

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

February 2013

Dear Friends,

One of the most beautiful stories in the Gospels is the restoration of Peter (recorded in John 21). It is a very human and tender story, full of redemption and hope.

Peter, as you recall, is the man who denied Christ at his moment of greatest need. The rooster crowed and Peter went out to weep bitterly. As any of us would. Maybe a week and a half later, post resurrection, Jesus finds Peter and the boys out fishing and has them to breakfast on the beach. Then he takes Peter aside and restores him – three times, just as the betrayal was three times. Peter goes on to become a leader in the early church, and a contributor to the New Testament. That ought to give us all hope.

But the treasure I want to point out is named in Luke, when Jesus says to Peter, “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32). *Strengthen your brothers*. This is what Jesus longs for you – to be strengthened. The theme carries on through the New Testament...

Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers (Acts 15:32).

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being (Ephesians 3:16).

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy (1 Thess 3:13)

It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace (Hebrews 13:9).

One of the major spirits of our age is a spirit of surrender. You see it in the world as “a soft acceptance of all things.” For the Christian it brings a kind of weariness of heart that causes us to drop our guard. Prayer seems like a hassle; going to our small group seems irritating; holding onto the truth seems unnecessary. It is, in fact, a spirit of Defeat, and its subtle approach is to get folks to surrender. Bit by bit, month by month, it wears away at our spiritual strength, the strength of our hearts. That is why we *need* to be strengthened.

So, here at the beginning of the year, I want to suggest some ideas that will help strengthen your heart...

Turn down the noise. We are bombarded every day – commercials in taxis, at gas pumps, in elevators, on our computers, our phones. Wherever you can, turn down the noise in your life. Use your drive time for quiet, for something that enriches you.

Turn off the news. Really – I mean it. The news is a product sold every day; evil sells. “Three children were told today they are loved” doesn’t make headlines; “Three children found dead” does. The evil one uses the news to celebrate darkness. Turn it off.

Forgive. Bitterness and resentment eat away at the heart like cancer. It’s time to let it go.

Name your fears, and turn them over to Christ. Fear is also a cancer (usually felt as “worry.”) Name it, and lay it at the feet of Jesus. Every day if you have to.

Play worship as background music in your home, your car. For one thing, the demons hate it and don’t like to be around it. But more so, it enriches your spirit, mind and heart.

Stay with one truth at a time. Distraction doesn’t nourish. Pick one truth God brings you and spend a week with it before you rush on to the next thing. Marinate.

Sabbath. I don’t mean an hour at church and then grocery shopping, paying the bills and homework. I mean, where is the rest in your life? Weekly, what do you do for Sabbath?

One night a week. Most of you are running hard; the pace of life is in itself an assault. Give one night a week to quiet, to God, to joy, to whatever strengthens your heart. (It won’t be TV; television does not strengthen the heart.)

Recover what once brought you joy. What was it? Running? Playing an instrument? Reading? Taking walks? Go take it back; joy strengthens the heart.

Distance yourself from draining people. I don’t mean stop loving; I mean set some boundaries for heavens sake. This may be hard but the relief will be worth it.

Beauty. You need beauty in your life – nature, music, visual beauty. It’s life.

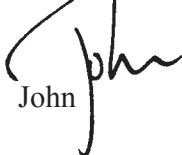
Pray Ephesians 3:14-19 for yourself, often. This is God’s will for you – that you be strengthened by his power deep within. My goodness – *ask for it!!!*

Tell Jesus you love him, several times a day. As we make a practice of loving Jesus, it strengthens our hearts because this above all else is what your heart is made for.

My friends, I hope you understand we are living in soul-draining times. The enemy very much wants to break the power of God’s people. And remember – an affair doesn’t happen in a day, nor does an addiction, or a suicide. All the woes of the human heart happen over time, subtly at first, as we yield to surrender, to the spirit of Defeat. You do not want to surrender your heart, not in these times, not when you need every bit of strength you can possibly find. Strengthen your heart. Seek those things out that Jesus is using to strengthen your heart.

It matters.

Offered in love,


John