

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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December 2013

Dearest Friends,

And now it is December. Thanksgiving is behind us, and the year is quickly drawing to a close. The holidays will be here momentarily. As I sit in my office on this cold and snowy morning, I am praying over this letter...

*What do you have for us, Jesus? What do you want for your people this month?*

I am reluctant to write you on a Christmas theme. Not because I don't like Christmas; I love it. I love all of Christmastide. My reluctance comes because by now you are inundated with everyone's holiday thoughts, wishes, commercials, muzac, schemes, sales, catalogs, blogs, sermons, tweets. It tends to blur into a drone of holiday noise, overloading us at the very time of year we sing, "Silent Night." Typically there's not much silence to it.

But then Jesus replied,

*"I want to restore hope."*

He wants to restore our hope – and that would be a very, very good thing. You might not even know that you need your hope restored – till it happens!

Whatever else Christmas might be, it is a demonstration beyond all doubt that God keeps his word – he intervenes. He promised he would come...and he came. On a cold night in Bethlehem, in a far corner of the Roman Empire, when his people had pretty much figured the Kingdom would never come, he came. We have to push back all the other holiday messages for a moment and simply let the reality of the Incarnation hit us fresh again: He said he would come, and he did.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. ("O Holy Night")

A thrill of hope.

I think it's been quite sometime since my heart felt a *thrill* of hope. I've certainly had a nudge or two of hope, maybe even a stirring of hope. But wouldn't it be wonderful to feel a *thrill* of hope, perhaps to feel it in some new way for the first time? Let's see if we can find that, open our hearts to it's coming, just as Mary opened herself to the coming of Jesus...

Christmas is more than God simply "coming." It is a dramatic intervention the likes of which the world had never seen before. O yes – God had intervened for his people in many ways down through the centuries, sometimes in stupendous ways. The creation itself was quite an intervention

– dazzling beauty and life out of what had been “formless and void.” But all of those were... able to be lost. Fragile.

Here, in Christmas, in the Incarnation, God intervenes *permanently*. This is no manna for today, no one-time parting of the sea. It is not merely an answer to a prayer, a miraculous provision for a moment’s need. He comes to ransom, he comes to restore, he comes to save – *forever*. It is a permanent provision, an “ongoing and unstoppable miracle” if you will, because the effects of it are present and everlasting. You are everlastingly his now; you are everlastingly secure; you are everlastingly taken care of. It was an intervention that opened the door to a multitude of interventions. For he keeps on coming.

I will not leave you as orphans; I *will* come to you (John 14:18).

Jesus comes to us now, and his coming is our greatest need.

*O Jesus come to me; I need you now, I need you here – in this. Above and beyond whatever else I need, I need you, God. Come to me again.*

It is now. And it is also imminent. He is coming, soon, once-and-for-all. Yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. If you haven’t spent time in the woods through the last hours of the night, you might be surprised to know that it tends to get very cold right before the dawn. It can be a bit disheartening for the uninitiated, if you do not know that the bitter chill is merely a sign that things are finally turning, and the night is about to fade away. Dawn is coming, warmth and light and beauty are coming even though it just got colder than it had been all night.

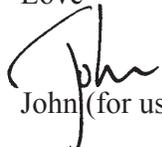
The world is like that; human history is like that. Jesus himself told us it would be so – that things would get coldest right before the dawn. These dark days tempt us in exactly the wrong direction; our hearts begin to succumb to the feeling that Jesus is still a long ways off. Not at all. Quite the opposite – this is the very sign that our glorious morn is rapidly approaching from the east. Life is finally about to be ours. Everything you have ever dreamed of is about to be yours.

That will bring a thrill of hope, if you’ll let it.

*O Jesus – forgive my failing heart. I have lost this almost entirely. I pray you would restore to me the sure and immovable hope in your imminent return. Restore to me the most genuine hope of all – that my life is about to come true, that everything I ever longed for is about to be mine, forever. Grant to me this Christmastide a thrill of hope.*

We love being your friends and allies here at Christmas, here at the end of the age. We love this great and noble fight as we stoke the fires and wait for the dawn. Thank you for being our friends. We wish you and yours a very merry Christmas indeed.

Love

  
John (for us all)