

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

June 2012

Dear Ones,

First, thank you so much for your kind notes regarding last month's letter on Hope. I'm so grateful to hear it was a help to you. I found myself reading on hope again this weekend, praying for hope. So good. So needed.

And now, I have something even more important to say.

I think the greatest trick the enemy has pulled on Christians – especially committed followers of Christ – is to convince us to do our best. Really. It can take a hundred different forms – serve the world, be a good mother/father, live a holy life, witness for Christ, fight for justice. He appeals to the very passions within us to live as we long to live, and urges us onward. But it is absolutely deadly if any of these noble endeavors are what we are living for. The cunning, cunning shift, so brilliant, so subtle, is away from union *with* Christ to doing our best *for* Christ.

And it will destroy us.

Because the secret of Christianity – the secret *to* Christianity – is that God comes to live inside us, impart his life to us, give us his power and from there we can then go on to love, serve, pray, fight, live. But only from there. This is really basic to Christian teaching, I know, but friends – it is mighty rare in experience. Most Christians are living out some version of “do your best,” or, they have collapsed from trying and given in. Really now, be honest – how much of your day is given over to union with Jesus? To even asking for it? Is this really even a category for you, on a daily operating basis?

When you face a crisis, a temptation, a difficult conversation, a fear – do you in that moment immediately pray, *Jesus in me, help me with this. I choose the life of God in me to handle this?* Me neither. We gut it out. We try to do our best.

We've all heard the famous vine-branches analogy, probably hundred of times over. Jesus said, or perhaps better, Jesus *warned*: “I am the vine, you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But somehow, we keep forgetting. Or thinking that faithfulness, or bible study, or ethical living on our part equals being a good branch. It doesn't. Being a good branch means being united to the vine, drawing our life from him. That is the branch's number one job. That's what a branch does. In some ways, it the branch's only job (!).

To help you see how vital this is, think about the even more famous passage two chapters later in John, where Jesus is praying for us:

“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world

may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity..." (vs 20-23).

Far too often this passage is used to urge us to Christian fellowship, unity in the body of Christ. I've heard laypeople quote it that way hundreds of times; I've also heard it used in this manner from the pulpit. But that is NOT what the passage is about. Not at all. The passage is about union with Jesus and the Father. Watch carefully...

Jesus prays, "that all of them may be one, Father." (This is where folks think it is about Christian unity). But without taking a breath, in the same sentence he goes right on to illustrate that oneness by example: "just as you are in me and I am in you." Jesus and the Father are not one in the sense that they share ecclesiastical brotherhood, or that they get along with one another despite their differences. They are one in being, one in substance, they share a single life, they are joined in union. THAT is the union Jesus wants with us. "Just as," is the way he puts it: "just as you are in me and I am in you may they also be *in us*."

Then he repeats himself in order to make it clear: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." And how are Jesus and the Father one? "I in them and you in me." This is the union he is after; this is the union we need. Desperately.

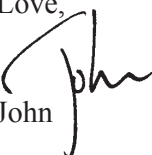
According to Jesus, he lives in you, and the Father lives in him in you, and this is how we become "one as we are one." I keep having to tell myself repeatedly: *Jesus of Nazareth – that Jesus I so admire and adore – that Jesus lives inside of me. Right now. He is in me. The Father is in me.*

Of course, Paul described this as the central treasure of Christianity: "Christ in you." Friends, anything else is striving. Anything else – including every effort to "live a good life" – is trying to produce a Christ-like result on our own strength. Even though it is done out of love, devotion, the fear of the Lord, even out of such good motives, none of it will work. You are not a vine; you are a branch in need of a vine.

We are entering trying times, dear ones. We need Jesus desperately. Inside of us. We need his life to live this life. And so here is what I find myself praying more and more:

Jesus, I ask you for union, for oneness. I pray for union with you. Nothing else will do. And so I give myself to you, I surrender Self to you in me, to Christ in me, that you would come and fill me, possess me in every way. I give me to you, to have you in me. I give my life to you, to live your life in me.

This, and nothing else, will rescue us.

Love,

John