

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

February 2014

Dear Friends,

I had a remarkable experience this past weekend which got me thinking. Twenty guys holed up in a house for several days of fellowship and going deeper with Jesus. The conversation ranged across a wild field – how do you pray effectively? What do you do with relational struggles, especially when they hit close to home? How do you hang onto hope when your calling seems to have gotten sidelined by just paying the bills? How do you hear from God? Lots of rich, deep subjects. More than your average bear tends to wonder about.

But after hours of profound conversation, I walked away thinking that if a person could just grasp three things, it would transform their daily life...

1. The *personality* of Jesus.

A whole lot of confusion goes out the window when you encounter Jesus as he really is. Not the religious Jesus; the real one. After all, he is “the image of the invisible God...the exact representation of his being” (Col 1:15, Heb 1:3). This is huge; knowing God is everything. But “God” is actually a fairly safe word these days; people mean all sorts of things when they use the word “God.” Jesus, on the other hand, is startlingly specific; he is so immediate and particular and...himself.

I could tell you some facts about my wife Stasi. She has green eyes; she is about 5’8”; she likes baths. True facts, but you hardly know her. Most Christians just have facts about God, and it doesn’t really help. I could tell you stories about Stasi – that she went sledding last weekend, and she met a friend at the vet because her dog was sick – and you begin to get such a better picture (she’s playful, and caring). *Or*, you could meet Stasi yourself. Which ends all debate; you encounter her. Now you know the reason for the Incarnation! Facts about God don’t get you very far. Stories about him bring you closer. But to actually *meet* him for yourself changes everything. Thus, Jesus. “Tada – here I am; any questions?”

When you remember that he is playful, it restores joy to your life. When you keep in mind he is valiant, it calms your fears. When you are convinced of his goodness, it restores hope. Jesus as he really is helps you interpret what he’s doing in your life, and move into a much deeper relationship with him. Sadly, most Christians still have a pretty religious view of Jesus, and it is harming their life. Others of you know, but forgot what he’s like – his playfulness, cunning, scandalous freedom, kindness. The fog crept back in. We all would be greatly helped by a fresh encounter with his personality. May I recommend *Beautiful Outlaw* as a way to get closer to Jesus? You can’t interpret what Jesus is doing in your life without keeping in mind his *personality*.

2. What Jesus is primarily up to.

Life continually shouts all sorts of messages at us – the twists and turns, ups and downs, hopes and bitter disappointments – it has a way of confusing us about what God is after. How can we pray with hope and confidence when we're not really sure what God wants for us? The cross, the resurrection and the ascension are his means of accomplishing something – but what? Are you holding onto a rich understanding of that right now? You might say, “Redemption,” and that is true – but meaning what?

Let me remind you, first, that Jesus came for *you*. He didn't come for himself; he came for you. To rescue you, and restore you. In fact, Jesus himself is the picture of what you are intended to be: “God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him” (Rom 8:29 Message). The work of Jesus Christ is intended to restore your humanity. God is primarily after your restoration. Is that what guides your engagement with God – or are you after others things, and confused by his lack of cooperation?

If you can keep before you the actual personality of Jesus, and what his primary mission is, it will do wonders for your daily life. But let me add the third essential...

3. Your context.

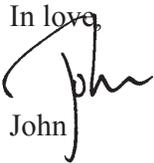
If you watched the Super Bowl, you might have seen the commercial in which an adorable puppy kept escaping from the kennel and showing up at a farm, where he was befriended by a beautiful Clydesdale. It was a “boy meets girl” story. The handsome cowboy and beautiful woman who runs the kennel are leaning on the fence together at the end, watching the puppy and horse play in a meadow. I found myself wishing life were simply about that – let's just make things beautiful. You long for that too.

Because life used to be like that; we lived in a place called Eden. And it will be like that again one day – it really will. But that is *not* what is happening right now, and if you set yourself to trying to make it so, it is going to be mighty disheartening.

Our context is savage war. Think terrorism, human trafficking, the number of cults holding millions hostage. War. Forget this and you'll find it hard to trust God. The war distorts our view of Jesus and our belief that he intends to restore us. You live in a war; a great invasion is taking place. It can get ugly. People who understand this operate very differently from people who are trying to make their life like the puppy commercial. Context is everything – how are you understanding your context?

The rich, beautiful personality of Jesus. The restoration of your humanity. A world at war. Hold onto these three things and they will help you not merely navigate stormy days, they will change your expectations, restore strength to your heart, and help you live a far more meaningful and fruitful life.

Really.

In love,

John