

# The Kingdom of the Gracious One

The sun rose in gentle strides over the kingdom that lay in the southern mountains. The light chased away the shadows of night as it drew its curtain up the mountainside. It peeked into the houses and shops of the inhabitants of the kingdom as if to say “Up, up. A new day is beginning.”

The kingdom was situated among the crevices and cliffs on the tallest mountain in the range that was both austere and ominous in appearance. Here was the home of all things tough and hardy, of the mountain lions, wild dogs, and birds of prey. The people that dwelt here were as gruff as the rocks themselves and even the sparse wildflowers that grew in small scattered clusters here and there contained a prickly edge to them that suggested a sturdy character of survival in the most unlikely of places.

As the day was dawning, the streets and marketplace began to hum with the life of people. Shopkeepers opened the doors of their shops. Men and women called out their wares and goods to passersby who either stopped to barter and bring down the price of the item or hurried away, intent on some business, to wherever their destination was. Children chased each other and stray animals down the streets and in and out of booths among the sellers till some poor fellow holding a stack of lanterns or hats would invariably trip over child or stray sending all his goods flying this way and that, to the amusement of all those looking on.

Towering above all the hum drum and every day business of the marketplace was the castle of the king of the Southern Kingdom. Its tall turrets and spirals jutted out into the sky and interrupted the jagged silhouette of the Southern Mountains. The castle was a foreboding monument, built and constructed on the backs of the king’s slaves and the townspeople. Giant stone eagles guarded the perimeter wall of the fortress. In the Great Hall the statues of the kings of long ago looked haughtily down on visitors passing through. At the end of the Great Hall was the throne of the king made of marble, alabaster, and gold inlaid with diamonds and jewels. The back of the throne was the height of 3 men and on top sat a gold eagle in flight, wings spread, talons outstretched, as if ready at any moment to devour its prey.

As the king sat on his throne, scepter in hand, he looked down in disdain as his servants and slaves approached the throne. He wore robes of the finest silks and velvets of the richest colors and a large ring of gold and jewels on every finger. How immensely better than my slaves, am I! He thought. Why, they are not even worthy to approach my throne or even to speak to me. Oh, how I despise them! How many of them he would sentence to death today, he did not know. He only knew that the blood

would flow from his ax. The slightest error, the smallest mistake, was rewarded by the King with the penalty of death. And so the servants and slaves approached his throne in fear, each having said good-bye to their families and the sun, uncertain whether they would see either ever again.

And so throughout the course of the morning, after he had sentenced to death 3 slaves (the cook for too much salt in his breakfast, the master of wardrobe for tying his belt too tight, and the chief musician for allowing the trumpeter to play flat) it was time for the reading of the parchments where all matters of the kingdom were brought to the attention of the king.

Now the servants and slaves dreaded this time more than any other. No slave had read the parchment without being sentenced to death for the last 3 years. Whoever read the parchment now was sure to die. And so they had resorted to pulling straws for no man willingly claimed this task. This morning the shortest straw had been pulled by a young man who had only been serving the king for 3 months.

And so the young man approached the throne with trembling hands and weak knees. For a brief moment he thought of his wife that he had kissed good-bye this morning and the children that he had hugged for perhaps the last time. Was it really only this morning? It felt like a lifetime ago. But there was no returning to his family now. The only thing he could do was the task set before him and so with courage that came from where he did not know, he raised his eyes to the king and waited for the signal to begin.

“Read,” the king said.

The king studied the new servant standing before him. He had never seen this servant before and did not know his name. Did it even matter? No, the king could not possibly think why the name of this man would matter or who he would matter to. What appalled the king the most was the dirt and grime on this servant. Why was it so hard to find a clean servant? Ugh, he had terrible posture. And his teeth! Was there no end to the appalling condition of this servant? Haven't I set an example of proper decorum and hygiene? the king thought. How can it be that this man is standing before me? He is unworthy!

Though the servant knew he was under the king's scrutiny, he kept his eyes focused on the parchments. He had to read the letters perfectly. His very life depended on it. And so he read as best as he could until to his great dismay he came across a word he didn't know and couldn't pronounce. He tried to stumble across the word but the king stopped him.

“Slave, did you falter in your reading?” the king asked.

“Your majesty, I—”

“Slave, I do not know your name nor do I care to. Many unworthy people have entered this Great Hall and have appeared before me not even aware of their unworthy condition. Do you see this Hall that I have made with my own hands? Do you see the utter perfection of this throne upon which I sit? There is nothing amiss here, nothing out of place. I root out all things that offend my perfection. And so it must be that you shall be put to death.”

The king motioned his hand and the guards came forward and seized the servant. He cried and pleaded to the king for mercy as they took him away but the king would not hearken. They carried him through the Great Hall and passed through the Doors of the Forgotten where those who enter are never seen again. And so by a flick of the king’s hand the servant would never see the sun again and the sun would set at dusk upon a family who waited for the return of a husband and father whom they would never see.

As the Doors of the Forgotten closed a servant came running through the Great Hall to the throne of the king, breathing heavily, chest heaving. Before the king could sentence him to death as well, he spoke.

“Your majesty,” he panted, “Invaders.”

“Impossible,” the king replied. Who would have the audacity to invade his kingdom? The king rose and looked out on the Great Balcony. There on the fields at the foot of his mountain were swarms of soldiers who carried the emblems and seals of the Gracious One. His eyes scanned the hosts and his heart faltered for he could hardly see a patch of grass from the field, so great was the number of soldiers.

“How many,” he cried, “How many?”

“Your majesty, there are legions. More than any one man can count,” the servant said.

For a moment he hesitated. Could he defeat the army of the Gracious One? He considered surrendering but his indignant anger fueled his actions. He motioned his hand and gave the signal for battle. The servants scrambled to prepare. The king called for the archers and for the soldiers who fight on foot and for those who fight on horseback. He commanded the catapults to be brought out and swords, bows and arrows to be given to every able body in the kingdom. He would prove the audacity of the Gracious One to invade the kingdom that he had created with his own hands.

The king put on his armor and mounted his horse and stood at the head of his army at the gate. He did not have many soldiers, not as many as the Gracious One, but that didn't matter. He ordered the gate to be opened and called his army to charge forward. And so they went down the mountainside till at last they stood on the field before the enemy. The two armies charged at each other till they met in the middle of the field with a resounding clash. The battle had begun.

How many soldiers fell that day no man could count. As the heat of the sun increased so did the intensity of battle. Horses charged, men lunged, swords clashed till finally the army of the Southern Kingdom grew weary. They could not stand against the strength of this army. It seemed as though the soldiers of the Gracious One never faltered or tired. One by one they put down their swords in defeat and surrender.

"Cowards," the king cried, "Cowards! Come and fight with me those of you who have remained loyal and I will reward you." The king drew up a sword that a soldier had laid down. He charged forward with a battle cry but looked back in shock. He was alone. His men stood behind him, unmoving, silent. They took three steps backward and surrendered their king to the reward that awaited him.

The king looked across the field that was now soaked in blood. The dead were piled and strung across the field covering it like a blanket of armor and flesh. A silence had fallen upon the armies which every man knew to be the silence of souls departing. The carnage had been great and so the soldiers knew to have respect unto those who had paid the price.

The armies separated a path amongst themselves as the Gracious One stepped forward to stand before the king of the Southern Mountains. Although few men have seen the Gracious One, every soldier that looked upon his face that day knew that never was there a king fairer than he, nor would there ever be. He drew his sword and spoke before the king had a chance to cry out in scorn.

"There is nothing amiss here, nothing out of place. I root out all things that offend my perfection."

And with those words the Gracious One slew the king of the Southern Kingdom with his sword. His body dropped to the ground and laid there in a pool of his own blood.

So the army of the Gracious One returned to the north from where they had come. They had accomplished their purpose and there was no need for them to stay. It wasn't in them to conquer and divide, to make great cities or nations. They only bring grace when needed and relieve those who are oppressed like the reprieve of the moonlight sky from the glare of the desert sun.

The people of the Southern Kingdom took the bodies of those who were slain and buried them in the field. And when springtime returned white lilies sprung up all over the field where never lilies had grown before. So to this day they call the field the Field of the Redeemed because beauty grew again in the place of hatred and cruelty.

They did not touch the body of the king but left him to rot where he had fallen. This was his royal burial as he was left to be devoured by the jackals, wild dogs and birds of prey that would pick his bones clean till nothing remained. The people didn't mind that their king was disposed of in such a way as this. Because the people thought it only fitting that he should return to his own kind.

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Sometimes, as depraved sinners, we have tendencies to build great kingdoms in our imaginations. In these kingdoms we are kings and nobody knows better than we do. No person is cleverer than us, no person more just or more right. All people that we come into contact with become the subjects of our kingdom, the vassals of our tyranny.

The kingdoms of our imagination become the fruition of our hands in our day to day dealing with the people of the church and others that we come into contact with. With frightening strength we hold onto distorted views, petty arguments, and vain self opinions in the belief that nobody knows better than we do. And so we walk among each other as lords, peering down at one another, despising this man and that man for what we believe are weaknesses and for differences that aren't salvation issues and, quite frankly, not worth the fight.

And there are so many things for which our kingdoms battle against one another. We fight about church practices, school issues, sports, church politics, world politics, people's behavior. The point of this article isn't to argue either side, to validate one group over the other. Let each man have his opinion and speak peaceably about it. The question here is which kingdom are you fighting for?

Outside of the kingdom where your old man of sin rules, there is another kingdom that is often referred to as Zion. It's a beautiful kingdom and the one that rules it is fairer and more worthy than you. This kingdom has been built on the eternal foundation of his arms and the people that dwell in this kingdom dwell in the Covenant of Grace.

Although there are many joyful aspects of this kingdom, I want to focus on one in particular: grace. It's the tool that God uses to save his people, to restore them from eternal damnation to everlasting life. It's the means by which you are saved. And as such it's breathtaking.

But the beauty of grace doesn't just lie in the fact of what it accomplishes. The beauty of grace is also found in its boundlessness. That's how it's been measured to us, in boundlessness. Grace does not come to us in the measurements of teaspoons and tablespoons, in rationed amounts and child-sized portions. It comes to us in floods and torrents, in the quantities of seas and oceans. Grace is not the drizzle of a light April shower but it's the drenching thunderstorms of a late summer day, so heavy the rains fall, so thick the torrents of water that drench your skin, soaking you to the bone, till it's dripping from your clothes and fingertips. The quality of grace is eternal. It never ends for us. It never fails. West and east are forever away from each other and there in between lies all the grace that has been given to you.

Yet with all the grace that we receive from God, too often the grace that we deal out to one another is given in paltry doses. Like pennies and nickels that a miser gives to the poor and orphaned children, we hoard all the grace that God has bestowed upon us within ourselves. We refuse to surrender our unfounded expectations. We refuse to let go of arguments that grieve the Spirit because of the disunity that it causes among the members of the body of Christ. Life among the church becomes a tug of war as each kingdom of man refuses to budge or give an inch. And so we never stop to ponder what pleases the kingdom of Christ most. Or to ask ourselves as members of the covenant of grace, how can we best serve the Gracious One?

The kingdom of your vanity is rancid and a foul stench as are all kingdoms of men. The activities of these kingdoms are despised by God and displeasing to him. So it is that you have to dismantle your kingdom. You have to tear it apart because you can not have citizenship in both. You can't be a king in your kingdom and a member of the kingdom of the Covenant. So dismantle your kingdom. Raze it to the ground. Burn it if you need to. Do whatever it takes because your kingdom is doomed and the Gracious One will destroy it at the rising of his Son.

As a member of the Covenant of Grace you can be assured that the grace of our Father will never disappoint you. In time you will find it to be a cure-all, a band-aid, the super glue of the life of the church. Grace is the blood that flows in the body of believers as it forgives, chastens, restores, serves, loves and heals. It's the fertile soil that allows friendships to grow, marriages to flourish and covenantal life to abound.

The king of the Southern Kingdom was a vain man who believed that he was better than all men. He caused the death of so many people, just as we in our pride and cruelty kill so many people in word and thought. Let go of your vanities. Think yourself better than no man lest the Gracious One come and find something amiss and in his wrath root out those things which offend his perfection. Abdicate your throne before the Gracious One slays you and gives your body to the wild dogs and birds of prey and all those that feed upon the flesh.

