



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Awakenings

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: March 2018 ::::



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Herb Montgomery

Gun Culture, School Shootings, Racial Disparity, Militarized Police and Jesus

by Herb Montgomery
March 1, 2018



Photo credit: Bodyguard Blanket

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

Matthew 26:52

Last week, as Crystal and I drove our kids and the kids we carpool with to school, these children had a conversation on the best escape routes at their schools in case a gunman showed up at their school and began firing.

Stop and let that sink in.

Instead of chatting about an upcoming test, a high school sports game, or an after-school event, they were talking about what they could do to stay alive if a shooter showed up at their school.

This is not the world I want my kids to be growing up in.

And I believe another world is possible.

Gun Culture and School Shootings

In *Splendid Literarium: A Treasury of Stories, Aphorisms, Poems, and Essays*, the author, Aberjhani, eloquently states: “Democracy is not simply a license to indulge individual whims and proclivities. It is also holding oneself accountable to some reasonable degree for the conditions of peace and chaos that impact the lives of those who inhabit one’s beloved

extended community.”

The two words that jump out at me from Aberjhani’s statement are “accountable” and “reasonable.” Community involves balancing individual rights and the well being of community. The tension between these two can be challenging. Our context this week, though, is protecting the lives of our children.

I want to echo what Deshanne Stokes tweeted last June after a mass shooting in Virginia: “Violence isn’t a Democrat or Republican problem. It’s an American problem, requiring an American solution.” (<https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/8-wounded-in-lawndale-shooting/>)

Violence is a Left versus Right debate. Both sides of the aisle should be motivated to ensure no more children die.

My country, the U.S., is obsessed with guns. Many people in my own neighborhood value their individual rights to own guns over the lives of our community’s children. This is not hyperbole.

As Emma Gonzalez, Parkland High School shooting survivor, said in her now-famous speech on February 17, 2018 in Fort Lauderdale, FL:

“I read something very powerful [today]. It was from the point of view of a teacher. And I quote: ‘When adults tell me, “I have the right to own a gun,” all I can hear is “My right to own

Quotable Quotes

“In Jesus Christ, God disarmed himself. God surrendered himself without protection and without arms to those who keep crying for more and more protection and arms. In Jesus Christ, God renounced violence. And of course, he did this unilaterally, without waiting for us to lay down our weapons first.”

– Dorothee Solle;
Of War and Lovenon

a gun outweighs your students' right to live." All I can hear is "Mine, mine, mine, mine." (Speech Transcript)

The loudest voices right now in my neighborhood promoting individual gun rights are Christians. Two years ago I stood across the aisle from many of these people as our town debated an inclusive non-discrimination ordinance. Then, they wore t-shirts and held signs about bathrooms and keeping children safe. So it resonated with me last week when Dana Simpson tweeted: "Hearing Republicans say that, look, massacres of kids are very sad, but we just can't limit people's basic freedoms is weird if you're a trans person who's been listening to a years-long debate about whether you need to be banned from public bathrooms TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE." (<https://twitter.com/MizDanaClaire/status/964586682719748096>)

It seems that keeping children safe is only a concern for some Christians when that serves their personal biases or prejudices. Studies debunk the bathroom myth yet mass shootings are becoming commonplace. Mass shootings now so common in schools that some entrepreneurs are seeing an opportunity to capitalize on them. According to *Business Insider*, you can now purchase a school nap time pad/blanket for your small child that doubles as a bullet proof shield.

Really?

Do we really value the lives of the children in our community that little? Gun regulations can operate just like speed limits, car inspections, and driver licensing. We title and tag cars at each sale and mandate universal driver education and training. My younger daughter is studying for her driving test presently. She must complete a written test and also sit behind a wheel and demonstrate her ability to drive a car safely. My other daughter has to wear her glasses when she drives. All of us must carry liability insurance, and here in West Virginia, we must have our cars inspected every year, too. All of these rules exist and anyone who complies with them can still have and drive their car. Yet the rules drive home the point that when you drive a car, you share the road with everyone else, with others who would like to stay alive themselves and keep their children alive.

Gun regulations do work. Australia is a good example. (<https://www.factcheck.org/2017/10/gun-control-australia-updated/>)

More than 130 other studies offer powerful evidence that common sense gun regulations do save lives. (See <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientific-evidence-that-stricter-gun-control-works-saves-lives>)

In *Another Day in the Death of America: A Chronicle of Ten Short Lives*, Gary Younge states,

"So long as you have a society with a lot of guns—and America has more guns per capita than any other country in the world—children will be at risk of being shot. The questions are how much risk, and what, if anything, is being done to minimize it? If one thinks of various ways in which commonplace items, from car seats to medicine bottle tops, have been child-proofed, it's clear that society's general desire has been to eliminate as many potential dangers from children as possible, even when the number of those who might be harmed is relatively small. If one child's death is preventable, then the proper question isn't "Why should we do this" but rather "Why shouldn't we?" It would be strange for that principle to apply to everything but guns."

Adam Winkler argues that even the Wild West had more gun regulations than many of our states do today. "When you entered a frontier town, you were legally required to leave your guns at the stables on the outskirts of town or drop them off with the sheriff, who would give you a token in exchange. You checked your guns then like you'd check your overcoat today at a Boston restaurant in winter. Visitors were welcome, but their guns were not." (*Did the Wild West Have More Gun Control Than We Do Today?* See also Ross Collins' *Gun Control and the Old West*)

Racial Disparity and the Militarization of the Police

This is not just a current news topic. It's also an area where we can apply the teachings of Jesus. A key part of living out the shared table philosophy with a preferential option for the vulnerable that Jesus' modeled is learning to listen to other vulnerable voices around the table. Children are not the only vulnerable people involved in the gun control debate. White, straight, cisgender, paranoid males raised in an environment of toxic masculinity and claiming that they're being oppressed and their right to own assault weapons are being infringed are not vulnerable in this world.

But gun regulations have too often been used to disproportionately target communities of color. Sameer Rao cautions, "Gun control in America won't work for *all* Americans unless advocates push to demilitarize police departments and advance measures that don't disproportionately impact people of color. Gun control reform that does not go this route will end in laws that further empower police to seize weapons and use them against whomever they choose. History shows who they'll target first." (*Gun Control Advocates Cannot Win Without Fighting Their Own Racism*.)

cont'd on page 4



If this history is unfamiliar to you, Creed Newton's article (www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/gun-control-racist-present-171006135904199.html) on how calls for strict gun control after mass shootings overlook how regulations have been used to disarm people of color is a fantastic read and a great place to start. In this article, Newton quotes Saul Cornell

of Fordham University: "Saying gun laws are always racist is just false. Saying that gun laws have never been racist is also just wrong."

Can we protect our children from mass shootings and also not disproportionately target people of color? Can we, like other countries, demilitarize our police so that citizens and non-citizens don't face unilateral gun regulations that would leave them even more vulnerable?

I believe "another world" here in the U.S. is possible. Like other countries, we can keep our children safe. Regulations can be carried out democratically and with care so as to not target some vulnerable communities while we seek to protect others. I believe we can choose a path that leads to a safer, more compassionate, just society without sacrificing those who are vulnerable.

And this leads me to my final thoughts on our passage this week.

These words are about weapons. I believe we can apply them to our modern weapons today.

Jesus

In the gospel of Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples pulls out a sword and strikes another person in an endeavor to protect Jesus. Jesus then turns and responds,

"'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'" (Matthew 26:52)

To be clear, the Bible is not a nonviolent book. Nor does it consistently teach non-violence. But Jesus' teachings in the gospels are consistently non-violent. Even in Luke's gospel, where Jesus tells his disciples to "go buy swords" the context reveals that these swords were not to be used.

There is wisdom in his words, "All who draw the sword will die by the sword." It's as true for societies as for individuals, as well. A society that lives by the sword will die by the sword. If we don't learn alternatives, we will, as a society, be destroyed by these guns we love so much.

The constitution is not a moral counter-argument. The U.S. constitution gave White people the right to own other people until 1865. That leeway wasn't right even though it was written.

Some also argue, "But it's a heart matter. People need to learn how to deal with their anger without resorting to guns. You can't change people's hearts with laws." I hear this argument whenever laws are proposed to protect vulnerable, minority groups from the majority. Rules do train and change people. Rules train my children. Rules also shape people's hearts and teach them to listen to others whose experience is unlike their own. Both Dr. Martin Luther King and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) address

cont'd on page 5

RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for March

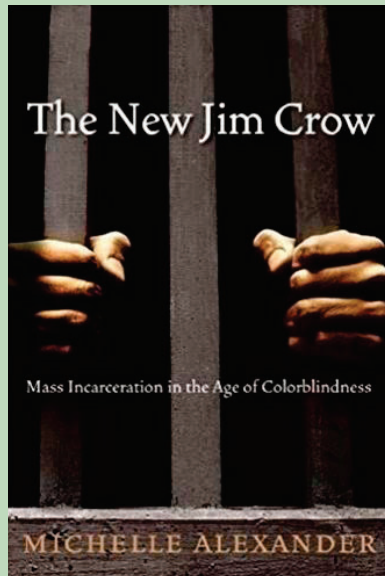
In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus begins his ministry with these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners..."

In every civil society where domination and subjugation are practiced there is a direct connection between liberation of the oppressed and setting free those whom society has imprisoned. This month we are proud to include **Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*** in our 2018 reading course.

From the publishers:

"'Jarvis Cotton's great-great-grandfather could not vote as a slave. His great-grandfather was beaten to death by the Klu Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation; his father was barred by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, Cotton cannot vote because he, like many black men in the United States, has been labeled a felon and is currently on parole.'

As the United States celebrates the nation's "triumph over race" with the election of Barack Obama, the majority of young black men in major American cities are locked behind bars or have been labeled felons for life. Although Jim Crow laws have been wiped off the books, an astounding percentage of the African American community remains trapped in a subordinate



status – much like their grandparents before them.

In this incisive critique, former litigator-turned-legal-scholar Michelle Alexander provocatively argues that we have not ended racial caste in America: we have simply redesigned it. Alexander shows that, by targeting black men and decimating communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control, even as it formally adheres to the principle of color blindness. *The New Jim Crow* challenges the civil rights community—and all of us—to place mass incarceration at the forefront of a new movement for racial justice in America."

It is our hope that your heart will be renewed and inspired to take action as we together endeavor to follow Jesus' teachings more deeply in this context. May we continue engaging the work found in Luke's gospel of "freedom for the prisoners, and the recover of sight to those who are blind."

this argument, convincingly for me.

King said:

"Now the other myth that gets around is the idea that legislation cannot really solve the problem and that it has no great role to play in this period of social change because you've got to change the heart and you can't change the heart through legislation. You can't legislate morals. The job must be done through education and religion.

Well, there's half-truth involved here.

Certainly, if the problem is to be solved then in the final sense, hearts must be changed. Religion and education must play a great role in changing the heart.

But we must go on to say that while it may be true that morality cannot be legislated, behavior can be regulated.

It may be true that the law cannot change the heart but it can restrain the heartless.

It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me and I think that is pretty important, also.

So there is a need for executive orders. There is a need for judicial decrees. There is a need for civil rights legislation on the local scale within states and on the national scale from the federal government." (Address at Western Michigan University, December 18, 1963)

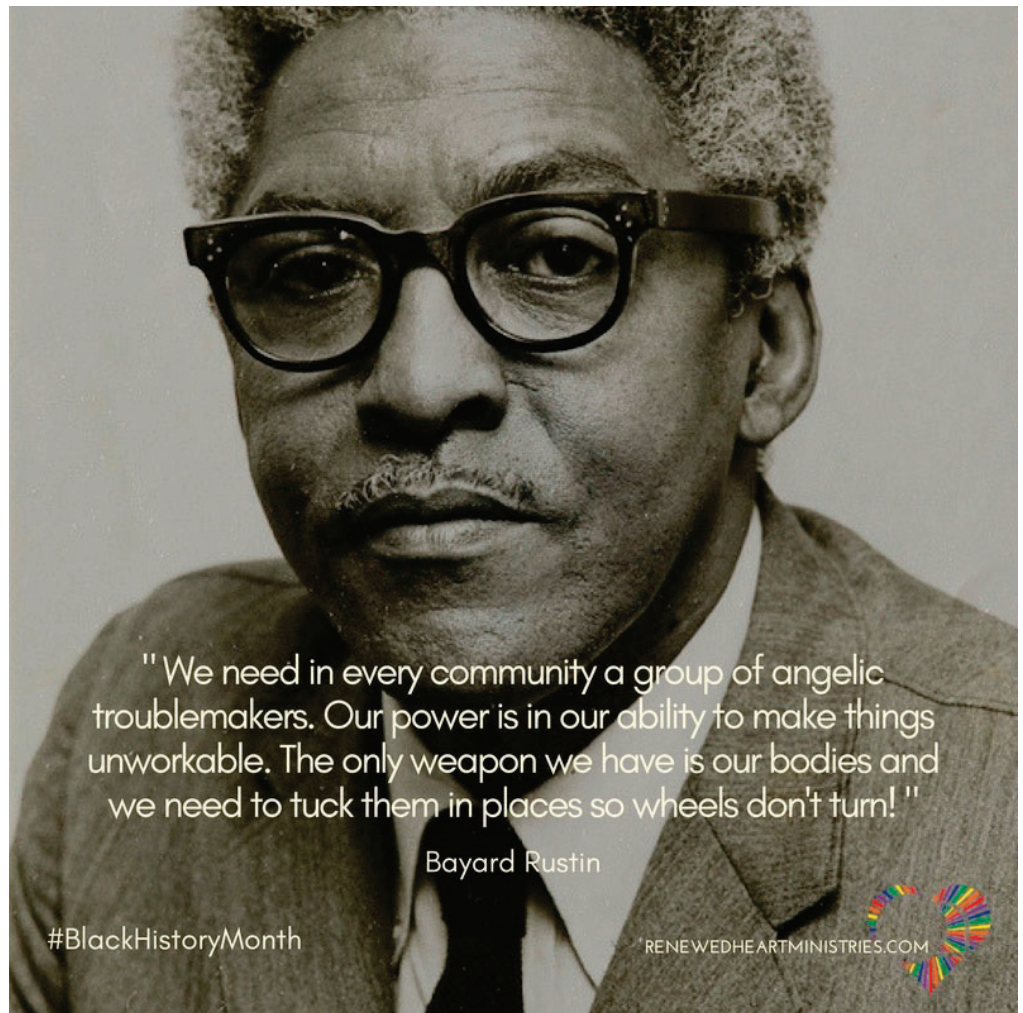
Ture, who was staunchly opposed to racist gun control measures, argued:

"If a white man wants to lynch me, that's his problem. If he's got the power to lynch me, that's my problem. Racism is not a question of attitude; it's a question of power."

I believe there is a way to reach hearts while simultaneously limiting people's power to hurt others. It doesn't have to be one or the other. Gun regulations are a matter of power, and we must engage the work of balancing that power for all lives involved. I believe this can be done democratically if we as a society choose to do it. Representatives who are bought and owned by the gun industry probably won't do it for us.

It's time to lay down and let go of the guns.

"Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw



the sword will die by the sword."
(Matthew 26:52)

HeartGroup Application

This week:

1. Google "Non-violent Conflict Resolution Resources."
2. Find two to three non-violent conflict resolution practices that resonate with you.
3. Bring these two or three practices to your HeartGroup this coming week and discuss how you might begin implementing them as a group. Conflict is inevitable, but violence is optional. Non-violence can begin with community practice.
4. Call your representatives. Share how you feel about the mass shootings and measures you hope lawmakers will take.

Thanks for checking in with us this month.

Another world is possible!

Keep living in love, survival, resistance,

liberation, reparation, and transformation.

I love each of you dearly,

I'll see you next month. ■



Sign Up for RHM's Free Resources!

Daily Quotations in your email inbox, weekly articles, podcasts, and ministry updates, monthly newsletters, and more.

Sign up now so you don't miss a thing!

<http://bit.ly/RHMSignUp>



***Sayings Gospel Q:* A Two Year Journey Reaches Its End**

Photo by Kalle Kortelainen on Unsplash
by Herb Montgomery | February 12, 2018

This past weekend we released our final installment of our two-year long series on what is referred to as *Sayings Gospel Q* from a liberation perspective. This is a group of sayings attributed to Jesus found only in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. I'll explain.

Q theory states that when the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians were blended in the early church, Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel were written to unite these two communities through blending two Jesus stories, the hypothetical Jewish Q Sayings Collection and the Gentile Gospel of Mark. Matthew's gospel combined Mark and Q for the Jewish Galilean territories, while Luke-Acts combined Mark and Q for the larger Gentile world. Although Q source theory hypothesizes that this collection of sayings must have been lost after the early Gentile Christians squeezed the Jewish Christians out, we can rediscover these sayings to the best of our ability by simply looking at the sayings of Jesus held in common by both Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark. (See <https://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/01-08-2016>)

What makes our series on Q unique is that we took modern Q scholarship and combined it with a contemplation of what these specific sayings might offer other liberation movements not typically associated with Jesus. It is important to

remember that the Jesus of Q was an itinerant Jewish teacher from the margins of his own culture, standing in solidarity with those his community had pushed to the underside of their society. These are sayings from the margins. It is also telling that these sayings have repeatedly inspired significant positive, grassroots change throughout history. From Francis of Assisi and the anarchistic Anabaptists to more recent people like Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero, and so many others, whenever these sayings have been experimented with in contemporary applications, the result has been positive social change in each of their respective societies.

Taking Jesus' own oppressed, social location seriously, each week we read these "Jesus sayings" from the perspective of contemporary movements such as our modern class struggle and workers movements, civil rights and racial justice movements, women's liberation movements including both womanism and feminism, LGBTQ liberation and equality social movements, indigenous people's movements, poor people's movements and more. We've spent the last two years asking if these sayings could offer us anything in our social context, too. It's been an incredibly thought-provoking and challenging two-year series and I'm happy to be able announce we've finally reached its completion.

In our intersectional justice work, whether it be survival, resistance, liberation, reparation, or societal transformation, I believe these sayings attributed to Jesus as a first century, Jewish prophet of the poor from the margins of Galilee still have much to offer.

If you have been tracking with us through the last two years, you are my hero. I've received so many emails and letters from you throughout the last 24 months. One encouraging email recently read, "I'm so thankful for Renewed Heart Ministries and for the paradigm shift I've been given. I receive your daily quotations and your weekly eSights. I am amazed with the degree of liberation I have experienced through these materials. I have been downloading your podcasts and presentations and passing them onto my family. Thank you so much for opening my eyes, renewing my heart, and moving my feet to action as I learn to follow more deeply a Jesus who is a liberator of the oppressed."

I'm humbled that each of you made space in your life each week for this series. We've come a long way together and it's been a beautiful journey.

For those of you who might have missed a few installments or maybe you'd like to go back through the entire series from the beginning, you can access the starting point here:

Written version:

e-Sight Article: *The Sayings of Jesus*
<https://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/01-08-2016>

Audio version:

Podcast Episode 156: *The Sayings of Jesus*
<https://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts>

Here's to many future podcast episodes and more e-Sight articles, and to the continuation of our work, together, of building a safer, more just, and more compassionate world for us all.

Thanks for being on this journey with us.
Keep living in love.

With much gratitude,

Herb Montgomery





The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast.

A weekly podcast where we discuss where faith in Jesus and social justice work for the vulnerable today intersect and what a first-century, Jewish, Galilean prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

www.renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts

Schedule

MARCH 16, 2018

Avondale College Church
Cooranbong NSW, Australia

MARCH 17, 2018

Fox Valley Adventist Church
Cooranbong NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

MARCH 17, 2018

Sydney Adventist Forum
Cooranbong NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

MARCH 18, 2018

The Shared Table
Brightwaters NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

APRIL 27–28, 2018

Chico Adventist Church
Chico, CA, USA
530.342.7777

MAY 19, 2018

Asheville Adventist Forum
Asheville, NC, USA
828.552.3072

The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of 10–12 people working either full-time, part time, or as volunteers dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible. If you find blessing, encouragement, and renewal here, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a reoccurring donation or by making a one time gift.

2018 Annual Budget Goal:

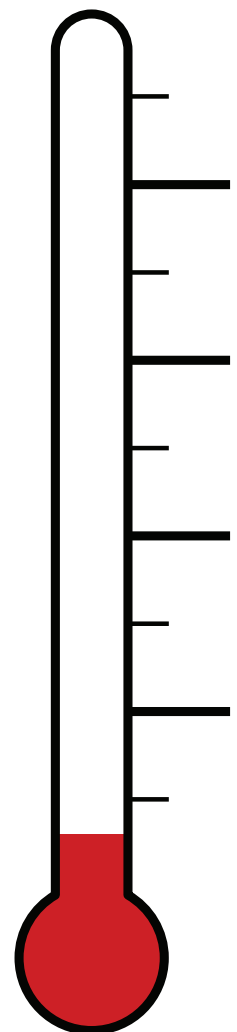
\$183,206.00

Monthly Budget Goal:

\$15,267.00

January's Contributions:

\$11,634.24



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 hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming 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 personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of people who are less privileged.

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.



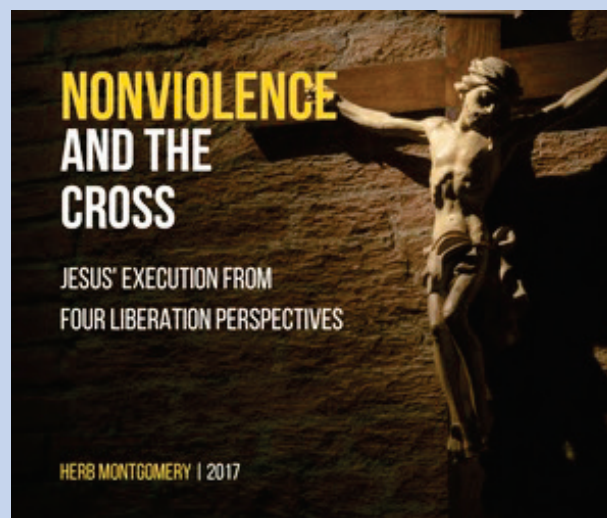
RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

This month we are featuring our fourth and final presentation in our new series *Non-violence and the Cross: Jesus' Execution from Four Liberation Perspectives*.

In this forth presentation we ponder the meaning of the gospel from our fourth liberation perspective, the early church in the book of Acts. Most scholars agree the early Jesus movement was comprised of those on the undersides and margins of their society

at that time. Their emphasis in their telling of the Jesus story is significantly different than Christianity's focus became a few hundred years later once it became united with Empire. When Christianity's social location changed, so did its gospel. It's our hope that your heart will be renewed and that you will be inspired to action as we listen together to this month's featured presentation: ***First-Century Jewish Good News*** by Herb Montgomery.



Testimonies

"I heard Herb speak today for the first time and was deeply moved by his presentation. I came away understanding The Lord's Prayer from a new perspective and committed to become more involved in social justice. Thank you for your honesty and ability to shed new light on basis truths."

– AP; Phoenix, AZ

"Your meetings were truly inspirational. Your presentations demonstrated thinking which is most refreshing. I wish that we had more like you. I've attended meetings in New York City, Berrien Springs, Chicago, and Keene and can say that I've never heard a speaker like you. Keep up the great work!"

– TR

"Dear Herb and Everyone at Renewed Heart Ministries, I save all your newsletters because they are so inspiring. We are so blessed by this ministry. Thank you."

– R & N

"Wow, this is revolutionary and absolutely thrilling! Oh, if only people can grasp this and actually put it into practice."

– WK

"My husband and I have been churchgoers for years, but over the years we have felt ourselves feeling more and more like outsiders. We kept saying 'wait, that's not what the gospels say' (to each other) and asking each other if we were just crazy. It got so bad that my husband felt like he simply wasn't welcome at church. We felt like the proverbial lepers. The people we work with are real people with real problems and we try to help them. It got to the point that we just didn't feel like anything about our church was even remotely relevant to them. In the middle of our discouragement a friend recommended your website. It has changed our lives and breathed new life into our hearts. Please keep doing what you are doing. I thought you might be able to use the encouragement. You are doing so MUCH and it really matters!"

– S

"RHM is a ministry that facilitates change. From all the way back to when RHM first started to these most recent publications, we have been so truly blessed by the journey on which both this ministry and ourselves have been. Thank you for all you do."

– KF