



## *A Christmas Story: Extravagant love kisses extreme poverty*

### **Main Point:**

This year I'd like us to journey toward Christmas re-reading the well-known story from a new perspective.

After reading *Kisses from Katie*, I was inspired by the verse:

*"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus was: though he was so very rich, yet to help you he became so very poor, so that by being poor he could make you rich."* (2 Corinthians 8:9 The Living Bible)

May we discover the spiritual riches offered by God and a fresh revelation of Christ's preparedness to enter the world's poverty, so we may become spiritually rich.

### **Intro |**

I want to start by making a confession. This year it is somewhat hard for me to get excited about Christmas.

In a few weeks, my mum and dad are travelling to Europe to spend Christmas with my sister and her family. So that means my boys and I will spend Christmas by ourselves.

But that is not the only reason. Having been raised in a Christian family, the Christmas story quickly becomes very familiar. It is easy to think, 'I've heard it all before.'

So, as I think about our Advent journey, it can be hard to stir up excitement and anticipation about how to see the season in a new way.

Anyway, putting Advent on the shelf of my mind, last week I packed my bag for my holiday. I happened to include an autobiography written by an inspirational young lady.

From the first page I was captivated by her uncompromising passion for Jesus, and her determination to obey whatever God called her to do. Even more so, when God's call was to leave her comfortable life in Nashville, Tennessee to hug and kiss the disease and malnourished street children in the slums of Uganda.

The book I'm talking about is *Kisses from Katie*. Katie shares that from a young age she was inspired by Mother Theresa and longed to share God's love with those the world deems 'the very least'. So, in December 2007, before finishing her senior year, she spent her Christmas holidays volunteering at an orphanage in Jinja.

The minute she arrived she fell in love, not just with the country, but most of all with the beautiful people who lived there.

A short holiday wasn't enough for Katie. She decided to return teaching kindergarten to the children who lived in the slum community.

Page after page described her journey of adjusting to a world that was so drastically different from everything she had ever known. She shared how most days she felt overwhelmed by the incredible number of people who needed help.

She describes feeling like 'attempting to empty the ocean with an eyedropper.' Only, just when she felt like she'd managed to fill the cup half-way, it would rain with more orphaned children.

Yet discouragement always seemed to dissolve as God whispered for her to keep going - because he loves every single one of these usually forgotten people.

It really is impossible to read a story like Katie's and not feel profoundly convicted.

I was confronted with my indifference to the plight of God's children living in abject poverty ... while I enjoyed such wealth, comfort and extravagance.

I felt convicted as I went to sleep in a comfortable bed, knowing there were millions who only had cardboard to cover a dirt floor.

I felt convicted that I often spend five dollars on a cappuccino, when in Africa, for one more dollar a child could be fed for a whole month.

Yes, every page was convicting.

But I was enthralled by her capacity to show love and compassion to those who can only be described as filthy, laden with germs and dirt poor.

When I read how Katie unflinchingly invited the street children to bury their faces in her hair, and kissed their diseased heads, I knew I would be worried about catching lice.

When I read how Katie cared for these children enough to remove the small insects that had burrowed into their skin, and rub ointment into their feet, I knew my stomach wouldn't have held up.

When I read how her heart for orphaned children drove her to adopt fourteen girls and feed hundreds more children every day, Community Dinner Church seemed to pale in comparison.

Reading about Katie's experiences kept Christmas and Advent out of my mind.

But then I read this paragraph,

*Every day I have spent in Uganda has been beautifully overwhelming; everywhere I have looked, raw, filthy human need and brokenness have been on display, beginning for someone to meet them, fix them. And even though I realise I cannot always mend or meet, I can enter in. I can enter into someone's pain and sit with them and know. This is what Jesus did. ... he enters in, He comes with us to the hard places. And so I continue to enter in. (page 23)*

And immediately Paul's words to the believers in Corinth sprang into my mind,

*"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus was: though he was so very rich, yet to help you he became so very poor, so that by being poor he could make you rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9 The Living Bible)*

And immediately, my heart exploded with a realisation.

In this one verse, it is as though I suddenly saw the Christmas story in a totally new light.

Christmas became the ultimate story of a gloriously rich King who because of his extravagant and relentless love, chose to kiss those who were living in a world steeped in darkness, disease, poverty and evil.

Now ... when I read books like this, it makes me reconsider what on earth I'm doing here in comfortable, beautiful Australia? Should I be packing up my life to care for the millions living in poverty on the other side of the world?

One of the contradictions Katie identified is that although the people she now called friends were desperately poor, they profoundly overflowed with the riches of the heart. She writes, *"They did not blame God for how they lived, nor did they ask him for more. They knew their circumstances were due to the brokenness of this world and they simply praised Jesus for keeping them alive through it all."* (page 22)

In fact, Katie discovered, these people were the most joyful human beings she had ever known. They prayed more passionately and worshipped God more exuberantly than she had ever seen. Now, there is no denying, God has certainly called every Christian to serve the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the lonely (Mark 14:7, Deuteronomy 24:19-22, Acts 2:44, 4:32-35).

I began to wonder how God defines wealth and riches. Was it the same way that we do? When God looks at our dependence on the physical comforts we regard as necessary, does He see a people who are rich?

The more I pondered this another verse spang to my mind.

**Point 1 | God defines wealth and riches in a dramatically different way than we do: material riches aren't the same as spiritual riches.**

I remembered what Jesus wrote to the rich church in Laodicea,

*"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."* (Revelation 3:17-18)

I realised that God defines wealth and riches in an entirely different way, than I had presumed.

I realised that God sees those who rely only upon themselves – as wretched.

God sees those who are driven by greed, comfort and pleasure – as pitiful.

Those who cannot see his abundant love and grace towards them – as blind.

Those who look to the world and its pleasures to cover their hearts – as naked.

Yes, God does indeed desire that we love and care for the poor, blind and the naked ... but the poor do not only live on the other side of the world ... these spiritually poor people are our neighbours, our friends and our family.

This makes the Christmas story totally different!

If I was to embark on a mission trip to a third-world country, I would definitely be packing many of my comforts from home: a soft mattress, comfy pillow, packets of chocolate, coffee ... all the bare essentials in life!

But that is not how Jesus prepared to embark on His mission trip to our broken and disease-infested world.

The Son of God, the King of the Universe, was prepared to enter this world into the most vulnerable of places – the womb of a poor woman.

One day he was walking the golden streets of heaven, sitting on a throne embedded with precious stones, chatting with angels who continually played heavenly music ... and the next day, he was a helpless, vulnerable baby.

**Point 2 | The eternal Son of God, lived in the splendour of heaven and was surrounded by the glory, power, and majesty of God – chose to become poor for us.**

Why did Katie leave her comfortable home in Nashville to love and care for these impoverished children?

Because she knew that God loves them as much as He loves every single person He created.

That's why the Son of God chose to leave His heavenly paradise and become poor.

That's what the nativity scene tells us.

The newborn King did not sleep in a cradle of gold but in a feeding trough set in a humble stable. The newborn King wasn't wrapped in fine linen, but in swaddling bands of poor children. His whole life was lived humbly. From a very young age, Jesus lived as a refugee from His own country.

He was the son of a humble carpenter. He had no fancy clothes, no home of His own, and often relied on others for food.

Every moment of His life on this earth, from His birth to His death, Jesus made the conscious choice to live as a relatively poor man.

But why? Why was Jesus prepared to enter this sin-infected world, surrounded by hearts darkened with blindness?

**Point 3 | The reason Jesus chose to enter our poverty-ridden world was "for your sakes, that you through His poverty might become rich."**

*"For God so loved the world that he gave us one and only Son ..."* (John 3:16)

And like Jesus, Katie knew her role was to serve in love,

For, *"the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:28)

Because of Jesus' poverty those who put their trust in Him are invited to share in the heavenly riches which Jesus shares with his Father.

This Advent may you remember the eternal heavenly riches that Jesus has bestowed upon you and may you be prepared to enter the lives of the poor around you with the love and compassion of Christ.

### *Advent Prayer Devotional*

Do you like stories? Both Matthew and Luke have a story to tell—the best story in the world. It's the story of how God sent His own Son Jesus down into the world to become one of us, a human being. It is the story of how God our Creator became God our Savior; and how the Son of God became the Son of Man.

Matthew tells the story simply, and mostly from Joseph's point of view. The darker parts of the Christmas story are mostly found in Matthew's Gospel.

Luke tells the story with lots of drama and poetry and humor, with plenty of dialogue. He tells us how the women saw things—Elizabeth and then Mary, Jesus' mother.

In this Advent season, we'll be sharing this story together—the story of how Jesus, our Savior, came into this world to save us. Together we'll celebrate how God kept His promise: "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

