



## RECONCILED

## SUNDAY MESSAGE QUESTIONS

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### OPENING

Wow! It's Christmastime again. What is it about this season that excites us the most? For God, the joy of Christmas is found in reconciliation. Yes, we get together with family and friends and have wonderful meals and great conversation, but it is the greater reconciliation that God wants us to celebrate. He sent Jesus to reconcile us back to Him. The plan to accomplish this was set before the Garden when sin entered the world. It was coming to fruition over the centuries after that as God's Word prophesied that the Messiah would come to fulfill all prophesies and redeem mankind back to God. This is the reason for celebration at Christmastime. It is the one time of year when maybe our hearts will soften and be open to mending other relationships, as well.

### SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

**Luke 2:8-14** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

**Luke 4:43** Jesus said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

**Matthew 6:9b-10** Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

### OBSERVATION

For four hundred years, from the time of Malachi to John the Baptist, God had been silent. There had been two exiles and the destruction of Jerusalem leading up to Malachi and then God wasn't speaking. Then, BOOM! The long-awaited Messiah is born. The angel announced good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Life in the Kingdom of God was once more available for any and all who desired it!

**Question:** Under what circumstances have you felt great joy?

For Mary and Joseph it was the birth of their first child, and with the announcements of the angel Gabriel to them, some of the fear was gone, but really ... a virgin birth? Yet they were being obedient as they arrived in Bethlehem for the census and, although this birth miracle was an amazing event, for them it was humbling to realize they had been chosen to be parents for the Son of God. Then there were the shepherds. At this huge moment in the history of mankind with the heavens opening up and angels appearing in the sky, shepherds were to hear the joyous news first! But they were the lowliest level of society. They lived outside of cities, looking after the dumbest of animals, bathing infrequently, and uneducated. They were considered religious outcasts and even

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture is NIV unless otherwise indicated

their testimony was not admissible in court, so what was God saying to us about His love for all people and His perspective of hierarchies and classes in human cultures?

**Question:** Why did God choose shepherds to witness the birth of their Messiah?

## APPLICATION

A kingdom is a territory ruled by a king or queen. They exercise authority and their will over everything. In essence, we all have a kingdom where what we say goes. If we are bosses or parents or teachers, or senators or air controllers, we rule a kingdom. In a broader sense, there are two competing kingdoms in our world: 1) The Kingdom of God where His presence and power are manifested to accomplish His purposes on earth; 2) The kingdom of self where our presence and power are manifested to accomplish our purposes on earth. The Kingdom of self contributes to what is wrong in the world. As we spend our days trying to build our own little kingdoms, we flow into this stream of individuals creating even more destructive kingdoms, based on oppression, racism, sexism, classism, global injustice, and economic disparity.

**Question:** Which kingdom does your life so far demonstrate to be your choice? What are you contributing to these destructive self-centered kingdoms. In what ways can you be considered racist, sexist, unjust, prideful, bigoted and unforgiving?

**Question:** If you are truly and sincerely introspective, what changes would you have to make to choose God's Kingdom? What is keeping you from beginning a passionate pursuit of God's Kingdom?

We often ask, "What about good people who don't accept Jesus as Savior? Won't they be in the Kingdom, too?" Human beings were created, not only to believe in God in some general way, but to love Him supremely, center their lives on Him above everything else – to be part of His Kingdom. Anything other than this is what the Bible calls SIN. "Have no other gods before me." Remember? Any time we pursue our will instead of God's we are operating from our kingdom instead of God's. While what we do matters, what matters more is WHY we are doing it. If we live our lives trying to do good things for any reason other than pursuing God's Kingdom, then we are still separated from Him.

**Question:** Which people in your life believe that being a good person is enough to get them into heaven? When do you plan to have a discussion with them about the salvation of Jesus being a prerequisite?

If our highest goal and sense of self-worth is the good of our family, we care less for other families; if it is the good of our nation or ethnicity, then we are racists or nationalists; if we seek individual happiness, then we put our own economic and power interests above those of all others. If our business or career is unsuccessful – if our families fail - if others criticize us - then our kingdoms are at risk. Anxiety takes over and fear of the future becomes our constant companion. Only if our identities are built on God can we have a self that can risk anything, face anything, and bounce back from all disappointments because that Kingdom cannot be shaken.

**Question:** Where do you recognize yourself in the previous paragraph? How do you feel about that?

**Question:** What are you anxious and fearful about today? What is keeping you from trusting God with your future – with making Him the very center of your existence? Why does that thought make you fearful?

Living in the Kingdom of God isn't easy. It means we have to forgive people we don't want to forgive and to love people who aren't our people. We can't settle for our best because we have to be open to God doing His best in and through us. We all know what we need to do, don't we? Confess whatever has caused distance between us and God, change whatever we need to change and forgive those we need to forgive. Consider the **Rooted** session beginning in January. Strongholds are broken and we hear His voice. This experience is bringing people back to God and turning them into passionate disciples. God has touched their hearts and changed them into sensitive people He can use.

**Question:** What is keeping you from joining **Rooted**? When have you asked someone about their experience?

God wants to carry our burdens of shame and loss. He wants to give us a life so much bigger than anything we have ever imagined. It is time to abandon our little kingdoms and enter God's Kingdom where we can be reconciled to Him and live a life of great joy.

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we have chosen earthly kingdoms which have left us empty and ashamed. Ecclesiastes tells us that they have no value whatsoever – only life in Your Kingdom offers peace and lives full of value, worth and joy. Help us to give ourselves passionately to a life with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.