

A Revealed Gift Eric H Janzen

Jesus does not wear a top hat, red coat, and black boots. He doesn't carry a whip with which to snap over our heads, driving us to leap through fiery hoops for his amusement. He is not a ringmaster in some unpleasant cosmic circus.

Are you relieved?

Too many of us have this image of Jesus floating around in our hearts. It is a lie we would be quick to discount if we heard someone describing him in this way. Yet, many of us carry around this misconception, allowing it to hinder our faith and our relationship with God.

Recently, I had the opportunity to teach on Matthew 11:25-30. I read the passage a number of times and felt...frustrated. It is a famous piece of scripture. Often, those can be the most difficult because they are too familiar. Jesus praises the Father for hiding the things of the kingdom from wise and learned folks and revealing the kingdom to little children instead. Not only that, but it pleased God to do so. "Why?" I wondered. He goes on to say, the Father commits all things to him and that no one knows the Father except for him. Jesus then says that those to whom he reveals God also know the Father. After this comes a wonderful invitation, but let's leave that for a moment.

I decided I would ask Jesus about the first part of the passage. At first, all was quiet in my spirit. I wondered if I were perhaps too wise and learned to hear him speak to me on this (haha). A few moments later such an arrogant thought proved unfounded. Let me share with you what I felt him saying to me:

"I have torn down the barriers of religion that kept people from the Kingdom. The Gospel is given. It is revealed. I didn't want people to have to have scholarly degrees and learn several languages in order to receive my message. This is why I speak of revealing my Father. I came to show the world who God is, what He is truly like. I ended the need to adhere to a System of rules and protocols in order to feel there was a chance at knowing God and pleasing Him. There is no peace in that kind of uncertainty and certainly no rest. I hid the Kingdom from those who depend on unspiritual systems attempting to make the Kingdom a matter of the Mind instead of the Heart. The Kingdom is to be open to all, from the least to even the greatest, but it is given not achieved."

I sat back and considered what he was saying to me. He hides the Kingdom from those who adhere to systems in order to connect to God. Throughout the Gospel story, we see Jesus at odds with such people. The Pharisees were always trying to trip Jesus up with the rules of religion, the System they believed to be the only way to connect to God. However, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom is revealed...it is open to all and given. You cannot achieve the things of the Kingdom. Your connection to God comes out of a revelation of who He is...a revelation given through Jesus. This is good news! You should be feeling some relief after hearing him say this. The Kingdom of Heaven is committed to Jesus by the Father. In other words, Jesus is in charge of the Kingdom and its unfolding presence in history. At the core of what has been committed to Jesus is the revelation of who God is. He didn't come and give us a new System...he came and gave us a full revelation of God. By the end of Jesus' ministry and life, he will have revealed to his followers that he is God and that to know what God is like, they need look no further than Jesus. Jesus has shown us the truth of God's nature and character.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus gives a profound invitation in light of what he has just said to the people standing there listening to him. I imagine a small crowd of people looking a little stunned by his words. "Is he saying what I think he is saying?" someone mutters. Another nods, "Yeah, but will that really work? Revelation instead of System?" Alright, that last comment is probably what I would have said, but you get the idea. This is radical stuff. Jesus is turning things upside down and that

would have been difficult for many people to hear and understand the first time around. Indeed, we are still having trouble catching on. Listen to his invitation:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

I have to tell you that sounds truly great to me. I am not a restful person. I get anxious a fair bit and like many of us, I find it difficult to rest. If I do start to feel like I'm resting, an odd sense of guilt comes over me, as if to say, "If you aren't doing something, you must be doing something wrong." Jesus probably shakes his head at me from the throne room at these times "What do I have to do to get that guy to rest in me?"

His invitation is a message of freedom. Freedom from Systems of rules that offer no substantial way to connect to God. Freedom from the exhausting sense of failure to live up to the 'rules', which are often nebulous and undefined in our day and age, behaving more like a heavy spiritual cloud weighing us down with guilt and shame. Freedom from striving to earn the things of the Kingdom. Freedom from forcing a connection and relationship with God through a System telling us that if we were just a bit better, a bit more than what we are, we could maybe get there.

Jesus invites us to his Way. He gives us the Kingdom through revelation. You can't attain it, because it doesn't need to be attained. Attempting to attain the Kingdom outside of receiving the revelation of Jesus would be like trying to climb a mountain that simply isn't there. Jesus reveals the loving and amazing character of God to us in and through himself. He invites us to rest from the ways of the old System. Take a break from trying to earn God's acceptance and salvation. Rest from trying to earn his love, his grace, his mercy...you don't have to earn these things...they are a revealed gift.

Find the most comfortable seat in your home. Make a cup of coffee or tea...or whatever your favourite beverage may be, and sit down in that chair. Take a sip of your drink. Set it down. Take a deep, deep breath. Let it out and sink into the chair...rest. Now open your hands and lay them in your lap. Now get your courage up and get grateful. Pray something like this:

"Jesus, thank you for revealing the things of your Kingdom to me. Thank you for loving me and accepting me. I am so grateful that you are showing me who God is and what you are really like. Thank you that I don't have to earn my relationship with you and thank you that you have given me this gift of connection with God."

Pause. Rest. Receive all that he wants to give to you. The presence of Jesus should always come with a light yoke and an easy burden. This is his promise...his invitation...his gift of freeing us from the weight of systems and leading us into the Life of relationship with God.

I don't know about you, but that is a trade I gladly make.