His Vets

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. - 1 Corinthians 1:18

The beggar hunched over against the cold wind and shuffled slowly down the broken street. His uncut, unkempt hair hung no less tattered than his layers of worn, torn clothes. His hands and face were smudged with dirt from the last dark corner he’d tried to hide in, to sleep in exhaustion until the gang found him. His body was bruised. He hurt all over where they’d beaten him, just for fun, just for evil. The dawn of his personal hell.

In his heart, he had no hope. His stomach churned not just from constant hunger but from fear, knowing it was only a matter of time. His crimes would be found out, exposed. The monarchy had already won the war. The king would come and clean up this last war zone where he tried to escape notice for a time. It could not end well for him.

At the heights of the war, the prince had come, dressed in disguise like another beggar, talking like another beggar, living like another beggar, exposed to danger and suffering just like any other beggar. Who would leave the palace and risk that? So foolish.

The prince talked about how the king loved everyone and wanted to bring peace. The beggar had drawn close to hear him. A shot rang out! His majesty took the bullet intended for him. What commoner, let alone royalty, would willingly die for his enemies? Foolishness.

Yet the king kept sending messengers to proclaim amnesty. This simply couldn’t be! Who would do that? From the shadows the beggar heard it, but it sounded so foolish to his confused mind. Surely there could be no amnesty for him.

And this is the crowning craziness. Messengers announced that the king would adopt any of his enemies who accepted his offer of amnesty. Unbelievable. Nobody would take the one responsible for his own son’s death, and forgive him, much less offer to adopt him as heir to the very kingdom he’d been fighting against. Inconceivable. Foolish. Why would a king forgive and adopt his enemies—make them heirs to his kingdom, the very kingdom they fought? Who would take his enemies who killed his own son, forgive them, adopt them, seat them at his own dinner table? Too foolish to even imagine. Nobody does that.

But something even bigger bothered the beggar. They said the prince had come back to life! They’d seen him! But he was smarter than that. Up close, he’d seen the prince die in his place. One time he’d seen a buddy die for his friend; but who would choose to die for an enemy?

It was disquieting. The messages insisted this prince, no longer dead, would return soon, and this time he was bringing the whole victorious army. There would be no escape. He’d make an end to the war he’d already won, and only his people would survive, only the ones who accepted his offer of amnesty.

For God so loved the world, that He sent His only Son—that whoever believes in Him might not die but have
everlasting life!

Gnawing guilt, gnawing hunger, restless waiting, hopeless, afraid, vulnerable, outcast, rejected. We can fool ourselves, pretend we’re pretty good, in control, self-sufficient. But we all start like a beggar on the street.

Who of us is in control of our lives? Who makes our heart beat, our lungs inflate? Who can control the power of earthquakes and tsunamis and hurricanes and volcanoes, in the news this year? Not us beggars. We watch in wide-eyed amazement and hunker down hoping to survive.

To the world, the message of Christmas seems foolish, crazy: that any love could be so great, that Royalty would die for His enemies, then offer amnesty—to adopt them as heirs. But the evidence is unequivocal. I know. God changed my heart, and He has transformed the lives of many other beggars like me in ways that cannot be explained any other way but His love.

The mystery of the cross I cannot comprehend, The agonies of Calvary
You the perfect Holy One, crushed Your Son,
Who drank the bitter cup reserved for me
Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank You
The Father’s wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank You
Once Your enemy, now seated at Your table, Jesus, thank You

By Your perfect sacrifice I’ve been brought near,
Your enemy You’ve made Your friend
Pouring out the riches of Your glorious grace,
Your mercy and Your kindness know no end

Lover of my soul! I want to live for You

As I write, a missionary father of eight was killed in Cameroon this week. But through the grief and tragedy and the heavy heart, as one who has accepted His amnesty I know we are not called to a spirit of fear. Whenever believers die, my dear Ethiopian evangelists always ask, “Now who will step up and go in their place?”

Here I am Lord, send me. For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain. Let us press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!

Our prayer this Christmas is that you would join us to marvel at this wisdom of God, that seems foolish to the world-- the transforming amnesty of Jesus, mysteriously born as a baby so that we can be heirs, seated at His table, the King of unfathomable love who has already won the victory.

Joy to the world!
Fred and Vicki

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