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# Choosing Peace through Militarized Policing or Distributive Justice

by Herb Montgomery

This week we end our consideration of the final warnings in Luke's version of the Jesus story and how they might relate to our society. In Luke 23, we read:

"Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed! 'Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us! 'and to the hills, 'Cover us! 'For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'" (Luke 23:28–31)

In this passage, Jesus addresses women weeping for him as Roman soldiers march him toward Golgotha. Jesus is just moments away from being crucified here. Luke tells us that "a large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him" (Luke 23:27). Days earlier this same crowd had ushered

Jesus into Jerusalem. White Christians today who still trust in militarized saviors in our current social climate miss a lot of the details in Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

Luke's gospel borrows imagery used by Rome itself, which referred to Caesar as the "son of God." He was called "the savior of the world." Through the victories of Rome (i.e., Caesar), the political propaganda of Jesus 'day proclaimed, "peace on earth" would come. They called that peace the Pax Romana, the "peace of Rome." And when Caesar would approach a city in the Roman Empire, emissaries from the city would go out to meet the dignitary and escort him on his way into their city. They would welcome Caesar and the "peace" that Roman occupation brought to their lives.

The fact that Luke's gospel used images of honor thought to be due only to the "Lord" Caesar would have deeply subverted Rome's political gospel. As Luke's Jesus approached Jerusalem, the crowd cries out, "Blessed is the KING who comes in the name of the Lord!" and "PEACE in heaven and glory in the highest!" Yet there is a difference between Luke's Jesus and Rome's Caesar. Where Caesar would have ridden a warhorse in his triumphal entry, Jesus came riding on the foal of a colt, or a young donkey. At least two literary agendas are present here: a contrast to Rome's militarized methods toward peace and Jesus 'path toward peace through distributive justice rather than policing, and the writer pointing readers/listeners to the words of the prophet Zechariah:

"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your KING comes to you, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a DONKEY, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will TAKE AWAY the CHARIOTS from Ephraim and the WARHORSES from Jerusalem, and the BATTLE BOW will be broken. He will proclaim PEACE to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9, emphasis added)

Attaching Jesus to Zechariah's words put the violent imagery of Caesar riding a warhorse in direct confrontation with the nonviolent Jesus riding a donkey, calling for those on the margins to be centered and for the elites 'wealth to be redistributed to the poor. What we have here is two paths toward peace. One was enforced by militarized power and the other addressed the root causes of injustice that lead to the lack of peace.

One approach toward peace is imposed, and the other is a more organic approach to social causes and effects. When Jerusalem came into view, Jesus stopped and wept: "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you PEACE—but now it is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42–44, emphasis added).

This calls to mind what we are seeing take place in our society presently. The protests are a call for justice that has long gone unheard. Yet Trump is responding, not by listening to the underlying systemic causes and working to address these injustices, but by simply threatening greater force.

([twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1270914092295950337](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1270914092295950337)) We have an over-funded, militarized police force and as a country, we spend twice as much on law and order as we do on social welfare. ([washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/us-spends-twice-much-law-order-it-does-social-welfare-datashow/?fbclid=IwAR1bQ\\_y2bX\\_O0YNoyGH\\_ky6pUalMhSW8JnxLn1G9\\_61e6v8\\_DhZfgWMV3ZI&utm\\_campaign=wp\\_main&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/us-spends-twice-much-law-order-it-does-social-welfare-datashow/?fbclid=IwAR1bQ_y2bX_O0YNoyGH_ky6pUalMhSW8JnxLn1G9_61e6v8_DhZfgWMV3ZI&utm_campaign=wp_main&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook))

It is in a context like this that Luke's Jesus addresses those weeping for him on the way to his execution. Rome executes Jesus because of his economic protest in the temple and his

growing number of followers among the disinherited, dispossessed, and disenfranchised.

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children...For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"(Luke 23:28-30)

Again, many scholars believe Luke's gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Luke connects Jesus' economic teachings about distributive justice, the economic elites' rejection of those teachings, and the Jewish poor people's revolt in the late 60s. As I've shared in previous weeks, the poor people's revolt grew into the Roman Jewish war (66-69 C.E.), which resulted in Rome's violent leveling of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Luke's gospel tries to make sense of the devastation of 70 C.E. Christianity has a long, anti-Semitic history of explaining Jerusalem's destruction as God's punishment of the city for rejecting Jesus. I don't believe that. Instead, I see the gospel authors connecting rejection of Jesus' economic teachings of wealth redistribution and resource-sharing with what later happened in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They are making a more organic, intrinsic connection between a society that rejected economic distributive justice and restructuring their community to prioritize the poor on the one hand and the poor people's uprising and revolt on the other. The results are not divinely imposed or arbitrary. They are the natural outcome of political, economic, and social causes and effects.

This helps us understand the words, "if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" If Rome responds to Jesus' minor protest and demonstration in the temple with such violence as a crucifixion, what will Rome do when it's facing an entire poor people's revolt and an all-out class war (i.e. the Jewish-Roman War, 66-69, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.)? Luke's Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea, who centuries before had spoken those words about the way Israel would be destroyed by Assyria. "The high places of wickedness will be destroyed—it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, 'Cover us!

'and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'..." (Hosea 10:8-10) Luke applied Hosea's words to how Jerusalem would be destroyed by Rome.

"As the legions charged in [the Temple], neither persuasion nor threat could check their impetuosity: passion alone was in command...Most of the victims were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, butchered wherever they were caught. Round the Altar, the heap of corpses grew higher and higher, while down the Sanctuary steps poured a river of blood and the bodies of those killed at the top slithered to the bottom...Next [the Romans] came to the last surviving colonnade of the outer court. On this women and children and a mixed crowd of citizens had found a refuge—6000 in all. Before Caesar could reach a decision about them or instruct his officers, the soldiers, carried away by their fury, fired the colonnade from below; as a result, some flung themselves out of the flames to their death, others perished in the blaze: of that vast number there escaped not one." *Josephus, The Jewish War*, Williamson and Smallwood, p. 359 (6.5.1; 271-76)

This is where the path of systemic injustice pressed down too long by militarized force ultimately ends. People finally have enough. When the dust settles, there is either change or massive destruction as social unrest is once again quelled, and social change is once again pushed further down the line for a future revolt. Rome put down Jerusalem in 70 C.E. But just seventy years later, there was another revolt, the Bar Kokhba revolt, the third Jewish revolt in the new millennium that ended in Rome's genocidal destruction of the Jewish people. There's no way to tell how a revolt quelled by militarized force will ultimately turn out. Will change come at a later date, or will it be just greater destruction?

Peace through a militarized quelling of unrest is not peace, but a lull waiting for another future eruption. Jesus' life teaches us that it doesn't have to be this way. The path toward peace is not greater force. The path toward peace is addressing the underlying causes for unrest, the underlying systemic injustices, and inequities causing the revolt.

For Luke's Jesus, the green tree and dry

tree imagery echoes the warning given by Ezekiel in the days when Babylonian captivity loomed on the horizon:

"Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to set fire to you, and it will consume all your trees, both green and dry. The blazing flame will not be quenched, and every face from south to north will be scorched by it. Everyone will see that I the LORD have kindled it; it will not be quenched." (Ezekiel 20:47)

Luke's Jesus is saying "If Rome will do this to me—a prophet of nonviolence—if Rome sees my temple protest (involving the damage of privileged property) and my growing number of followers as a threat, how much more will they do this to Jerusalem when the people have had enough and choose the path of violence and insurrection and war?" Jesus is proclaiming, "Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves."

What does this mean for us today?

We can go on quelling social unrest, or we can choose to listen.

I've been reading *The End of Policing* by Alex S. Vitale. On the cover of the book it reads, "The problem is not police training, police diversity, or police methods. The problem is the dramatic and unprecedented expansion and intensity of policing in the last forty years, a fundamental shift in the role of police in society. The problem is policing itself."

Rather than funding solutions to underlying causes of inequities, we have consistently funded a path of militarized responses to those responding to those inequities. Policing looks very different in other countries with a criminal justice system that is rehabilitative rather than punitive. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_killings\\_by\\_law\\_enforcement\\_officers\\_by\\_country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_killings_by_law_enforcement_officers_by_country))

In some of those countries, the police haven't taken human life in years, and they have extremely low recidivism rates compared to ours.

It's time to take the funding we've been using to respond to inequity with militarized policing and invest that funding on reshaping and restructuring our societies in more just, more

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## Weekly Zoom HeartGroup on Wednesday Nights

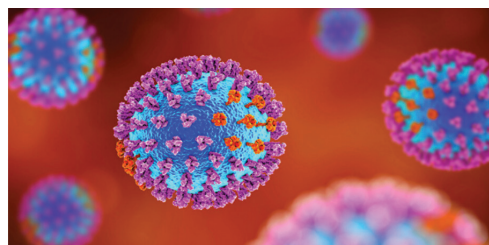
Each Wednesday evening, Glendale City Church will be hosting a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in Renewed Heart Ministries weekly eSight articles and the *Jesus For Everyone* podcast published each Friday. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

For more information and for the link to participate each week, follow Pastor Todd Leonard on Facebook – [facebook.com/toddjleonard](https://facebook.com/toddjleonard)

#heartgroup #dojustice #citychurchonline

## Recent Posts from RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/)



### COVID and the Things That Make for Peace (Part 1 & 2)

Will those in our future look back at us today and say, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Begin reading this series at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/things-peace-time-covidpart1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/things-peace-time-covidpart1/)



### A Path Toward Societal Equity (Parts 1-3)

Today's climate for those deemed essential workers during our present pandemic is similar. As the Swiss author, Max Frisch, wrote, "We asked for workers; we got people instead." Any society produces tension when the value of societal equity is violated, by design, to benefit a few at the top of society at the expense of the masses on the margins and undersides.

Begin reading this series at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/path-toward-societal-equitypart1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/path-toward-societal-equitypart1/)



## Book of the Month for July 2020

***Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God***  
by Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas

Written in the context of Trayvon Martin's murder, this volume is just as relevant in the context of the calls for systemic racial justice in the U.S., presently.



This book is an attempt to take seriously the social and theological questions raised within Black communities, "Where is the justice of God? What are we to hope for?"

Remember, you don't have to order this book through [amazon.com](https://amazon.com), but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile ([smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.

Tacoma-Lakewood Spanish SDA Church invites you to:

# Prayer Meeting

## UNITY & JUSTICE

 Saturday June 13  7:00 pm PST

Transmission:   LIVE



**Doug Bing**  
Washington Conference  
President



**Bill Roberts**  
Washington Conference  
Ministerial Director



**John MacLarty**  
Green Lake Church Pastor &  
Former Adventist Today Editor



**Herb Montgomery**  
Director of Renewed  
Heart Ministries



**Harold Alomia**  
Senior Pastor, College View  
Church, Union College



**John Brunt**  
Washington Conference  
PhD New Testament



**Sam Gungaloo**  
Eastside SDA Church  
Washington Conference



**Nathaniel Good**  
Salle Patrol Chaplain  
& Breath of Life  
Seattle SDA Pastor



**Paul Smith**  
Mount Tacoma SDA Pastor  
Tacoma Washington



**Candice Núñez**  
US Army Major  
JUS Army Major, Joint Base  
Lewis-McChord in Tacoma

## Unity and Justice Zoom Talks via Iglesia Adventista de Tacoma- Washington

This past Saturday night at 7:00 pm pacific, I was privileged to speak alongside others on a Zoom call on the topic of the systemic need for racial justice in our country and the need for faith-communities to participate in calling for change. I was one of ten speakers. Each was given five to seven minutes to share. This is a transcript of what was on my heart to offer:

I join alongside you, tonight, as a follower of the brown-skinned Jesus, who knew first-hand the experience of police brutality, whom the police, for the purpose of terrorizing, murdered, too.

He was also murdered by those who

spoke the rhetoric of prioritizing maintaining “law and order,” over and above valuing the human lives of those whose social location, as Howard Thurman used to say, had their “backs against the wall” or as the Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglass today says, “have no wall upon which to even place their backs.”

I join you tonight as a follower of the Jesus whom Luke’s gospel characterized as “liberator of the oppressed.” (Luke 4:18)

A Jesus who stood in the stream of his own Jewish, prophetic, justice tradition found in the writings of his own Jewish sacred text in passages such as:

### **Psalms 146:6-7:**

“God judges in favor of the oppressed.”

### **Isaiah 58:6:**

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”

### **Isaiah 10:1:**

“How terrible it will be for those who

make unfair laws, and those who write laws that make life hard for people.”

### **Amos 5:21-24:**

“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

A Jesus whose gospel confronted both personal as well as the systemic sin of his own society.

A Jesus who modeled valuing human lives over concern for privileged property, when within the courtyard of the heart of his own Temple-state, his own protest and temple-demonstration involved the overturning tables and the property owned by the privileged and those economically profiting from the systemic exploitation of those on the undersides and margins of his own community.

I also stand before you belonging to the Christian faith tradition who has a long history of participation and partnership with the culture of White Supremacy, as Ida B. Wells stated “too busy saving the souls of White Christians from burning in hellfire to save the lives of black ones from present burning in fires kindled by White Christians,” a form of Christianity too often refusing to understand and/or willfully misrepresenting movements for Black and Brown lives; too often practicing more caution than courage and remaining silent behind what MLK referred to as the “anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.”

Tonight, we don’t call for peace, we call for justice, knowing that true peace only results from distributive, societal justice.

We reject the sin of White supremacy and pledge participation in the work of eradicating systemic White supremacy from both the faith communities to which we belong and our larger communities outside of our faith community to which we also belong, specifically in the context of what Angela Davis calls a racialized,

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compassionate, safer ways and with life-affirming institutions.

Recently, Mark Van Steenwyk of The Center for Prophetic Imagination posted a list of resources for those who would like to learn more about what defunding the police means and what it doesn't mean. (facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158458451218770&set=a.230724218769&type=3&theater) I recommend this list as a good starting point.

As Michelle Alexander recently stated, "America, this is your chance." (nytimes.com/2020/06/08/opinion/george-floyd-protestsrace.html?fbclid=IwAR0GKdcEe2CKhsctLSWSVOXFGQMVwPc3ERgXSqTnzthTGj7\_\_N93ebX0p8)

Another iteration of our world is possible if we will collectively choose it.

## HeartGroup Application

We at RHM are continuing to ask all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time. Please stay virtually connected and practice physical distancing.

When you do go out, please keep a six-foot distance between you and others, wear a mask, and continue to wash your hands to stop the spread of the virus. This is also a time where we can practice the resource-sharing and mutual aid found in the gospels. Make sure the others in your group have what they need.

This is a time to work together and prioritize protecting those most vulnerable among us. How many ways can you take care of each other while we are physically apart?

Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.

1. What are some changes to the underlying causes of inequities that you would like to see more funding for in your civic community? Discuss it with your group?
2. What can you do this week, big or small, to continue setting in motion the work of systemically shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for all? Discuss with your group and pick something from the discussion to put into practice this upcoming week.

Thanks for checking in with us this month.

Right where you are, keep living in love, choosing compassion, taking action, and working toward justice.

I love each of you dearly. ■



## A Special Message to Our HeartGroups

We at RHM are continuing to ask all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time. Please stay virtually connected and to practice physical distancing. You can still be there for each other to help ease anxiety and fears. When you do go out, please keep a six-foot distance between you and others to stop the spread of the virus.

This is also a time where we can practice the resource-sharing and mutual aid found in the gospels. Make sure the others in your group have what they need. We are more interconnected than we realize, as this has proven. And we need each other during this time.

This is a time to work together and prioritize protecting those most vulnerable among us. We'll get through this. How many ways can you take care of others while we are physically apart?



## The "Jesus For Everyone" podcast

**New episodes every Friday!**

A weekly podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and societal justice and what a first-century, Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee offers us today in our work of compassion, love and justice.

**renewedheartministries.com/  
Podcasts**

**2020 Projected Budget  
Goal: \$185,000.00**

**2020 Projected Monthly  
Budget Goal: \$15,417.00**

**2020's Projected Budget  
January-May:  
\$77,085.00**

**2020's Contributions  
Received Through May:  
\$31,236.85**

**May's Contributions  
Received:  
\$4,718.92**

Renewed Heart Ministries is a nonprofit organization working for a world of love and justice. We need your support to impact lives and provide the kind of resources and analysis RHM offers.

Intersections between faith, love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever.

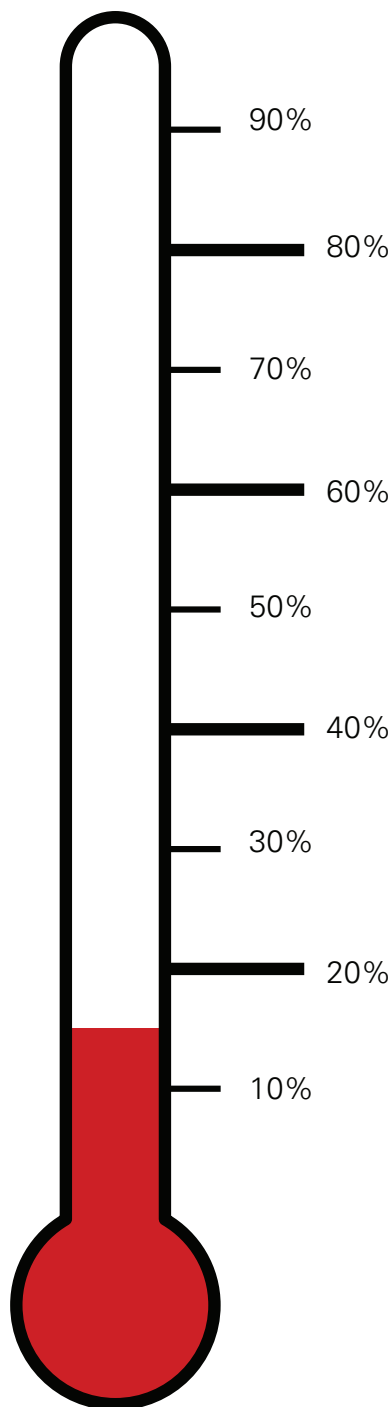
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To do so online go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click "Donate." Or if you prefer to make a donation by mail, our address is:

Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901

**And to those of you out there who are already supporting this ministry, I want to say thank you.** We could not continue being a voice for change without your support.



**Whether you give  
\$5 or \$5,000,  
every amount helps us  
continue our work.**

**Unity and Justice Zoom... cont'd from page 5**

prison-industrial complex which includes the terror of police brutality that fails to value Black lives and Black communities.

For those familiar, I'll end with James Parkinson's response to the work of the late Dr. James H. Cone,

"Until the white body writhes with red rage, until the white heart heaves with black tremors, until the white head bows before yellow dreams and tan schemes and olive screams for a different world, any communion claimed will be a contrivance of denial. A theologian—speaking of resurrection, in a body not bearing the scars of their own 'crucifixion'? Impossible!"

Let us pray,

"God of all peoples, source of love, inclusion, equity and justice, May Your just future come, on earth as it is in heaven. An earth where those who presently mourn find comfort, those presently on the margins are centered and heard, where those who hunger and thirst and cry out for justice are filled. Tonight, we lift up our own voices alongside the chorus of others around us also crying out:

Black.  
Lives.  
Matter.

We pray all this in the name of all that is holy, just and good, Amen."

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and click "Sign Up!"**

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](http://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



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

"The one thing everyone seems to agree on today is that there's plenty wrong with the world. There are only two responses to this—either go and put it right yourself, or, if you can't, make life pretty uncomfortable for those who can until they do. When we take stock of our relationship with the powerful, we ask ourselves, 'Does the shape of my life reflect my longing to see God set people free, and do I challenge those who keep others in slavery?'

SAM WELLS  
INTRODUCTION TO BINDING THE STRONG MAN: A  
POLITICAL READING OF MARK'S STORY OF JESUS  
BY CHED MYERS

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