unemployment reaches record highs, drug addiction is an epidemic, and our schools continue to struggle from not receiving adequate funding. For one out of every four children in my state, the only meals they receive are the meals they eat at school.

Jesus' gospel places before our imaginations what this new human society could look like, if we choose it. This month we are featuring the second presentation in this new series—**Appalachian Jesus** by Herb Montgomery



Schedule

APRIL 28-29, 2017

Rehoboth Kinship
Mini-Kampmeeting
Rehoboth Beach, DE, USA
304.530.0030

MAY 12 - 14, 2017

Chambersburg Adventist Church
Chambersburg, PA, USA
717.491.7990

JUNE 2 - 4, 2017

McMinnville SDA Church
McMinnville, OR, USA
503.434.9422