~ The Unopened Gift ~

For so long, my story wasn't the one I wanted.

I secretly hated believing God required constant rules and performance just to love, accept, or favor me.

Now I know better. That is all religious crap—and yes, that is the exact word Paul used!

Today, I refuse to shy away from my story.

I've been set free from those religious narratives that only serve to keep us doing things and going places Jesus never actually asked of us.

The moment we are taught that we need to go here, read more, die more, or do more just to receive an "atta boy" from Jesus... we completely miss His Gospel message.

Some of us don't need to *do* more. We need to *believe in Jesus* and His finished work more. Read that again.

Legalism tells you that you can only rest once Jesus gives you that "atta boy."

It forces you to hide behind a mask—because even though most churches teach that you can "come as you are," you quickly realize they are watching every move you make and placing you into their categories of pursue, move here, or cancel until…

You can see these masks the minute you step into a church foyer. The trained lingo is always the same: "*How are you?*" "*I am fine, so good to see you!*"

Fortunately, my husband simply doesn't do masks.

When he goes into the church building to see our kids and someone gives him the standard, "*How are you, brother?*" his response is a blunt, "*Average.*"

Because it isn't the approved religious script—like "blessed beyond measure"—people are completely at a loss for words.

His unfiltered honesty highlights the ugliest part of institutional culture: religion makes it clear that institutional expectations matter far more than the raw, messy authenticity that...

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Jesus actually adores in each and every one of us.

We've been conditioned to keep to a hand-me-down script clothed in spiritual "Christianese," convincing ourselves we are "well-behaved" simply because we are following the script.

The institutions applaud us for it, happily promoting our masks while the real us gets buried deeper and deeper beneath the system.

I know this firsthand because I used to have that religious lifestyle down to a science. I checked every box, but Jesus still felt like a distant, secondhand hearsay.

I eventually realized I was just a sheep listening to other sheep, instead of listening to the one and only Shepherd endorsed by God…Jesus.

There is simply no equation in knowing Jesus when the only thing you know about Him comes from someone else's hearsay.

There is absolutely nothing personal about remaining faithful to everything and everyone except His daily love and presence in our life.

That was the turning point where I decided it was Jesus' voice or bust for me.

There is no doubt some of us have received the gift of Jesus' Gospel message, but we haven't opened it yet.

We bring the package to church, flaunting it as a gift, while remaining faithful to a system that treats it as a heavy adornment we carry but never open.

Because what is inside isn't about what you need to do, how you need to progress, or what Jesus still requires.

What is inside is the truth that Jesus already finished what religious systems demand your performance to prove…

He didn't die to put us on a performance treadmill; He died to save us from the weight of religious systems that imply He did, and so you must.

Religious systems and religious performance go hand in hand, keeping us trapped in a system that ignores what is actually inside His gift... dare I say?

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Ironically, the hardest part of this journey hasn't been walking away from the narratives that blinded me for decades. It has been surviving the silent judgment of those who are still trapped inside them.

And even within myself, some of us need a major detox from this system so we can finally enjoy and rest in Jesus' finished work and true ekklesia.

When people have been trained for generations to look to human institutions for truth, anyone who cuts out the middleman looks like a rebel.

But it isn't rebellion to choose the only mediator that exists between us and God—Jesus' voice without a human filter.

Too many inside the institutional church have mistaken cultural morality for proof of their salvation.

They have mastered the performance and the lingo, remaining faithful to the institutional teachings while remaining absolute strangers to the one they call their Lord and Savior.

This is why my story, though seemingly rebellious to the religiously inclined, is no longer something I hide.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

I see my journey now as a roadmap to help set others free from their own possible counterfeit faith.

My life is proof that you can survive the judgment, drop the mask, and find the real Jesus the moment you open His gift.

If my willingness to stand unfiltered can help break the chains of just one person still suffocating under the weight of religious expectation…

Then every single swipe from every side-eyed sweetie is worth it.

wildly graced...
~bly

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