

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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June 2015

*“What can this incessant craving, and this impotence of attainment mean, unless there was once a happiness belonging to man, of which only the faintest traces remain, in that void which he attempts to fill with everything within his grasp?”* –Pascal

Dear friends – this is one of the single most helpful quotes I have ever read, and one which I will often copy into my journals so that I have it as a reminder, an interpretation, a comfort and a warning. Pause, if you would, and read it again before we carry on...

“That void which he attempts to fill with everything within his grasp.” Oh my—this explains so much. I know that void very well. I bet you do too (unless you have kept yourself so busy in order to prevent having to feel that void).

“What am I doing with the void?” may be one of the most helpful questions you can ever ask yourself. It reveals so much, explains so much. It will help you care for your soul. (You have a void, dear one; if that is a revelation to you—seize it now).

Chocolate. Projects. Daydreams. Television. Alcohol. These have been the “attempts within my grasp,” of late. And what is so helpful about realizing what I am doing—attempting to fill that void left in my soul by the loss of Eden—that is one thing that puts it all in context. *Oh, that’s what this is all about...* (fill in your own blank—your drivenness, your compulsions, those little “indulgences” you can’t get over, the fantasizing, etc.). Thus the quote is a helpful interpreter—it gives us interpretation for our actions, our addictions, our unhappiness (we can feel so embarrassed by our unhappiness, after all God has done for us, until we realize, “Of course you are unhappy, dear heart—you used to live in paradise and you don’t anymore”).

It is also a comfort, because we begin to feel that there is something fundamentally wrong with us—“Why do I have this incessant craving, or ache, or unsettledness in me? *What’s wrong with me?* Everybody else seems to be getting along with their life.” You know how the accusation/condemnation goes. It is a comfort to be reminded that there was once a happiness belonging to us of which only the faintest traces remain. Oh...right.

It is also a warning, a very good and helpful warning on several fronts.

If you give that ache in your soul to anything but God, it will hurt you eventually. Certainly it will frustrate and discourage you, but it will probably hurt you as well. Say you give the void to another human being (or the hope of a relationship). You will become demanding and manipulative when they don’t fill the void; you will become depressed; you will land in resentment or self-reproach (“it’s their fault; it’s my fault”).

If you give it to those little “comforters” that become our addictions, you find yourself in that terrible whirlpool of ache-reach-regret-reproach-bondage-attempt to free-ache-reach-regret....

It is also a warning against those theologies and movements that promise a full life now. “You can always be full. Struggle doesn’t need to happen anymore. There is no war. Your wounds can be dealt with in an instant (*should* be dealt with instantaneously). You don’t have to live with an ache—we have the fullness of the kingdom now!” And so on, some version of it. You can see why these movements are so inviting; my goodness, that sounds wonderful. And it sounds so close to what is true, because God does heal, he does fill, he does provide. But friends—we *are not home yet*.

For two thousand years the church has held to the view that our life is a pilgrimage toward the “Celestial City.” It is a journey towards our true home. “All creation groans,” as Romans says, *until* the day of its redemption. Meaning, obviously, that day has not come yet.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our redemption, for the full coming of heaven. (8:23)

I think that’s pretty clear. We are in a waiting period. Yes there is goodness and beauty and abundant blessing now. Yes there is. But not in fullness, not in a way that removes the war, removes the struggle, removes all possibility of suffering. My goodness—you are not standing in the actual, physical, total presence of Jesus yet. And that is why the poet George Herbert wrote,

To be in both worlds full  
Is more than God was, who was hungry here.

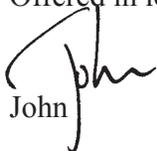
But mostly Pascal’s beautiful description of the human condition is a warning because that ache is meant for God. That void is his alone to minister to and heal and fill. It is a daily invitation to find our life in God, really, and when we don’t bring it to him we are not really looking to God for our life—we are looking to something else. That’s why I will copy these lines of George MacDonald’s into my journal as well:

Though but to hold the heart an empty cup...  
Athirst and empty, for God’s breath to fill.

So, this is a very, very helpful question to ask yourself on a regular basis: *What am I doing with the void?*

But even more so, to ask God to come into it; to bring the ache to God; to wait on him to minister to it. It is his alone to fill. This will prove a great rescue, and comfort, a helpful interpretation, and a very healthy warning, too.

Offered in love,

  
John