

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

May 2013

Dear Friends,

Last Saturday night Stasi and I were out to the movies with another couple; it was one of those fun, spur-of-the-moment ideas. We'd gone out for sushi and were actually headed home when somebody in the car suggested a movie; a quick U-turn later there we were – tickets in hand, looking for seats in the crowded theater. There were four left in the first row of tiered seating – the row where you can put your feet up on the rail (which is sweet). The main aisle is on the downhill side of the rail, then all the floor seats that give you a crick in the neck as you gaze upwards for two hours. Anyhow, we grabbed the prime seats and settled in.

Then, the woman with us whispered a question in a very serious tone: *Do you think these seats are safe?* I'm thinking what? I've never been asked that question before. She went on, completely earnest: *I mean...if there's a shooting, we're right in front.*

What a world we now live in.

Aurora. Sandy Hook. Boston. These – and dozens more – have changed our cultural psyche.

If you've been following my letters for the past year or so, I think you've noticed a theme – I've been trying to help us grow strong in Christ because of the very trying period we are living through. This month I'd like to offer some thoughts on taking refuge in Christ. But before I do, we must renounce fear. Fear is growing in our public ethos, spreading with the delighted help of the enemy. God has not given us a spirit of fear:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15)

For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Fear is not something to be reasoned with but something to be **renounced**. "God has not given me a spirit of fear; I reject all fear; I break every agreement I've made with fear; I bring the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ against fear. I banish all fear from my life, in Jesus' name." I'm serious – you want to be tough with it, give it no room. So my following thoughts here are not based on fear, but on our heart's desire to abide more deeply in Christ.

Let me begin there – Jesus urges us to abide in him. "Remain in me and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). Which implies, of course, that it is quite possible *not* to abide in him. We wander off; we rush after other things; we forget God. And that is not a safe way to live your life. Remaining "in Jesus" is something we cultivate. It involves a conscious effort on our part but it is so very worth it! Jesus says, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is

unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6-7). He is describing a hidden life in God, a life we cultivate in private – through worship, prayer, simply being quiet with our God behind closed doors.

And, cultivating a life with God allows us to receive his counsel. I cannot emphasize how important this is if we would dwell in the refuge of God: “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture” (John 10:3-4,9). There is a *condition* to the shepherding protection of God: You must listen to his voice. In dangerous times like these you cannot simply go out and live life on your best hunches.

Two more thoughts. In that most wonderful Psalm on the shelter of God – Psalm 91 – notice that David is making a conscious choice to make God his refuge, and part of how he does this is to *proclaim it*: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (91:1-2). There is power in proclaiming, *declaring* that Christ is your refuge. It rouses your spirit; it centers you back in the truth. The demons hate it, too. *I will say* God is my refuge, my fortress. That’s just so good!

One last piece for now – invoking the Kingdom. This is such a terrific privilege of our life in Christ but so seldom practiced by God’s people. All authority in the heavens and on the earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18). He gives us that authority to share: “I have given you authority to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). We have the authority of Jesus at our disposal. But this must be enforced, daily, over your domain. Using the “Daily Prayer” and the “Bedtime Prayer,” Stasi and I bring the Kingdom of God over our family, our home, and our entire “kingdom” twice a day. It really helps. Demons aren’t exactly the most obedient creatures in the world (that’s how they became demons, through rebellion) so you have to command the Kingdom over your domain and command the enemy to leave. You can find those prayers on our website under the section titled “More.” As we consecrate our homes (or vehicles, work, vacations, whatever) we bring them under the rule of Jesus Christ; we bring them into the shelter of God.

Okay, I hope these simple steps help you to find a deeper refuge in Christ. Thank you for being our friends and allies, for all your love, prayers and support. We are so deeply grateful for you!



John