

***RADICAL JOY***  
**Habakkuk 3:17-18; James 1:2-4**

**(Read James 1:2-4)**

**Intro:** Charlie Brown once looked at the comic strip reader and said “*It always looks darkest just before it gets totally black.*” Another time he responds to Lucy with, “*I think I’m afraid of being happy because whenever I get too happy, something bad always happens.*” Good ol’ Charlie Brown had a sad life. And maybe it’s because his psychiatrist was none other than Lucy, and Lucy’s gift mix did not include tact.

Well, these are cute. And they make us laugh. But maybe we laugh a little nervously because far too many people we know, and maybe even we ourselves, know a little bit about Charlie Brown’s despair. With that in mind, I think we can learn from the persecuted church. Yes, in the same way we learned about radical faith from them last week, today we’re going to how radical joy is possible. This is because our sisters and brothers across the world, who live under the shadow imprisonment, torture, and even death because of their commitment to Christ, have a deep-seated joy if the face of it all because their tremendous faith.

As I said last week, I pulled this series idea from a five day YouVersion devotional entitled Learning from the Persecuted Church. In the same way I began last week’s talk by reading the brief text of the devotional, I’ll do it again today. Listen:

*There are some things in the Bible that really sound strange when we first read them. One of these statements is found in the book of James. We are told we should consider the trials we face as joy. Let that sink in for a moment. This is not an admonition to simply “hang in there,” “shake it off,” and “keep your chin up.” James tells us the trials, difficulties, and persecution that we may face as Christians, we should receive with an attitude of joy. We must learn that these circumstances can be used by God to benefit us in such significant ways. To live in such a way is to live in radical joy.*

*The Persecuted Church is often among those who live in this reality. This is because there is a recognition that a sovereign God can be trusted in every situation. It is possible because there is a certainty that God will never waste our trials, but will, in fact, redeem them. When prison is understood to be “God’s seminary” for teaching and training someone for a greater service in God’s kingdom, it provides a perspective on life that enables one to consider even trials to be joy. The promise in James chapter 1 is that our trials will be used by God in ways that will ultimately result in our being made “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” When one can understand the struggles of life as the means through which a faithful God perfects and completes us, even those very difficulties can be considered to be joy.*

*The Persecuted Church teaches us this can be more than a crazy thought: it can be a lived-out reality.*

**POWERFUL WORDS!!** Let’s look at it. First . . .

**God will never waste our trials – so we shouldn’t either**

- James is speaking to new Christians, most of whom have probably converted from Judaism. As we said last week Christians are not in a popularity contest – at least they’re not supposed to be – and they certainly weren’t popular in James’s day. They are facing trials of various kinds, which as time was going on was increasing persecution for following the Gospel.
- So that’s why it’s extraordinary that he makes the crazy claim that Christians should “count it all joy” when faced with various trials. Common sense would seem to dictate that he’s not telling them to rejoice in the face of trials – who rejoices in the face of grief or pain or abuse? Well, Christ Followers do. But not because we are looney or masochistic, but because we can rejoice because of what God is going to teach us through it.
- Harold Fickett writes, “*As Christ followers we have never been promised that Christianity is going to be an easy way. We have assumed that, we’ve even presumed that. But it has never been true.*” But we have been promised that he will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and we can count on that and learn from it and experience the radical joy of those who have put their radical faith in a God who does not waste our experiences.
- Besides . . .

**Our trials complete us**

- When James tells us that our testing will make us perfect and complete means it will bring us to greater maturity in Christ. Last week I used the analogy of physical fitness and how it takes preparation and

conditioning and similarly it takes preparation and conditioning to produce radical faith. Well it takes similar conditioning to realize maturity and the resulting radical joy. Trials produce steadfastness and patience which gives us the wherewithal to stand fast and accept what comes to us – with joy. Not because we’re crazy, but because we are glimpsing the end result.

- James Adamson says that Christian joy is the pleasure we experience as we witness our own progress and that of our brothers’ and sisters’ toward the fullness of salvation. He goes on to say the trials which embody the testing of our faith brings to light its reality and its power. So we should soak it up while we can, all the while “*realizing that faith preserved and practiced in trials leads on to victory and deeper joy.*” The result of this conditioning toward maturity is steadfastness or patience which is the ability to stay put no matter what comes our way. It’s like this, as we endure testing and trials and even persecution, with patience, we find ourselves growing to maturity. And its then that we will know that . . .

### **Joy will be in our present when we realize it is guaranteed in our future**

- New Testament Greek and Bible scholar, Spiros Zodhiates, points out “. . . *the word that is translated as “consider” (which is rendered as “count” in ESV which I’m using) would be best translated to “think forward, consider, regard”. In other words, as you live in the present, consider the future, think forward to the future. Gloom now, but gloria in the days to come.*” Christ Followers look forward! We do not wallow in the present and we certainly don’t roil up the present. Our God who is timeless is in eternity urging us onward and upward.
- This brings me to the stalwart faith of the prophet Habakkuk that Chris read to us earlier. Leo Stephens-Hodge says, referring to the preceding verse 16, “*He can tremble and totter and at the same time quietly wait with an apparently assured calm? His assurance is born of the living faith which these verses are beautifully expressed. Though everything which, humanly speaking, supports life may fail, yet he can now rejoice in the Lord. Personal faith is the practical answer to life’s discontents. The contemplation of the history of God with his people, that all his deeds are for the salvation of the people* (referring back to verse 13), *now leads the prophet to rejoice in the God of my salvation.*” You’ll notice a progression here. Last week we talked about radical faith, this week radical joy. Faith comes before joy. But joy surely comes.
- FB Meyer says “*If all God's gifts failed, he would still possess the giver. He could still triumph in God. Indeed, the divine Savior and friend is often more apparent when the fields and farmsteads are bare*”
- No, he never promised us a rose garden – but what is promised is a new heaven and new earth. Listen, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* Revelation 21:1-4 – our joy is truly guaranteed in our future.
- And here my final point, as I wrap this up – it’s the truth that . . .

### **Joy can be our reality now**

- Commenting on Habakkuk’s extreme faith and deep joy, James Gailey writes, “*Though the economy of his land be ruined by the devastations of the enemy, Habakkuk can conclude, ‘Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation’. The real and vital presence of God gives him strength and a sense of triumph which goes beyond the patience and perseverance called for by the declaration ‘the righteous shall live by faith’.*”
- Here’s the promise that the persecuted church hangs on and that we must own for ourselves. Even if the crops are destroyed and the cattle are lost, with Habakkuk we can and must rejoice in the Lord. Gaily points out that hardships must be endured for only a season; in due time Yahweh will deliver his people. Until then the prophet will rely on the lord. He will rejoice in him who is the God of his salvation.
- This is living with radical joy as a reality.

**Conclusion:** Is that our reality? I include myself as the recipient of that question. I don’t have this completely worked out either. Not because I don’t believe it, but because I’ve not experienced persecution, certainly not

to the extent that millions across the globe do because of their faith in Jesus. But for when that comes, if it comes, may *we count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when we meet trials of various kinds*. Let's learn from the persecuted church and build our faith muscles so that we too can experience such radical joy. Amen.