



McCLAIN MINISTRIES

Since 2000 A Monthly Christian Newsletter Publication

December 2009



JESUS IS THE GIFT

This Month's Issue

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OUR TROOPS

Freedom Peace Liberty Happiness...

On this Special Christmas Day
count your blessings
as the troops and soldiers make the way
for us to say
We are proud Americans and we're here to stay

MELVA'S CORNER

CHRISTMAS: NO WORD FROM THE MAGI



Power, it is an important word in the human vocabulary. It can mean vastly different things.

On the one hand, power can be understood as the right to command, order, manipulate, and control others. This is what we mean by the word when we use it in most political, business, and social settings. The person with power is the one who is at the top of the pyramid. He calls the shots. She throws her weight around. He bosses and cajoles until he gets his way. She consolidates power until the time comes to make her move.

Some villainous characters have left their marks in history via the exercise of this sort of power. Thus we remember names like Nebuchadnezzar, Ghengis Khan, Adolf Hitler, and Idi Amin. Satan offered this kind of power to Jesus when he showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" and said, "All this will I give you, if you will bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9).

On the other hand, though, there is a form of power that does not depend on titles, armies, or money. It is the power a child has over her father. It is the power of a lover with his beloved. Or it is Barnabas' exercise of power with a rejected Saul and a crushed John Mark.

People with power of this second variety most often step aside for rather than step ahead of others. They don't threaten or manipulate; they liberate and empower. They refuse to use the lies or bribes that seem to go hand in hand with power of the sort described earlier. They deal in truth, candor, and honest challenge.

No one has ever used power this healthy way as perfectly as Jesus of Nazareth. He never manipulated or took advantage of anyone. He didn't swagger and boast. He didn't intimidate with titles or dress, pomp or exhibition.

He loved children. He showed compassion to an immoral Samaritan woman and dealt gently with the publican Zacchaeus without patronizing either.

He demonstrated patience with thick-headed disciples who were aghast that he would perform so menial a task as washing feet and who kept pressing Him to establish a kingdom on the traditional model of political power -- with them, of course, filling key posts of distinction.

In connection with His entry into flesh, Jesus precipitated the first of many clashes centered on the power issue. It makes an interesting case study.

Jesus was born during the time and under the territorial rule of King Herod. Most often called Herod the Great; he was allowed by the Romans to be their puppet king in Judea. In the year 40 B.C., the Roman senate gave him the title "King of the Jews."

Herod's father was an Idumean Jew named Antipater. Idumea was located in the area just south of Judea, and its inhabitants had accepted the religion of the Jews only two generations before Herod's birth-- at the point of a sword. His mother was an Arab princess.

Because he had assisted Octavian in his campaigns in neighboring Egypt, Antipater was made the Roman procurator of Palestine in 55 B.C. Until his death by assassination in 43 B.C., he played shrewd politics with the Romans and maintained power.

After Antipater's death, the Romans needed a loyal ally in the Jewish territory who would protect their interests against the intentions of a priestly group wanting to throw off all foreign presence and power. It was in this context that Herod was given the title King of the Jews. But was he really their king?

When the Romans declared him king, a member of the priestly Hasmonean group named Antigonus was in control of Jerusalem and had taken the title of king to himself. With Rome's aid, Herod fought for three years to gain control of the region.

He had Antigonus crucified and beheaded. Herod also decreed the execution of over forty priests who had opposed his ascension to power.

Just before he captured Jerusalem and began his actual rule over the Jews in 37 B.C., he married a Jewish woman of the Hasmonean line named Mariamne. By means of this marriage, he hoped to mitigate the widespread hatred of the people toward him as a non-Jew. Strangely enough, the evidence seems to suggest that he came to love the fiery Mariamne more than any other of his ten wives.

King Herod was a suspicious man who always saw people scheming against him. Considering the Hasmoneans to be primary enemies, he set about to eliminate them one by one. Eventually he put even Mariamne to death for plotting against him in 29 B.C. He had his two sons by her, Alexander and Aristobulus, brought up in Rome and designated as his heirs in Judea.

But they were also judged guilty of conspiring against their father and executed in 7 B.C.

For all his personal and political wickedness, Herod was a genius as a professional builder. He built the spectacular mountain citadel at Masada on the Dead Sea. In an attempt to win over the loyalty of the Jewish people who despised him as a man of mixed blood, he began a lavish reconstruction project of the Second Jewish Temple at Jerusalem in 19 B.C. -- a project still not completed at his death and which continued until A.D. 63.

Fear built Masada, and the temple at Jerusalem was a failed attempt at buying a nation's loyalty. But the Roman garrison town of Caesarea was Herod's most colossal work of self-expression. It was built to be a monument that would consolidate his power, enrich his coffers, and certify his fame.

Herod built the city in the twelve years between 22 and 10 B.C. He named it for his patron, Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. An aqueduct that required tunneling through four miles of solid rock brought water from Mount Carmel to its Roman baths and fountains. He built a large harbor in the open sea without any protective bay or peninsula. Using a concrete mixture that hardened when it came into contact with water, his engineers surpassed anything the Romans had ever done with the concrete construction technique they had invented two centuries earlier. At least 100 ships of the time could anchor in its protected waters.

Caesarea survived and occasionally even thrived for well over a thousand years after Herod. In two decades of recent excavations there, a great deal has been learned about the city's history. One of the most sensational finds was a temple stone dating from A.D. 30 that bears the name of Pontius Pilate.

So as to pursue and fund his passion for building, Herod had to play the power game with consummate skill. He had to placate his overlords in Rome and preserve his base of jurisdiction among the Jews of his Judean kingdom. He was never very subtle about preserving his mastery. He was ruthless and cold-blooded in dealing with anyone who represented a threat to his position.

No less than Emperor Caesar Augustus made this caustic comment about Herod's use of power: "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son." In Greek, there is a mocking play on words in Augustus' remark. *Huios* is the word for son, while *hus* is the word for pig.

In Herod's death agony, he ordered a group of Jerusalem elite to be arrested. At his death, they were to be killed so that tears would be shed on the day he died. The order was countermanded when he died as that of a madman and it is unlikely that any tears fell for Herod the Great when he expired in 4 B.C. In the words of one historian: "He stole to the throne like a fox, ruled like a tiger, and died like a dog."

What we know of this King of the Jews as a figure of history fits perfectly with what we know of his behavior toward the birth of a child destined to be "King of the Jews." What a jolt it must have been for nervous and jealous Herod when visitors from the East came to his court and asked about a baby destined to rule over the Jews. As Matthew relates it: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him' "(Matthew 2:1-2).

What a tragic mistake the wise men made. But it was an understandable mistake. If one were looking for the birthplace of the new Jewish king, where better to inquire

than at the palace of the reigning king? What these strangers knew about Herod and his paranoia over power is unknown. More than likely, they knew practically nothing about him except that he was King of the Jews. The machinations of such a petty monarch would not have been a topic of interest in Persia, Babylon, or any other eastern country. Let's not fault the Magi, then, for a blunder we see in hindsight but they could not have foreseen.

There is a classic instance of understatement in the biblical text when Matthew writes: "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed" (Matthew 2:2a). Disturbed?

He must have been unsettled to the depths of his soul. And he must have turned in a masterful performance before his guests to restrain his anger. Can't you imagine, however, that eyes darted all around the room when the question was put to him? His court knew that Herod had killed his own wives and children when he thought they threatened his reign as Jewish monarch.

The understatement continues when Matthew says that "all Jerusalem [was disturbed] with him" (Matthew 2:2b). They knew the unpredictable rage of this power-madman. It was not beyond anyone's imagination in Jerusalem that Herod would set about to search houses and kill children. In fact, the locals must have been surprised at the restrained response to his visitors.

King Herod called together the chief priests and teachers of the Law of Moses. He asked for whatever light they could shed on the matter. Had they heard of a star? Were there rumors about a baby? Did their Scripture have anything to say on the matter?

As a matter of fact, they responded, their holy books contained a prediction about the Messiah's birth. Thus they told Herod

that he was to be born in Bethlehem and cited the prophecy on which they based their belief: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6; cf.).

Furnished with this information, King Herod called the Magi for a final, private interview. Before telling them what he had learned, he first pressed them for additional details about their experience. What sort of "star" did you see? How did you know that you were supposed to follow it? Exactly when did you first see it?

Then, after learning all he could from them, he passed on the information about Bethlehem. From the way Matthew describes the scene, Herod appears to have tried hard to avoid raising any suspicions among his guests. He simply sent them to Bethlehem, five or six miles from Jerusalem, and told them to "make a careful search" for the newborn king. "As soon as you find him," he instructed the Magi, "report to me, so that I too may go and worship him" (Matthew 2:7).

Apparently still naive about King Herod and what plans he might have had in mind for the baby they were searching for, the eastern stargazers left for Bethlehem. They must have left the king's court with a sense of confirmation about their mission and with renewed excitement. The heavenly sign they had been following led them not just to the town of Bethlehem but to the very house in which the baby and His family were living.

They entered, worshipped the child, and presented the gifts they had brought to Him. Did they stay for just the one visit? Were they in Bethlehem for several days? The text of the Bible leaves us without a clue. What we are told about their departure returns the focus to Herod the Great:

"And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route" (Matthew 2:12).

How long did Herod wait for word from the Magi? Probably not very long. Nervous and insecure as he was, it would not have taken long to conclude that someone had gotten wise to him and that his guests were not coming back with word of the child. The man whose fear of rivals had already bathed his own family in blood dispatched soldiers to dispose of this latest one.

Calculating back to the time when the Magi had first seen the star -- and perhaps allowing another six months to a year for good measure -- King Herod gave orders that all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under were to be killed. Given the size of Bethlehem at the time as a town of 1,500 to 2,000 people and an annual birthrate of perhaps thirty children per thousand, the number of male infants murdered by Herod would likely have been no less than twelve and no more than twenty-four. There is no non-biblical record of the event. Given the obscurity of the town and the grosser cruelties of Herod, we are not surprised that this atrocity doesn't survive in ancient archives.

In the meanwhile, miraculously, Jesus was saved from death. Joseph was warned in a dream about Herod's plot and fled Bethlehem in the middle of the night to save Jesus (Matthew 2:13-15). What awkward-sounding language! Jesus, the Savior of the World, was saved by faithful Joseph.

Herod wielded his power as King of the Jews. He built his towers, fortifications, and cities. He fought armies and murdered babies. Then, two or three years after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod died -- unmourned.

What has been the verdict of history on

these two figures? King Herod is a footnote to history; King Jesus is the one from whose coming all history is dated.

Years ago, someone summed up the impact of Jesus with these words:

Here is a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was grown, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a really big city. He never traveled over 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

While He was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth -- His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned -- put together -- have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life.

So who is really king? Is it the one who bullies, pushes, and destroys with his power? Or is it the one who loves, serves, and empowers others?

The kingdoms of this world and all whose hearts are dominated by the sinful nature can only model the Herodian ideal.

The Kingdom of God and the hearts of those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God must put on the new garments of compassion, forgiveness, and love. Where these traits are lived, the Babe of Bethlehem reigns. He is Sovereign, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. 📖

THE GOD EFFECT OF PRAYER

6:00 P.M. Hour of Prayer



SPEND TIME PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Use this wonderful supernatural tool the Lord has blessed us with **the 6 o'clock hour of power**. This is the time to intercede for the needs of others, the concerns of the ministry, and to pray for the leadership within our community, our nation, and our world.

Hearts throbbing as one, prayers ascending to heaven multiplied by those praying in **one accord**. Sharing burdens, joys, and petitions to bear. Lay all your cares at the foot of the cross and encourage others to do the same. Lives are being changed. Breakthroughs are happening.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

There will be no Home Bible Study Workshops in December 2009. Mark your calendars with these **January 2010** dates. Please join us and take the next step in your walk with God.

Home Bible Workshop Schedule

Come and Join Us!



January 9th & 23rd

The Message...
"How To Operate In Real Faith"

✉ 492 Northpointe Parkway
Jackson, MS 39211

☎ Phone: 601-206-4606

Ministry Update
In 2010

The **McClain Ministries Newsletter** will become a quarterly publication.

PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

THANK YOU partners for doing your part. You are truly a blessing to McClain Ministries. Your faithful commitment and support is greatly appreciated. If you have not yet made a commitment to partner with us, please ask the Holy Spirit to speak to and guide your heart about it. If you will do your part God will do His part.

Higher Mountains... Higher Praises

AN AMAZING GOD!

Melva McClain

December 1, my sister Sylvia had surgery at the Saint Dominic's Hospital in Jackson, MS.

Our entire family would like to give praise and honor to God for a successful surgical outcome.

We would like to also express our appreciation, to you, for all of your prayers and well wishes. The outpouring was overwhelming and filled our hearts with gratitude and thanksgiving.

My sister, Denise, stayed the night with Sylvia as I departed for home with the knowledge of what an amazing God we serve.

From the surgeon to the caregivers it was apparent that God made Himself visible throughout the entire process.

Sylvia is resting well with the expectation of being discharged Wednesday (December 2).

What a wonderful personal reminder of God's great gift. The sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ, so that days like this would be possible.

Praise reports are a vital part of the ministry's newsletter. God is revealing Himself in your live daily. Share it with others. When you share your praise report it guarantees continued victory in your life and can also serve to encourage others in the "Body of Christ."



WEBSITE OFFERING

www.mcclainministries.org

PLEASE JUST LISTEN!

In his recent book "How Doctors Think", Jerome Groopman explores the fault behind medical misdiagnoses and the mistaken treatments that follow. A professor at Harvard Medical School and noted cancer researcher, he was bothered by the fact that very bright students were making judgments all too quickly and following cookbook recipes for patient diagnosis and treatment. So he set about to study how doctors (including himself) think.

His conclusion is that the best doctors know how to listen well as their patients talk, give histories, and otherwise relate their life experiences relative to what ails them. "We want to be listened to and in a high-tech age, the key to accurate diagnosis and the basis of insightful thinking comes from listening and language. The errors that we make in our thinking often come about because we cut off the dialogue," he said in a recent magazine interview. "Most physicians interrupt a patient 18 seconds after they start talking."

Why, that's terrible. It's downright insulting. And it is also typical of more professionals and therapists, government officials and bureaucrats, company executives and managers, or mates and parents than most of us care to admit.

Everybody has a natural agenda. It has to do with getting what she wants, advancing his personal interests and attaining or wielding power. That "natural" agenda is self-interest. That's why it feels so unnatural when somebody really listens or acts unselfishly or yields without being de-

feated and forced to do so. Or maybe the correct word is not *un-natural* but *super-natural*.

The Bible counsels: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak ..." (James 1:19). Or, as Eugene Peterson translates that same line: "Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue ..." God gave us two ears and one tongue. Maybe all of us should set a minimal goal of trying to listen at least twice as much as we talk. Seems obvious, doesn't it? But it is so hard to keep in mind and to practice consistently. I'm taking a shot at it. How about you?

WHAT TO DO ABOUT OTHERS BAD BEHAVIOR

Ever watched a two-year-old push her food onto the floor or break his favorite toy because he was way past nap time? It happens all the time! The baby pitching a tantrum is "asking for it," right? But what is the "it" here? It may seem to be a swat. It is actually help, understanding and a mature response by someone who understands what is going on. Wouldn't you agree? And a nap renews calm.

You may be dealing with an angry, rebellious teenager at your house. And the strategy that most immediately comes to mind may be grounding, loss of privileges and stiff punishments. Just this week, though, I watched a father and son work through a boy's immature response to a friend's death over a year ago! The kid isn't bad. He just didn't know what to do with his pain. He hadn't had any help processing his grief. Things are going to be better in that family now.

You may be ready to fire an incompetent new employee. Before starting the process, maybe you could ask, "Do you understand what we need from you? And do you think you have a handle on meeting those expectations?" Believe it or not, some

people are intimidated about asking for help they know they need. You may have somebody at your church that is critical of everything and everybody. You're ready to suggest she try another one! If you have lunch with her, though, you might find out she is hurting over some health or family crisis.

People in self-destruct mode often challenge a sharpshooter who finishes them off with a flourish. What they really need is to confront someone astute enough to grant a lesser confrontation that drains away just enough anger, embarrassment, or pain to let them know somebody cares — and will help.

We serve one another well when we impede self-destructive behaviors. 📖

THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

By Gerald R. Hill



A child was born in Bethlehem
many years ago.

In a small and humble stable,
(there was no place else to go).

Above the little manger shown
the Star of Bethlehem.
Sparkling like a diamond rare,
a bright and shining gem.

It kept a lonely vigil there
in the midnight sky.
Like a beacon to the world
and every passer-by.

From Heaven's stately mansions came
Angels singing praise.
Announcing His arrival
as on Him they did gaze.

Then appearing to the shepherds
who were frightened at the sight.
Proclaiming the good tidings of

the Savior's birth that night.

And testifying to the world
of His calling so divine.
That we would hear His teachings
and believe on every line.

Many faithful people came
in haste from miles around.
They knelt in awe and wonder when
the Christ Child they had found.

The rich, the poor, the curious,
the healthy and the lame.
Shepherds, Kings and Wise men,
from every land they came.

To see this precious miracle
and worship at His side.
That they might feel His spirit
and with Him, might abide.

Gifts they brought from every land,
gold, frankincense and myrrh.
In honor of The Christ Child,
an event beyond compare.

They knelt in silent reverence
knowing not what lay in store.
But trusting in the promise of
true peace forever more.

Christmases have come and gone
since this miracle occurred.
Each time we've knelt in solemn prayer
in remembrance of our Lord.

We've celebrated this event
in oh so many ways.
We honor Him with dignity
in song and verse and praise.

Carols, presents and Christmas trees,
traditions we all love.
But the birth of our dear Savior
transcends all else above.

When giving gifts to those we love
it is good that we recall,
that the love of our Redeemer
is the greatest gift of all.

PRAY FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA



Our Prayers Continue

"We pray today that your will be done and that your Kingdom be returned to its rightful place. Help us to be strong through the difficult times ahead. Grant us peace in the knowledge that these things must happen. Thank you Lord for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ and may those who do not know Him as Lord and Savior, be drawn to Him in this challenging time. We pray in earnest for your return and we pray for your mercy on the United States of America."

- **Pray for the president in his decision on supporting our armed forces in Afghanistan with more deployed troops.** President Barack Obama's national security team heads to Congress December 1st to address concerns from skeptical lawmakers on expanding the war in Afghanistan by sending another 30,000 troops. In his televised speech, President Obama said the goal of raising U.S. troop levels to nearly 100,000 was to step up the battle against the Taliban, secure key centers and train Afghan forces so they can take over, allowing for a U.S. exit. Allies were also expected to send more soldiers, with Obama saying "the common security of the world" was at stake. He also pledged to start bringing U.S. troops home after 18 months, provided conditions on the ground allow it. Key congressional committees scheduled back-to-back hearings on December 1st and 2nd to review the president's revised war strategy, estimated to cost \$30 billion this fiscal year. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, will appear first before the Senate Armed Services Committee at 9 a.m. ET, followed by the House Foreign Affairs Committee at 1:30 p.m. ET. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan who had recommended sending 40,000 more troops, will testify next week.

- Pray for peace in the Middle East and Israel. Pray for the truth to be revealed regarding Syria's nuclear ambitions.** The International Atomic Energy Agency and Syria appear to be headed toward a collision over two nuclear sites where undeclared uranium was recently found. The agency found traces of uranium at the Dair Alzour nuclear site that are not included in Syria's declared inventory, according to a just released report. The Syrians said the uranium came from the Israeli missiles used to destroy the nearby Al-Kibar reactor in September 2007. The presence of uranium particles was detected at a second site near Damascus — the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor. Syria said it came from the accumulation of samples and reference materials used in neutron activation analysis. The IAEA is not buying either of the two explanations and is pressing Damascus for more answers and wants to know from where the uranium came. The agency has run its own tests and is certain the Syrian government is not telling the truth. The IAEA won't comment on what clearly appears to be evasive behavior by the Syrian government because of concern about its tenuous relationship with Syria.
- Pray for the continued support of the president standing up for freedom of worship and religion in China. Pray for the protection and flourishing of the church in China.** President Supports Freedom of Worship in China during a town hall-style meeting in Shanghai last month, President Obama assured the crowd that the United States does not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation. "But we also don't believe that the principles that we stand for are unique to our nation," he continued. "These freedoms of expression and worship, of access to information and political participation, we believe are universal rights.
- Pray for the safety of our troops.** During his famous Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln said that America is a nation "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." He proceeded to question whether or not such a nation "can long endure." The testing ground for such a nation, as he observed, was not in the halls of academia or before the high courts. Rather, Americans prove defend their nation's existence on the field of battle. Since the conception of America, the United States military has stood as a line of defense between the American people and those who would see this nation conquered. During World War II, it was the American military that crumbled the fascist war machines of Europe. Even today in Iraq and Afghanistan, our troops are fighting to rid the world of radical militant Islam. Edmund Burke once said "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." The United States military is our nation's promise to both ourselves and our neighbors that evil will never triumph. The men and women who volunteer to stand downrange of enemy fire deserve our prayers.



INSPIRATIONAL REFERENCE FOR THE MONTH

We must offer prayers unto God that are "powerful and effective" (James 5:16)

McCLAIN MINISTRIES

Deuteronomy 16:17: Every man shall give as he is able according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee.

This Ministry has been such a blessing to me I want to share in reaching others with a **monthly gift** of:

\$30 \$40 \$50 \$100 Other \$_____

Enclosed is my ministry **additional financial donation** of: \$_____

Total Enclosed: \$_____

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Please send to:

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