

RANSOMED MINISTRIES Heart

- August 2003 Newsletter -

Dear Friends,

I'm sitting in my study on a Tuesday evening, with so many things on my heart to share with you. I wish we could simply sit down over a coffee or a pint and talk, but alas, that will have to wait for another day. For now, let me pen a few thoughts for your heart.

Years ago I read something in one of Francis Schaeffer's works which was an immense help to me then, but has since grown even more vital. There are *two* themes to the Gospel, Schaeffer said – a Major theme, and a Minor theme. The Major theme is one of hope and love and life triumphant. The minor theme is suffering and sorrow and loss.

Now, to try and present our faith to the world only in the Major theme would not be true to life, for life, as we all know, can break your heart. A Christianity that only talks of hope and joy and overcoming would be hollow, syrupy and shallow. We must, after all, “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). On the other hand, a Christianity that focused mostly on struggle and hardness and the elusiveness of God would be even worse, for the world is well acquainted with darkness and confusion, and for the most part they believe that is all there really is. We must be honest about the Minor theme, the hardness of the journey, but we must keep it a *minor* theme.

I fear we have not. I fear we have come to accept the Minor theme *as* the Christian life.

Let me give three examples why – one historic, one contemporary, one scriptural. I mentioned in *Waking the Dead* how the cross was never meant to be the central symbol of the Christian life. It sounds like heresy to say such a thing, doesn't it? My point exactly. In the first four hundred years of Christianity the cross *doesn't even appear* as a symbol. The early Christians don't use it. At all. This blows me away. What all the early Christian imagery focuses on is the Resurrection and the Ascension. That is what the fuss was all about – new life, restoration, miracles, the power of God. Dallas Willard explains that the reason they focused on those aspects of the Christian life is simply because those are the point. The Major theme.

But of course, the cross has become the Major theme. We don't put symbols of the empty tomb on our steeples, nor wear them around our necks. To talk of the power of the Resurrection is almost embarrassing, as if to make people who are struggling feel bad that they are. Which brings me to a second example. I heard it again today, in a popular Christian song sung by an artist I admire. This idea that life is hard and we don't really experience God all that much, because after all his voice is difficult to hear and we are pretty much a mess. But we still believe and we're hanging on in our own way and sure wish this waiting would end. That is true, but as Schaeffer would say, the *Minor* theme.

Yes, I know, life is hard. I know that very well. I've had many crosses to carry, some of which broke my heart. I carry some of them still. I expect I'll carry them all my life. But it's almost as though we've come to accept that as the Gospel, the Christian life as noble struggle. It's cool to ache.

Example number three: In the book of Hebrews, chapter eleven recounts the roster of great ones gone before us, whose lives are stirring portraits of life lived by faith. Starting with verse 4, and running

down through verse 38, we are shown a number of witnesses to stir in us courage and belief for the role *we* have to play, the course that is ours to run. Now, if you'll stop and have another look, you'll notice that 32 of those verses (11:4-35) speak of those who passed through the Red Sea, brought down Jericho, entered the Promised Land, "conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, routed foreign armies, received their dead, raised to life again." Life, and life triumphant. The Major theme.

Then there are three verses which speak of those who must live by faith in the face of life not triumphant. Tortured, sawn in two, stoned, wandering in the desert. They, too, lived by faith. They hung on to their God in the face of everything that should have convinced them otherwise. Both are true. Both are models of the Christian life. But permit me to point out that there is a Major theme and a Minor theme. Thirty-two verses on the Major; three on the Minor.

The Major theme is breakthrough; the Minor theme is keeping faith without breakthrough. Both are vital expressions of a walk with God. But let us keep the Major theme major, and the Minor theme minor. Let us not embrace this idea that you really can't expect to experience much of God, or hear his voice, or be restored in deep and significant ways. There is more. There is so much more available with God. Now. In this life. Let's go after it.

Okay, I also want to try and keep you up-to-date in my letters of what's happening in and through Ransomed Heart. We're probably finishing up our women's retreat as you read this, so I'll share with you next time what God did in the lives of the 250 women who gathered at Glen Eyrie. (I'm anticipating truly beautiful things, as you can tell – though I know they will be hard won. Major theme, minor theme).

On another front, we have finally gotten ourselves into some offices. Ever since we came together three years ago to form Ransomed Heart, we've been working out of our homes. It's been a wise way to operate, frugal, and mobile, as we waited on what God was doing. Our long-term vision of course, is for the Center, or what I've called the Ranch, the new Iona somewhere here in Colorado. That remains our goal. In the meantime, it's become clear that we need to be together as a team, and operate out of a temporary Center – or better, a sort of field headquarters, to use a military analogy. A long search led us to a modest place here in the Springs, and after several rounds of battle it is ours, I'm very grateful to say. This will give us a base for a couple years, until the Center is born.

Oh – make sure you check our website (ransomedheart.com) for updates on coming events and new resources. And please, do keep us in your prayers and your support.

With deepest thanks,

John