



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

*"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"* MARK 16:15

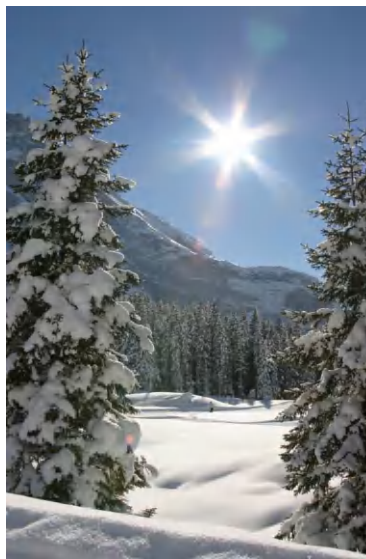
Winter

2012-13

# A Christmas Message

*From Eric and Anne Kaestner*

Yes, we know it has been a terrible Christmas season in much of the world this year! In the United States, we have experienced many weather related miseries. In fact, we were among the many who were hit by hurricane Sandy. A huge oak tree fell on our house! That was followed by a snowy Nor'easter, adding weight to the power lines and further damaging the trees which were still full of leaves. Yet, even in the most terrifying crisis, the Bible says, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV). And when you do that, all things just turn out better in the end (Romans 8:28)! In our case, we found out that we had more insurance than we realized. And God blessed us with limited damage, despite days of inconvenience. Yet we know that, in no way can our experience be compared to the many people who lost homes during the storms. However, God can turn even the worst disaster into a blessing. One example is found in the life of Naomi. *"Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband"* (Ruth 1:3-5 NIV). Like most women in that situation, Naomi thought that God had cursed her. Everything she had pinned her hope on for the future was gone. *"When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah"* (Ruth 1:6-7 NIV).



You can imagine the solemn atmosphere as these three widows headed back. It could be compared to the despondent mood of many who have lost jobs, homes, or loved ones so close to Christmas. Their pain and grief is beyond words. They must be asking themselves, "How can God do such a thing to me? Why has He rejected me?" Fact is, He who loved you enough to sacrifice His own Son for you (John

3:16) hasn't rejected you at all. He's just in a position to see wolves up ahead on the road His little sheep are traveling, that His lambs cannot see. He sees the demons waiting in eager anticipation to destroy your soul. And He changes His strategy in order to protect His sheep. The situation is going to look impossible to you. You know you don't have the strength in yourself to cope with the loss or how to go on from there. You were hoping for a joyous holiday season, and now everything has turned around. However, the Lord knows what is going on in your life. Perhaps you have become too complacent in your walk with God (1 Peter 5:6-10). We humans always have our own ideas of how things should work out. We are finite and therefore limited in our options. However, God doesn't want us to look upon the circumstances of our lives. He wants us to look toward Him! *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it'"* (Isaiah 55:8-11 NIV).

If Joseph and Daniel have balked at the dramatic and painful changes in their lives, God never would have used them as He did. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"...I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus My Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death"* (Philippians 3:8-10 KJV). To the carnal mind this may sound depressing. But without the Holy Spirit the things of God are not clearly understood (1 Corinthians 2:14). However,

what Paul is saying is that when you truly know Christ and His Spirit lives in you, the joy, peace, and wisdom that you gain is so far above anything this carnal world can give us that there is no comparison (1 Corinthians 2:9). When God first told us that He was giving us a ministry, we thought in our carnal minds, that it would be something simple like a Bible study. We got dressed in our Sunday clothes, despite the lack of air conditioning in our apartment, where we were living then. We had invited people. The only one who showed up, however, was the Holy Spirit. We had a great time in prayer, but it was not God's plan for our lives. One night in prayer the Lord breathed one word to Anne, "newsletter." Eric soon awoke to get ready for work. She told him what had happened and he felt the same way. We used our own money to buy a computer, office equipment, etc. and the rest is history. God may take the little you have lost, but He multiplies its worth many times over, and gives us so much more than we gave up that we are amazed at what the Lord has done. You may think God is angry with you. But instead, you may be chosen to step out in faith, trust Him, and receive the joy that finally comes with trusting Christ!

Naomi was depressed. She saw in her carnal mind that she was too old to have any more children. Besides which, she didn't have a husband. So "...Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.' Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, 'We will go back with you to your people'" (Ruth 1:8-10 NIV).

These were pagan women! Yet they wanted to remain with Naomi. They had tasted of the hope that could only come from the God of the Jews, and didn't want to return to their past. Instead of Naomi being an example of hope to them, they were encouraging her! Although she knew better, Naomi could only see with carnal eyes and couldn't imagine that there would be anything good to hope for. She told her daughters-in-law, "...it is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" (Ruth 1:13 NIV). This sounds reminiscent of the words of Job during his horrible time of testing (Job 29:1-5). Or even Christ on the cross (Psalm 22:1, Mark 15:34).

God uses desperate measures to herd His beloved sheep back on the straight and narrow path (see Matthew 7:13-14). And when you are the object of His concern, you're going to feel like God has abandoned you. Having the security of the Lord's Presence gives confidence to the believer. However, you can't stay an infant in Christ forever (Hebrews 5:11-14, Ephesians 4:14). It's like a father that puts training wheels on his child's bicycle to get him started, but eventually removes them so that the child will learn to ride on his own. That doesn't mean the father has abandoned his child. He just wants

them to learn how to ride as an adult, not a child anymore. Yes, the Bible says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5 NIV). However, that is referring to the trust we must have in God, that He will provide for our needs (Matthew 6:19-21 and Psalm 37:25) and will not leave us desolate, even though at times, we may be tempted to feel that way. God always has a plan, even if we can't see it ahead. That's why we must trust Him! If we don't get tested, how will God know we really love and trust Him? Remember what Satan said to the Lord (Job 1:6-12).

As for Naomi, all her fears were in vain. For God had plans for her that she never could have imagined. Both her daughters-in-law wanted to remain with her, however Naomi tried to discourage them so much that, finally, Orpah, gave in and returned to her pagan past. "But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.'

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her" (Ruth 1:16-18 NIV). Ruth had experienced just a little bit of the God of the Jews and wanted so much more. Unlike Naomi and Orpah, Ruth didn't value that which was of human invention, but that which was of God! The future clearly held no promise of re-marriage for Ruth. There was no guarantee that she'd ever find a second husband. In fact, her chances of doing so seemed



to be better if she returned to the Moabites. Nevertheless, Ruth would not leave Naomi. Even though Naomi was in a backslidden state, she was the only tangible link Ruth had to the one and only true God, and Ruth would not give Him up no matter what!

It didn't matter if she went hungry for awhile. She didn't care if she never got married again. Motherhood, home, and family, seem insignificant in comparison to Ruth's thirst for the Lord. Like the Samaritan woman at the well many of years later (John 4:7-30), Ruth wanted the living water from which she would never thirst again (vs. 13-14) and nothing, and no one, meant more to her than finding and knowing God! She had experienced the broken cisterns of water among the worshipers of Moab (Jeremiah 2:13, 2 Peter 2:17, Jude 1:12) and she had no desire to go back. So the two women "...went until they came to Bethlehem..." (Ruth 1:16-19 KJV). It was not by coincidence that Ruth and Naomi ended up in a little town named Bethlehem, for little did they know at the time that in this seemingly unimportant town, there would eventually be born the only hope and salvation for mankind, Jesus Christ! As it turned out, there is no more mention in the Bible of what happened to Orpah, but Ruth was greatly

blessed of God. For she had put Him first and foremost in her life and He had blessed her as a result of it. She married a wealthy Hebrew named Boaz. *“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son... and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David”* (Ruth 4:13 & 17 KJV). David eventually became king of all Israel, and a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ! (See Matthew 1:5-16.) True Christian victory doesn’t depend on the circumstances of your life, or the blessings or curses you think you are receiving. Naomi thought her life was over because the men in her family were dead. Little did she know of the joy that God would give her, not through her son, but through her daughter-in-law, Ruth! For Ruth chose to set a course for Bethlehem, a land she had never been to, and knew very little about. But a city that would play a pivotal role through the annals of time. Due to her love and commitment to a God her birth family never knew, Ruth, like Abraham, Job, and Joseph, received living water from which she would never thirst again. For they were all victorious in their Redeemer. They were not setting their hearts on tangible treasures that would fade and perish, for they both *“...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:8-10 KJV).

This is a difficult world we live in, so we want to encourage those of you who have become discouraged by the misery so many are facing this season. For example, why would someone become so full of hatred that he would go into a mall full of busy shoppers and open fire on them, as happened at the Clackamas shopping mall in Portland, Oregon. And why would someone go into a school full of young children and start shooting them, as occurred at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut? And why would a nurse in England who recently answered a phone call from two Australian disc jockeys spoofing the royal family and inquiring about the condition of the Duchess of Cambridge, kill herself? The Bible tells us, *“...our struggle is not against flesh and blood [humans], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world [demon spirits controlling the carnal part of this world that God gave to Adam and Satan finagled away from him] and against the spiritual forces of evil [high ranking demons, also called fallen angels, that plan strategy to deceive, influence and attack humans] in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).

It’s not human beings that scheme to destroy life, property, and the joy that people would like to feel during this holy-day season. The strategy for all this misery is designed in the spirit world, by Satan and his demons. For the devil hates anything that God loves. And, *“...God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever*

*believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16 NIV). It’s not the carnal things of this world that Christ died for. It’s lost, lonely, desperate human beings, who come to Him, when all hope is gone, and trust Him with their future (Luke 5:31-32 and Romans 5:5-8). For Satan wants to prevent you from turning to Christ! We know that so much bad news lately makes it difficult for people to feel the joy and peace of the holiday season. We want to concentrate on the promise of God. *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever...”* (Isaiah 9:6-7 KJV). To those bewildered by the conflict between this promise of God and the stress of everyday life, keep in mind that *“Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is from another place’”* (John 18:36 NIV). The peace of God is not

found in this worldly kingdom. It is found in all those who have totally given their hearts to God, through the redemption of Christ. This is a personal relationship that is definitely not channeled through a religious leader or entity. It is a private, beautiful, and ongoing communication between the Lord and you. It must be in keeping with the written word of God. So read your Bible consistently and consecutively. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the understanding (see John 14:26-27). And as He speaks to your heart, trust Him. *“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 NIV). And as you feel the peace and joy of God bubble up within you, worry not about the evil in this wicked world. For the promise of peace in Christ has no relationship with the wickedness of this world. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:27 NIV). The promise of God is a private, personal peace for each heart that loves Christ. *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things”* (Philippians 4:7-8 NIV). And, *“as... the anointing you received from Him remains in you, ...you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in Him”* (1 John 2:27 NIV).