Who's Your Lord?

a Christmas Eve message

Wow. Life is hard. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The government is all corrupted, you can't count on them at all, and they cause many problems.

"A lack of the public interest" some may call it.

I would call it outright oppression.

Taxes. Control. Lies. Deceit. Personal kingdom building…
…and for what?

A better marker on their grave?
A sizeable trust left as an inheritance?
A name that endures forever?

No. This is not the type of kingdom God had intended.

The economy favors the rich. And freedom? We are not really free. We are slaves to the system… a system bent on discontent and control.

The sick,
The blind,
The lame,
The elderly,
The unborn babies,
The widows,
The poor,
All dispensable.
All outcasts.

Survival of fittest, they say. Only the strong live.

No. This is definitely not the type of kingdom God intended.

Luke 4:16-21

> *16 I went to Nazareth, where I had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day I went into the*
> *synagogue, as was my custom. And I stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was*
> *handed to me. Unrolling it, I found the place where it is written:*
> *18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*
> *because he has anointed me*
> *to preach good news to the poor.*
> *He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*
> *and recovery of sight for the blind,*
> *to release the oppressed,*
> *19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*
>
> *20 Then I rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone*
> *in the synagogue were fastened on me, 21 and I began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is*
> *fulfilled in your hearing."*

It wasn't that long ago, about 3 years now, that I preached that message. You should have seen their faces! It was a sight to behold! They were dumbfounded, shocked, speechless. They couldn't believe what I was saying. Me, Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, claiming to be the Messiah, the long-awaited messenger of Yahweh, God. This was my hometown you see, and they had all participated in my upbringing. You know… it takes a village to raise a child. It was certainly true in Nazareth. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. I mean, they knew me!

Or at least they thought they did…
I wasn't prepared for what happened next.

Luke 4:28-29

> 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard [me say] this. 29 They got up,
> drove me out of the town, and took me to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in
> order to throw me down the cliff.

You see, by law, God's law, according to Deut. 13:

> any prophet claiming to be a messenger of God, that was indeed lying or deceiving, must be killed… stoned… thrown off the edge of a cliff. If the fall didn't kill the false prophet, then they rolled a huge stone off the cliff on top of the individual. If that didn't kill him/her, then they all picked up rocks and threw them on to the individual until they had expired. Community involvement in the death penalty.

I didn't blame them, or hold any offense against them. They thought I was a false prophet. They were only doing what they thought was right.

Luke 4:30

> 30 But I walked right through the crowd and went on my way.

They didn't know…
They didn't believe…
They didn't hope…
for redemption or
for freedom.

My friends and family in Nazareth dismissed me right away because I was one of their own. "No. He couldn't possibly be the Savior of Israel… the Savior of the world." They were used to me. Seen me play and work… grow up. They had been around me for a while. I was known to them. Familiar.

When you "know" something or someone, you are not afraid of it, you have control over it because it is familiar. Fear, doubt, unbelief, comes from things or people, we don't "know" … that are not familiar.

It seems to me that in 21st century America, I, Jesus, am known. I am familiar. I am dismissed almost immediately by people because they think they "know" me… that I am familiar…

Do you really "know" me?

Lucy, the small human child in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, converses with Mr. And Mrs. Beaver. They are talking about Aslan the lion, the type of Christ in the story.
Lucy asks: "Is Aslan a tame Lion?"
Is he familiar? she's saying…
Is he predictable?
Safe?
Known?
"Heavens, no!" said Mr. Beaver. "He is not safe, tame, or predictable. He's a lion!
But He's good."

Do you really "know" me?

Well, anyway…

My Father's message was this:

REPENT! REPENT! For the kingdom of God is at hand!

I have come to feed the hungry,
give to the poor,
give sight to the blind,
heal the sick,
clothe the naked,
give hope to those who despair,
give belief to those who are confused,
give love to those who are ashamed.

A different kind of kingdom that the one we lived in now.
(an upside down kingdom)

Let me tell you about the world's kingdom (the seemingly right side up kingdom) during my lifetime.

The Romans:
Rome was ruled by emperors who thought themselves to be gods. People worshipped them. Julius Caesar was the first emperor of Rome, but was assassinated by one of his close friends. Caesar's son Octavius then became emperor. His name was later changed to Caesar Augustus.

In 17 BC "a strange star appeared in the heavens."
Augustus believed his time had come…
his cosmic hour had arrived.
Augustus believed his father Julius was that star going to heaven:
"we saw the Son of God ascending to the right hand of Zeus."
Augustus said: "If my dad is God, then I am the Son of God."
He then inaugurated a 12 day celebration of his birth called Advent.
It was said that a turning point of the ages had come.
Augustus had united the world…
renewed the world and brought a reign of peace.

Peace. Let me tell you about the "peace" of Rome:
Germanicus (a Roman general) – slaughtered populations across the Rhine. He said:
"only the destruction of race would win war" – genocide.
Pompey – in 64 BC he boasted 12 million subjects in 1500 towns
Salucius – said the boundaries of the empire (the Roman Empire) = the boundaries of the earth
Titus – in a place called Judea… 500 or more were captured daily… nailed enemies to a cross, known as crucifixion
Pelevius – "they [the Romans] do this for the sake of terror" – fear

Veras – the town of Sepphoris (3½ miles from Nazareth); there was a revolt in that town and Veras killed 2,000 at once; he crucified 2,000 people at once; he then scorched and burned the city

Sounds like a pacifist's view of peace, right?
The Romans held the known world in "peace" through fear, despair, heavy taxation, control, and oppression.

Pax Romana

the Gospel of Peace of the Roman Empire

crucifixion. death. annihilation. genocide.

the Gospel of Peace.

Caesar Augustus was declared:
God incarnate on earth
The God-man in the flesh
God Augustus

One man ruled the world, from Britain to India
Augustus put up monuments (idols) to the divine Caesar in various cities. These cities where he was worshipped were called *ecclesias* – the NT word for **church**.

During Advent, Roman priests would distribute holy incense to the people because Augustus, Son of God, would forgive their sins, he would free them from past sins. He was considered the divine mediator between God and man.

Vergil the poet predicted "one who is to come" who will offer divine salvation. "He will establish a universal empire of peace and will lead in a golden age of blessing and renewed humanity."

All culminated in: CAESAR AUGUSTUS

The Advent proclamation? CAESAR IS LORD

Say it with me… CAESAR IS LORD. Again. CAESAR IS LORD

The Caesar was worshipped as god of a divine kingdom

That is the world during the first century…

I was sent as a baby boy to deliver the good news, the Gospel, of a different kind of kingdom. This would be a direct challenge to the kingdom of this world.

The message my Father sent me to bring?

REPENT! REPENT! For the kingdom of God is at hand!

A true kingdom of peace, not terror.
A true kingdom of blessing, not oppression.
A true kingdom of life, not death.
A true kingdom of love, not of hatred.
A true kingdom of hope, not despair.

A kingdom that is not of this world, but passes through this world wherever women and men of faith, believe. A kingdom that will truly endure forever.

It is said…
Philippians 2:9-11

> [9]Therefore God exalted me to the highest place
> and gave me the name that is above every name,
> [10]that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> [11]and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is Lord.

Say it with me. JESUS IS LORD. again. JESUS IS LORD.

You see? The story of my birth according to Luke, the doctor, directly challenges the kingdom of this world. The challenge?

> Who is your Lord? Caesar? Or Jesus?
> Who rules your life? Caesar? Or Jesus?
> Who rules your heart? Caesar? Or Jesus?

The challenge is directed at us 2,000 years later as well:

Who is your Lord? Caesar? Or Jesus?

Oh, yeah, I know…
today we are not ruled by Caesar nor do we worship him.

- Today worships money, wealth, fame, what is cool, hip, or hot.
- Today worships technology, advancement, youth, time, vacation, houses, second homes, and cars.
- Today does chase after peace, but ends up sacrificing it for the benefit of prosperity.
- Today's Lords enslave, trap, torture, and kill (just like the Caesar's of old).

Things haven't changed. It is just in a different form and is acceptable.

My message to you is the same now as it was 2,000 years ago when I preached in my hometown of Nazareth:

Luke 4:18-19, 21

> *18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*
> *because he has anointed me*
> *to preach good news to the poor.*
> *He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*
> *and recovery of sight for the blind,*
> *to release the oppressed,*
> *19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*
>
> *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

The kingdom of God is at hand!
Believe the Good News! The Gospel!!

My Father's message for you is: REPENT! REPENT!
Turn away from the Caesar's of today, our lord's that enslave.
and chose a kingdom that goes on forever,
and has no end
and truly brings peace.
The kingdom's of this world (Caesar's) die, burn out, and fade away.
But the kingdom of God just keeps on going…

Who's your Lord? Caesar? Or Jesus?

The angel's message to the shepherds the night of my birth in Bethlehem is your message to:

Luke 2:10-14

> "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ ***THE*** Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
>
> 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
> 14 "Glory to God in the highest,
> and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

A baby has been born.
This baby is hope lying in a horse trough.
This baby is God's glory encased in human flesh.
This baby is God's peace wrapped in swaddling clothes.
This baby is Christ, THE LORD!!!
embodying truth, justice, holiness, hope, love, and joy

Who is your Lord? Caesar? Or Christ, the Lord?

Oh, I know what some of you may be thinking… there really isn't hope in a different kind of kingdom.

- Your kingdom of "peace" has been around for 2,000 years, but it hasn't really produced peace and hope.
- Look at the Crusades, the wholesale slaughter of Muslim men, women, and children.
- Look at the Inquisition, the oppression and torture by the church on those who didn't believe the right things.
- Look at the modern church and its many sects and denominations and splits and controversies.
- Look at this church… it has died twice before.

How is your kingdom a different kingdom than the world's?

And I would say: "Good, honest question." And I will honestly answer…

Yes, the kingdom of God often gets lost amidst a sea of worldly kingdoms pursuit of power, prestige, recognition, domination, and heaven forbid, oppression.

BUT>

the good news is…

the Gospel is…

- Wherever there is belief in me, the Lord Jesus Christ, then there is hope, and that is where the kingdom of God is.
- Wherever there is faith in me, the Lord Jesus Christ, then there is humility, holiness, love, peace, and joy, then that is where the kingdom of God is.

You see, wherever and whenever, people believe in me,

that Jesus is Lord?

Then that is where my kingdom of hope is.

At times, it is hard to distinguish God's kingdom from the world's. It often gets mistaken for a Republican party agenda, arguments for or against my Father's existence, or whether or not the term "Happy Holidays" is okay… but nonetheless…

Jesus, the baby, was born amidst one of the most cruel and ruthless empires this world has ever known. And who would think, hope could be born out of disaster?

Luke 2:10-11

> "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11]Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ ***THE*** Lord.

Christmas is about a baby, born in a remote corner of an extremely cruel empire, to bring a glimmer of hope to:

the poor
the oppressed
the blind
the sick
the outcasts
the ones without hope
to you…

Today, Christmas is about this same thing. Jesus offers you a glimmer of hope in an all-too-often dark world… good news of hope to those who have none.

Hope has a way
Of breaking through walls
Of bridging the gap between us all
There isn't a problem
Too great or too small
Hope has a way, hope has a way[1]

And so, Repent! Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand.
A baby has changed everything.

Who is your Lord?

Please bow your heads…

[1] **Scott Krippayne - *Hope Has A Way*** From the album *Wild Imagination*