

The King of Gaia and His Amazing Grace

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Once upon a time there was a great King, the benevolent sovereign of the vast realm of Gaia. His kindness to his subjects was legendary. Never once had he ever abused or misused any of them in any way. If ever a sovereign deserved the undying gratitude and steadfast fealty of his subjects, this was one.

But sometimes citizens don't know when they are well off. So it was with the blind inhabitants of Gaia. They seemed ever in the throes of a bad hair day. Constantly they mindlessly kicked and chafed at royal authority. No matter that their monarch had always governed them patiently, mercifully, and wisely, he was never good enough.

It was almost as if they were under some kind of evil spell.

For one thing they were infected with the all-too-human notion that authority—any authority—is oppressive by definition. They imagined if they could just get the crown's laws off their backs they would magically achieve the freedom and tranquility that had forever eluded them. Little did they realize that their gnawing sense of enslavement and itch for emancipation had its roots in an interior, not exterior, condition of their own making, not the king's doing.

In the background of this malaise, but no small part of the trouble was a skillful, agitating outsider. This rogue, who despised everything and everyone good, was set on subverting the great King any way possible. Along with his devilish co-conspirators his design was to drive a wedge between the king and his subjects. Though wildly overmatched against the mighty monarch of Gaia, this foul creature was nonetheless an enormously clever and deceitful scoundrel who was however more than a match for the naïve, but evilly disposed citizenry of Gaia. This lying interloper insinuated himself and his perverse ideas into affairs with the insidious intention of sowing enough discord to achieve the overthrow of the King and seize his kingdom for his own evil purposes. He played the rebel-hearted citizens of Gaia like a fiddle, craftily leveraging their native disloyalty and their cravings for autonomy.

It goes without saying they fell blindly into his deceitful charms and totally into his ideological and moral orbit. Following a course of misperceived self-interest, they allowed him to lure them with his evil smirk into his fatal trap. Little did they realize the false freedom he promised them was true slavery and the illusion of the good life he advertised was really a death march.

One dark day the wicked citizens of Gaia revolted en masse. Led on by his deceptions and insinuations, these Gaians repaid the endless kindness and generosity of their Sovereign with loathing rather than love. Disowning him and the whole royal family, they refused haughtily to pay any tribute to the crown, though amazingly the King continued out of his royal coffers and stores to make daily

provisions for their needs and provide for their safety and security in ways they never knew or imagined.

Before continuing with this sad story, maybe this is the best point to paint in the background of this narrative. It may sound as though the king was but a helpless bystander in his own kingdom. Don't be fooled. Trust me, from the start he had a firm grip on all these unfolding events. Had he felt it the wisest thing to do, he could and would have prevented what happened. A person of uncanny foresight, he knew well in advance the heart and the actions of his subjects as well as how his enemy would try to exploit the estrangement of his citizens. None of this caught His Majesty flat-footed, as they say. From the outset the king possessed all the power, knowledge and wisdom needed to interdict the whole sorry episode.

So why didn't he, one may well ask. Kings have never felt obliged to explain all their thoughts and actions to subjects and spectators, but I think from what he has disclosed we can put together this much:

Obviously the king was not so determined to make his subjects knuckle under that he was willing to use his power to reduce them to robots. He did not want the love and loyalty of machines. That sort of 'honor' would give him no pleasure.

But there was an even greater consideration. From the day he established the kingdom on Gaia, the purposes and actions of the sovereign were determined by his royal master plan. When finally executed in all its glory, this would be the wonder of the ages.

Though it has never been fully explained nor is it possible to fully comprehend how it worked, we can say this much: somehow the good the king intended to bring to pass mysteriously embraced all the evil things that he allowed to happen. With god-like wisdom he knew how to make evil serve good ends.

Let me not miscommunicate here. In no way do I mean to suggest the king authored or prompted his subjects to do evil or anything like that. No, no. He was totally above reproach in everything. Nor am I saying that he simply foresaw these evil events and adjusted his plans accordingly. Admittedly, I'm getting a bit out of my depth here. Let me just frankly admit that at this point I am a bit like an ant trying to explain the thoughts and actions of an elephant.

Suffice it to say, in executing his master plan, this marvelous sovereign possessed such an array of powers and knowledge that not only was he able to foresee in various combinations how this and that situation would play off each other and how certain combinations of events, real or potential, would interact, depending on this or that, but had the remarkable ability to order and shape events that would make certain the outcomes he wanted.

I guess the important thing here (before we return to our chronicle) is that the king was brilliant enough to assure the outworking of his plan without stripping the players of their wills and

accountability. In other words, he knew precisely how to make actions and events certain without making them necessary.

That may seem like a distinction without a difference. So maybe a little domestic analogy will out here. Can you bring a little imagination?

Suppose I anticipate a day when for some reason it is important for my kids to go to the kitchen and get into the refrigerator at a certain time. I need to assure myself that when that certain time arrives they will respond on cue. But they are not robots. At that point I will not be in position to force them to act against their will. Moreover in this instance I have no inclination to impose my will on them. So how do I bring this off?

Bingo! I have a plan. Just inform them in a timely fashion that their favorites drinks and desserts are hidden in the frig crisper. Now they don't *have* to go to the frig. They can say, thanks, but no thanks, we're not hungry. However I have the advantage of knowing my kids inside and out. I *know* that information will draw them to the frig as surely as honey draws bees. I will not force them against their will, but I know how to use what I know of their native dispositions and unbounded youthful appetites to make certain they cooperate with my purposes. My plan works to perfection but they do what they do of their own volition. I did not make their actions necessary, but I did know how to make their response certain and guarantee the outcome I planned.

Well, it was something like that with the King of Gaia. You get the general idea. The King of Gaia didn't incite his subjects to do evil. But he did determine to use the evil they were all too glad and literally hell bent to do for his own good purposes and make certain that whenever they did their evil things, it all came down on time and on the dime to service his good ends. Amazing beyond words how he managed that!

Now to pick up the drama again. This story is one of amazing grace.

As I said the great King of Gaia had a secret plan he had never shared with anyone except his son, the royal heir. Over time he gradually unveiled it incrementally in a fuller and fuller way, although the whole story has never yet been told or fully comprehended. What we do know is this:

The master plan called for him to give his rebellious, incorrigible subjects the opportunity and the freedom to ruin themselves and to make such a hopeless mess of their lives that it would afford him an unprecedented window to display a grace and kindness never before seen or imagined in Gaia, or anywhere else for that matter.

His idea was to extend to all his worthless subjects, even after all the havoc they had wrought and the dishonor and insults they had heaped upon the Crown, an incredibly gracious offer of full amnesty and of restoration of all the rights and privileges of citizenship. What stupendous mercy! Unimaginable, given their wicked behavior. They all deserved to a man (and woman) to be roasted. Yet here is their sovereign extending to his worthless subjects an offer of redemption. Amazing grace!

But that keynote was part of the whole plan. Crucial to his ends was winning over his disobedient subjects on such terms that when they finally turned, it would be crystal clear to the whole realm and beyond that their restoration to favor and privilege in the kingdom was accomplished strictly and solely by the king's power, his wisdom, his knowledge and sovereign initiative alone. Their 'salvation' was, he wanted it to be evident, in no way indebted to any merit or noble action on their part. The whole plan was built around just that premise and outcome.

The mechanics are by no means entirely clear, but I guess you could say that it all started unfolding long before the rebellion, an event, remember, which the king anticipated and had incorporated into his plan from the first.

One day well before this ugly turn of events took place, the king of Gaia directed a royal scribe to bring to the throne room an official state roll of all the citizens of his realm. As he looked down the list of his unworthy subjects, every so often the King would order the scribe to record a name on a separate list. When he had finished, the sovereign told his scribe to entitle the second list "The Roll of the Elect and Heirs of the Kingdom." Of course at that point in time the scribe had no idea what of make of this, but, as commanded, dutifully returned the list to the royal archives for safe keeping.

In time after the great revolt occurred, it was like Gaia sat in some great darkness. The inhabitants seemed in the grip of madness. It was anarchy almost. They not only were now alienated from the Crown, but it was evident thereafter that they were at war with one another and yes, even at odds with themselves. The repercussions were ugly and pervasive.

From the outside looking in, the King of Gaia seemed to be faced with a great moral dilemma. On the one hand he loved his subjects and desired to save them from the jaw and paw of the evil Lion, so to speak. On the other, justice had to be served. Love and injustice cannot coexist. The question was, how could he extend his love and yet honor his sense of justice?

Here is where this story gets even more amazing. The son of the king was privy to and involved in the whole plan from the start. He was just like his father in every way.

As part of the plan the son volunteered with the father's consent--are you ready for this?-- to be the scapegoat for the people. He volunteered to step forward to the bar of state justice and, offering himself as a legal substitute, allow the judge to inflict upon himself the full penalty of the people's traitorous actions. This way their criminality could be legally and justly pardoned. Provided, that is, the offenders would actually believe the report of what the son did for them and would not hate the royal family so violently that for spite they would reject any reconciliation

So upon a day it happened. The son paid a dear price to facilitate his father's gracious plan to make it possible for those reprobate and totally undeserving subjects to be reconciled with his father and put back in good standing with all the precious rights and privileges of upright citizens.

Now the plan really kicks into high gear. The next thing on the agenda is to get the word out. Heralds are posted to every corner of Gaia. Messenger after messenger publishes the good news, extending to the king's wretched, wicked subjects his gracious offer of full amnesty.

Their message was always the same. "A royal offer of amnesty is on the table. Just believe it and receive it. Full pardon. Whosoever will may come. The King's son suffered your penalty in your place. Believe the good news, embrace it and be reconciled to the King. Whosoever will may come and be restored to the rights and privileges of citizenship in the Kingdom."

It said something about the ruination and incorrigibility of these wicked citizens that this offer flew like a lead balloon. Time and again the messengers returned at the end of the day mocked, maligned, or maimed. Some never returned. They were murdered.

By this time one would think that the patience of the great King of Gaia would have been totally exhausted. Smoke 'em and start over! Yet this incredibly merciful sovereign never scrapped his plan, but kept on page and just kept a rotation of royal heralds publishing the word, sometimes redundantly. Naturally the whole royal court was astounded that he would put up with all this nonsense from such hopeless ingrates. Yet throughout the realm the echo continued to ring, "Whosoever will. . ." A bona fide offer steadfastly refused and reviled.

Well, not quite, thankfully. Occasionally there was a major breakthrough. And that's the really stunning as well mysterious part of this marvelous story.

Remember that list of "the King's elect" the royal scribe has taken down and stored for safe keeping in the royal archives? Well, here is what that turned out to be all about.

As the messengers of the king were busy throughout the land publishing the word and being persecuted and reviled for their efforts, periodically the King himself, with that list in hand, would make a majestic foray into some venue or other. He moved about with his retainers in an arrestingly purposeful fashion, as though he knew exactly where he was going and whom he was seeking.

And that he did. For in every case as he ventured into hostile territory, though always well protected, he would search out some recalcitrant subject on that list, maybe even one bold enough to revile him to his face as the king rode up to him or her. It was always so amazing to watch him work. It was nothing short of miraculous how he could approach a hostile, look him or her straight in the eye in a way that disarmed them completely. Whatever their attitude had been before, when he confronted them in that ever so personal, irresistible way of his, their hearts invariably melted before him. In the tenderest way, he would just say to them:

"You are mine. Repent. Trust me and follow after me."

Every time they would fall in behind his retinue and march off with him like soldiers heading into battle. Totally turned around. There they were following him through the jeering crowds meek as lambs and brave as lions. Unbelievable!

Each time as the royal party moved on, the king would scratch through another name on that list.

Still the message went out:

“Whosoever will . . . come, follow me. Repent and receive pardon.”

And still the resistance and contempt continued unabated.

In the midst of it all, the king continued to seek out his Elect and confront them face-to-face. Who could believe the irresistible power of that certain gaze? How it melted all their hostility . . . how ashamed his former adversaries were of themselves when his eyes looked right into their souls. Every time it was the same thing. Not once did he fail to rescue his man—or his woman.

Yet all the time he was calling out his Elect, the gracious invitation continued to be offered in every place his heralds went. “Whosoever will . . .” If they would only respond, they could be spared. But spared they refused to be.

On the last day the offer was still open, the king glanced at his watch. Obviously and ominously, time was about to expire . . . the time to ring the curtain down on the part of his master plan. Again, for one last time he announced through his messengers:

“Whosoever will, come and receive amnesty. Please, come! Time is wasting. The opportunity for pardon is about to expire shortly.”

Seeing no response and hearing nothing but more abuse, at last he says:

“That’s it. Time’s up.”

And directly as he rides away with all his elect in tow, he gives the fateful signal to his army in the rear to move in and do at last what Justice cried for:

“The rest are yours. Punish them to the full extent of the law.”

One thing was evident as one watched all this. The hardness and the corruption of the subjects ran so deep and thick that not one of them would ever have been ‘fixed’ on their own. They were incorrigible in their wickedness and intractable in their contempt for their sovereign.

One can only be amazed that the king ever bothered to save any of them. But he did—many of them. Yet it was only by his own sovereign initiative that he selected some (who knows for what reason—certainly not any merit in them) to rescue from themselves and somehow turn into subjects worthy of him.