

A rose in winter gardens

No giftwrap will make this man a pretty parcel



John Sommer
Ideas and the Arts

The authorities were maddened by the man. They could easily have dealt with him if he had tried to fight them with weapons, since they were, like all worldly authorities, armed to the teeth. What irritated them, beyond measure was that he questioned the importance of their authority. Before God your power accounts for nothing, he said. The clever ones sensed the truth in what he said and trembled.

The end came swift and with the utmost brutality. His friends fled in fear, persecution. Some brave women wept and buried the dead body. Here and there, in hiding, people huddled together with their arms around each other for comfort. Their fervent hope, to rise with him, had come to nothing. The true and far from loving rulers of the world had demonstrated their power and won. Or had they?

Some of his followers soon realized that he had returned within them. The memories they had of him did not die but grew. It healed their shattered souls to think and to talk of this extraordinary man who had loved them and singled them out as if they were persons of importance. Yet they had never been anything but poor and of no consequence.

When I die I will draw all violence into me and render it impotent. I will die for you and set you free. Your rulers despise you and treat you ill? Do not rebel against them nor collaborate with them. Their rule is of this world only and it will come to an end, he told them. Astonishing and puzzling words. Do not answer might with might, be meek instead, forgive your adversary, love your enemy. Love your enemy? What a shocking idea. Yet he wasn't a coward, far from it. Remember the day he drove the money changers from the holy compound? That was the act of a passionate man whose patience had reached an end. He was fierce and forgiving, a man who united paradoxes within him. We never quite understood him. To be with him was to be close to a light that made us see and a fire that warmed us and burned us at times.

So they talked to each other, and slowly people from other places wanted to know about their dead master, and their numbers grew. The stories became embellished in the retelling and, after some years, they were written down and passed on, secretly, to the poor and downtrodden of many countries.

Of course the rulers hated the new creed wherever it established itself.

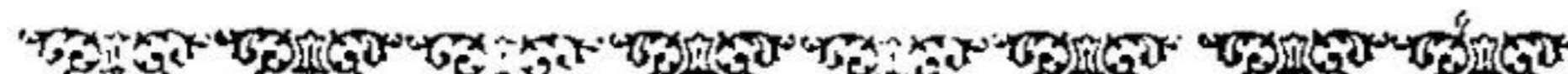
It seemed to mock them and their pretensions. What could be done to prop up their faltering regimes? The believers were killed by the thousands but new converts quickly closed the thinning ranks of this outwardly weaponless army. The killing went on for a long time. It stopped only when the killers were exhausted. They had lost their own beliefs, how could they fight the strongly-held beliefs of others?

The fine and modest memorial the poor of the world had erected to a shining and mysterious human became the ideology of a mighty empire now. Was that good? Who is in a position to say? The power and wealth that became the hallmark of the new official religion brought forth great and lasting works of art, started lively and never-ending discussions about the correct interpretations of the holy stories, and engaged men and women in mission work that went far beyond the boundaries known in ancient times. The western world, as we know it, has been

shaped by this religion. But it is certainly true that what was pure before, when it was committed to the soul, has been corrupted by worldly rule to the extent that the representative of heaven had eventually huge armies at his command with which he waged warfare against millions of helpless people. That, in turn, destroyed not only his prestige but weakened decisively the moral force the great friend of the poor had once been on this earth.

Have we lost him and the salvation he once held out to us?

I believe that his time will come again. The organizations that have tried to monopolize him have also tried to sugarcoat him, but he remains stubbornly unsweetened. No amount of giftwrapping will make a pretty parcel out of him. His ideas are as irritating to the exploiters and wasters of today as they were to the authorities almost 2,000 years ago. He is the thorny rose that blooms in poor and wintry gardens only.



A Christmas Message of Joy

At this time of year, many people are busy going to and fro buying gifts for their loved ones and friends. Rushing from one store to another just to purchase the desired gift that will please the receiver and fill the spot under the Christmas tree. Go over that list again — now who have I forgotten? Perhaps you've forgotten the most important part of Christmas.

Many look at this season as a time for all kinds of festivity — a time to visit with relatives — a time for showing kindness to our fellow man. The world is so caught up in the hustle and bustle and tinsel of Christmas that they have forgotten its true meaning.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." (Isaiah 9:6)

This Child that was born is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, and as the Scripture says, He is "God manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16) But why? What was the purpose for God sending His only begotten Son to earth?

From our first parents, (Adam and Eve) the whole world has been condemned because of sin. The Bible says:

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

"There is none righteous, no not one." (Romans 3:10)

"The heart of man is deceitful...and desperately wicked..." (Jeremiah 17:9)

Sin cannot enter into heaven and therefore we must be cleansed from it, and that is the reason why God sent His Son into the world. Matthew 1:21 states: "...and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins."

Jesus Christ, the sinless, spotless, Son of God was made sin for our sakes.

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

"Who his son self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

This is the great message of joy, that although we are dead in trespasses and sins, we can have eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

But beware — this great message of joy will turn to one of horror if you reject God's offer of salvation.

"And these (the Christ rejectors) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46)

"...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

This Christmas Message is not intended to take away from the joys of spending time with loved ones or the exchanging of gifts. The purpose in writing is simply to place a greater emphasis on the true meaning of Christmas. This message of joy, points men and women not only to the Christ of the manger, but also the Christ of the cross. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:22)

Our prayer is that you will look to the crucified, risen Christ, and experience personally, the joy of sins forgiven. Then you too will be able to sing from your heart:

"Oh come let us adore Him."

GOD BLESS EVERYONE. A.J.

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