

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

December 2012

Dearest Friends,

And so it is Christmastime.

Christmastime – what does the word evoke in you?

Perhaps there is the initial sense of pressure, of all the many things you need to get done. Beneath that, perhaps the word *Christmastime* evokes some hopes for the season, desires that this time of year arouse. Deeper still might be memories of Christmases past, and all the longing that those awaken. Can you feel it?

Christmastime.

It means something very different to me now than it did when I was a boy. Back then, in the golden days of childhood Christmas, before the end of the innocence, the word was filled with promise – stockings, and presents, and gatherings; the beautiful tree lit at night and hopes that Santa would come. The promise of a bike, a baseball glove. As a young man, newly come to Christ, a major shift occurred. The season became filled with the wonder of Advent – the Incarnation, Bethlehem, the coming of our Redeemer. All the joy that the old Christmas carols capture so beautifully. The promise of a Savior.

In recent years, though my love for Advent has deepened, I find myself thinking in another direction. My thoughts and desires turn not so much backwards – either to the memories of childhood Christmases, or to the wonder of Bethlehem – but rather forwards, to another Advent we are longing for, all of us, whether we know it or not.

There is a golden treasure at the heart of Christianity, which I think we have lost. Let me show you what I mean, by quoting a few passages from the New Testament:

We wait eagerly for our adoption (Romans 8:23).

You eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1 Corinthians 1:7).

We eagerly await a Savior...the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

I was reading through passages like these the other day, and what I was struck by was, *No we don't*. I don't know anyone who could be described as “waiting eagerly” for the return of Jesus. Really – how many conversations, emails, texts have you received this year in which the two of you spoke

longingly of how you are *eagerly awaiting* the return of Jesus? I rest my case. Sure – we want Jesus to come back. Sure, it is part of our faith. But are we actually, daily, looking forward to it with hopeful hearts? Waiting *eagerly*? You begin to see what I mean.

Yet – this is *the central treasure* of Christianity.

This is the very core of our faith. The older liturgies used to repeat it weekly, for a reason: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. Without this at the forefront of our hearts and minds...we are lost. We turn to this world with all our hopes and dreams...and it cannot deliver.

Friends, dear ones, your heart was made for the Kingdom of God, and nothing on this earth can possibly satisfy because this earth is broken and the Kingdom has not yet come in all its glory and fullness. Now, you know I believe that a great deal of healing, restoration and goodness is available in this life. But if you read back over the old saints, you'll find their hopes totally set on the return of Jesus, the second coming; the Second Advent. Here is one of my favorite passages from George MacDonald;

We may however say to ourselves, *One day these souls of ours will blossom into the full sunshine.* When all that is desirable in the commonness of daily love, and all we long for of wonder and mystery and the look of Christmastime will be joined in one, and we shall walk as in a wondrous dream yet with more sense of reality than our most waking joy now gives us.

Christmastime is a *promise*. It is a herald, in twinkling lights and songs, in bakery smells and beautiful packages, in parties and celebrations, of the coming Kingdom. All those desires (and disappointments) it awakens, they are telling you of the return of the King. Jesus Christ came once, to rescue this world, just as he promised. And he is coming back, dear ones, just as he promised. When he returns, life will finally be ours. All that we long for in the wonder and look of Christmastime will be ours. Forever.

If you do not find yourself “eagerly awaiting” this, you might want to stop and ask yourself why.

And so, I wanted to invite you to a new way of observing Advent, Christmastime, and the holidays. Let this be a time of turning your hopes and dreams towards the Second Advent, the return of our King. (Personally, I pray every Christmas eve that he'll return on that very night; wouldn't it be beautifully poetic, to have Jesus return Christmas eve night, under the stars, in Bethlehem?!).

However he chooses to return, our King and friend is coming, dear ones. This is the hope and treasure of our faith. This is the deepest longing of your heart. Christmas merely hints at it. Knowing this, putting your hopes on the one and not the other, has a surprising effect – you'll find your heart is freed to sing the carols with a greater joy, freed to enjoy the gifts of the holidays without the pressure. Free to breathe.

And may I say, a very merry Christmas to you from Stasi and me, and the whole team here at Ransomed Heart.


John