

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

April 2020

Dear Friends,

Well, the world has certainly been shaken.

And if we're honest, we've all been shaken a bit, too.

Ever since the pandemic broke out (probably the most significant event of our era), the world has been reaching for solid ground—medically, economically, politically, socially. And it has evaded us. We don't know what recovery will look like, or when it will come. We don't know about the potential for another “wave” of the virus, or the timing of vaccines. We don't know what the economy will really do. Uncertainty has been *the* consistent factor in all of this. It's almost as if God has kept things veiled, for his own purposes.

I wonder what he is up to.

Many years ago I was thrown by a horse, and broke both wrists. Both arms in casts. For almost three months, my “normal” was completely taken from me. Opening a door, tying my shoes, feeding myself, driving—it all vanished, in a moment. I couldn't wash my hair, cut my steak, couldn't even open the refrigerator door. It was an upheaval; I was dependent on Stasi in ways I had never been, and the “constraints” I found myself living with were very, *very* revealing.

God used it to expose my radical independence. Oh, I would have told you that I was “dependent on God for everything,” like a good Christian should. But in fact, I was a very self-reliant, insulated, self-determined man, living from independence and calling it maturity. My accident proved to be far less about my wrists, and nearly all about the condition of my soul.

Any therapist will tell you, there is nothing like crisis to get people to look at their life and face reality in ways they did not when everything was good. They see how fragile their house of cards really is. “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word” (Ps 119:67). Before I broke my wrists I was profoundly independent, more than a little proud of it, insensitive to those with less independence, and doing years of damage to my marriage. My independence shouted to Stasi “I don't need you.” What a horrible message to send my dear wife.

God didn't throw me off that horse, but I can sure tell you he used it. And I *needed* him to.

Whatever else Jesus is up to right now, this pandemic and all of the political, economic and social upheaval is a “shaking” the world very much needed. And it presents to us an incredible Gospel opportunity...for a window of time.

Friends, we in the developed world have enjoyed for years now an unprecedented level of comfort, convenience, and control. Pleasure on demand. With only the effort of a few clicks we could order anything we wanted in the world, and have it delivered to our door. We became connoisseurs of coffee, chocolate, cupcakes. Life on our terms. That little computer in our hands has given us an experience

of convenience and control unimaginable to our grandparents. Seriously, when you have an economy that could support specialty stores selling only cupcakes, you have a very comfy culture.

That kind of world does not cause people to turn to God; not when they are the masters of their happiness. And so that culture *needed* to be rocked, thrown from its high horse.

People are suddenly aware how fragile life is, how fragile culture, stability and things like jobs, healthcare and retirement accounts are. For this unique moment, millions are searching for solid ground. I'm told that Bible sales have skyrocketed. Online churches are seeing phenomenal attendance. The place on our website seeing the most action has been the prayer to receive Jesus Christ! Isn't that wonderful?! This is a very exciting moment, so far as Jesus is concerned!

And it won't last. You know human nature. You know that as soon as people are back to their cupcakes, Netflix, and yoga class, they will no longer be wondering about their house of cards.

Let's not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, folks. The most important thing we can do, THE opportunity before the church right now is this Gospel moment. It's not the "reset" of a slower pace of life; it's not a change in political leadership. That's not the main thing in God's mind. It is the eternal destiny of human souls.

I'm embarrassed to admit what the events of the past five weeks have revealed in me. I find myself thinking more about getting back to my normal life than I am praying for the salvation of my neighbors. Honestly, I'm embarrassed how much my thoughts turn to, "Will we lose summer vacation?" Then they turn to, "How is the single woman up the street doing?"

Friends of Jesus, let's seize this moment!

Join me in two things:

Pray for an outpouring of the revelation of Jesus in the world. Pray for it every day!

Pick three people in your world, and begin to pray for them daily, that they come to know Jesus. Maybe an aunt, a neighbor, someone from work. Make this *the main thing* you are doing with your shelter-at-home period.

Because we know this window will not last. The world will probably recover, and people will forget about their need for God.

I have so much more to say, but it won't fit here. Do tune into my April 20th podcast on the pandemic, and what I think Jesus is saying to us!

This is our hour, friends! We were made for this very moment!

Love,

John