

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

March 2017

Dearest Friends,

Over the years we have been sharing the joys of discovering lost treasures together.

What a life-changing experience it has been to uncover the personality of Jesus! Or how about learning that we *can* hear his voice, and all the blessings that come to us as we actually walk with him? And what absolute relief is ours as we explore the healing available to us through Christ? In the spirit of recovering lost treasure, I want to point out this month something that has baffled me for some time: Whatever happened to the promise of reward?

“I tell you the truth: at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne...everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:28)

Jesus was responding to a question Peter asked when he declared these bold promises: “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?” (19:27). Christ is neither alarmed nor offended by the question. He doesn’t tell Peter that service is enough, nor that virtue is its own reward. He quickly replies with the proclamation of the Great Renewal, and then—as though that were not enough (!)—goes on to assure the boys that they will be handsomely rewarded in the coming kingdom. It is a mindset almost entirely lost to our age. Who even talks about reward anymore? Who anticipates it? Expects it? Honestly, I have never had one private conversation with any follower of Christ who spoke of their hope of being handsomely rewarded. This isn’t good; it is a sign of our total bankruptcy.

Reward is central to a kingdom mindset...

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.” (Matthew 5:12)

“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.” (Matthew 16:27)

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (Hebrews 10:35)

By faith Moses...chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26)

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.” (Revelation 22:12)

Reward, reward, reward—it fills the pages of both Testaments. Saint Paul expected to be rewarded for his service to Christ, as have the saints down through the ages. Patrick, that mighty missionary to the Irish prayed daily, “In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward... So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.” It is our barren age that is out of sync with the tradition. C.S. Lewis wrote,

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.

“The unblushing promises of reward,” stopped me in my tracks the first time I read it. I’ve never heard a contemporary Christian use it. Unblushing means boldfaced, unashamed; it means brazen, outlandish and unapologetic. Did you know the promises of reward offered to you in Scripture are bold, unashamed, and *brazen*? God seems to be of the opinion that no one should be expected to sustain the rigors of the Christian life without very *robust* and *concrete* hopes of being brazenly rewarded for it. Are you looking forward to your reward???

That pastor who serves a rather small, petty and thankless congregation for forty years, the man who works late hours visiting the sick and comforting the brokenhearted, the servant who is grossly underpaid and regularly berated by his own flock—what does he have to look forward to? Shouldn’t his reception into the kingdom be like that of a great Prince returning to his Father’s country, with lavish reward? Indeed, he will. Will not his kindness be rewarded? It will. Will not his longsuffering be rewarded? It will. In fact, every noble deed of his largely hidden faithfulness, every unsung and even misunderstood action of love will be *individually* and *specifically* rewarded (Matthew 25:35-36, Matthew 10:41-42). And so he shall be a rich nobleman in the kingdom of God.

What about the believer who struggled under mental illness all her life, largely alone and almost completely misunderstood, clinging to her faith like a drowning woman clings to a rock while a broken mind tormented her daily? Should she not step into the kingdom like the Queen of an entire country? Indeed, she will. She will probably be granted a position dispensing wisdom and insight that heals the hearts and minds of her countrymen. O yes, rewards will be given out in the kingdom with great honor and ceremony. One of our great joys will be to witness it happen.

When you think of all the stories of the saints through the ages, and all the beautiful, heroic, painful, utterly sacrificial choices made by those saints, the suffering, the persecution—how long will we enjoy hearing those stories that ought to be rewarded told, and then watching breathless as our King meets the specific situation with perfect generosity? The thought of it fills me with happiness even now. I have friends and loved ones for whom I want a front row seat to witness this very moment.

Begin to allow your imaginations to go in the direction of reward. Your heart will thank you for it.

In Love,


John