

RADICAL HOPE**Psalm 119:113-128; Romans 5:3-5****(Read Romans 5:3-5)**

Intro: *A man arrived a little late at a Little League baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."*

"The man sympathetically replied, "Wow! That's discouraging."

"Why should we be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

That's radical hope in the face of hopelessness.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, *"Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all...As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength."*

But hope can be fleeting.

I've been feeling some hopelessness lately. I've had to attend too many funerals for people I love and were too young, at least in my estimation. I read news reports about shortages and leadership blunders and I begin to allow them to negatively affect my spirit, and I quote the plea *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* Revelation 22:20b. But the question is, is that really a plea? When you read those words in context from the last chapter of the last book in the Bible, you realize it's less of a plea and more of a promise. And from it we can take the encouragement that Jesus is returning so we should be anything but hopeless.

And besides, compared to Christ Followers across the globe who suffer from persecution for their profession of the Lordship of Jesus, my life is a picnic. So why should I be discouraged when I can look at them and see radical hope.

That brings me to our continuing study, learning from the persecuted church, let's look at that concept of Radical Hope. First, as I have in the past two talks, I'm going to read the words of the devotional from YouVersion that inspired this timely series. Listen:

Hope is unquestionably one of the most powerful forces in the world. As long as a person has hope, they can persevere. Hope enables heroic efforts in the midst of insurmountable odds. Hope stirs passion. Hope energizes the will. Hope sustains life. Conversely, without hope, we are defeated. Our passion will dry up, the will is broken, and life will seem to have no purpose or meaning. Hope is both powerful and essential. As such, our great enemy seeks to destroy our hope. Through the witness of the Persecuted Church, we can see how God takes Satan's schemes and uses them for His eternal purposes and for our good.

The enemy desires to make our lives seem hopeless. He wants us to feel like there is nothing in our world that has beauty, value, or possibility. He tries to accomplish this in different ways, but primarily through our hardships. His plan is to make life hard to the point that we can focus on nothing else but our struggles. If difficulties are all we see, our hope quickly fades. The testimonies of the Persecuted Church are a reminder to us that God is still faithful and He is working for our good.

The Persecuted church helps us understand the truth of Romans 5, which begins with tribulations, but ends with a hope that does not disappoint. They have learned that it is through tribulations we learn to persevere, and through perseverance we develop the strength of our character. A life of continual ease does not enable us to know who we are or how we would react in times of struggles.

It doesn't give us the chance to experience God's faithfulness in a time of crisis. Tribulations provide this opportunity. When we develop an assurance of God's faithfulness, we will never be without hope.

In fact, we will have a hope that is confident and steadfast. This type of hope will win every battle.

Let's dig into this. First . . .

Without God's word we are without hope

- We need to start right here – with God's Word and I get it from the text Wayne read earlier. There it says, *I hope in your word* Psalm 119:114; and then later in verse 118 the psalmist continues with *You spurn all who go astray with your statutes for their cunning is in vain.* Psalm 119:118. One commentator puts it brutally plain and simple, *"God cannot bless where his word is deserted."* You can't stand when you don't believe the promises of God found in his Word. The hymn writer put it this way,

My heart is leaning on the Word,

*The written Word of God
Salvation by my Savior's name
Salvation through His blood
I need no other argument
I need no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me*

- The scriptures bring radical hope. When hostilities between the US and North Viet Nam ended in 1973, prisoners of war were finally released, some after as many as 8 years. It turns out that one of the key ways they were able to endure the horrific conditions like rotten food, isolation, rats and bugs, and all too often in cells that had no windows to allow light in; in the darkness some of them reached into their memories to remember the words of the Bible. These they recited and quoted to one another, working to correct one another's memories. As time went on, they reconstructed and committed to one another a sizable amount of the Scriptures. Some tried to write it down, but with little or nothing to write on it and what they did being confiscated, memory was the best way to store away what they had learned in Sunday School. One account I read said, "*These soldiers found that because they had spent some time walking in the light while they still had the light, that when the light failed and faded, when their lives were plunged into misery and darkness, now there was a resource on which they could draw.*" These men had hope because of the Word of God, and it helped them endure captivity under a cruel and Godless regime.
- Our hope is found in the Word of God – so that is a plug, once again, for all of us to spend a lot more time in scripture.
- Moving into the Romans passage I read earlier, Paul reminds us that . . .

Hope, like a muscle, will not be strong if it goes unused

- There's that physical conditioning analogy again that I've referred to the past two Sundays. And lest you think I'm the one promulgating it – let me point out that those are the words of commentator Douglass Moo.
- You cannot get past it – hope needs to be exercised! Tribulation is a learning experience as far as the Apostle Paul is concerned. He tells us we can rejoice in our sufferings because suffering produces staying power, and that staying power grows our character and that character brings hope. Listen how Peterson renders our text: *We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!* Romans 5:3-5 (The Message).
- Our persecuted brothers and sisters know what this means because they have developed their faith muscles to the point their conditioning sees them through their suffering and on to the promises that are on their way.
- So which will it be for us . . .

Despair or triumph?

- I get that question from William Barclay who points out that, "*Two men can meet the same situation. It can drive one of them to despair, and it can spur the other to triumph and action. To the one it can be the end of hope, to the other it can be a challenge to greatness.*" He then quotes a British cabinet member from World War Two who said, "*I do not like crises, but I do like the opportunities they provide.*" And continues, "*The difference corresponds to the difference between the men. If a man has let himself become weak and flabby, if he has allowed circumstances to beat him, if he has allowed himself to whine and grovel under affliction, he has made himself such that when the challenge of the crisis comes he cannot do other than despair. If, on the other hand, a man has insisted on meeting life with head up, if he has always faced and, by facing, conquered things, then when the challenge comes, he meets it with eyes aflame with hope. The character which has endured the test always emerges in hope.*" (End Quote)

- The triumphant person has eyes aflame with hope. I can safely say that is what characterizes the persecuted church – because that is a perfect definition of radical hope. They are more apt than us to know what Paul means when he says *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 and their attitude coming out of it is the same as Paul’s when he writes, *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:16-17. They know this life is a light and momentary affliction. They know the best is yet to come.

Conclusion: As I wrap up let me give you this promise straight from our text – it is a promise the persecuted church takes to the bank every day, and that is why they live triumphantly: The promise of triumphal hope is no shame – no shame at all. The hope they have and what we need too, is the real deal and it is based on the unshakableness of God. Barclay says, “*When a man's hope is in God, it cannot turn to dust and ashes. When a man's hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When a man's hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power.*”

That church, is what can only be described as standing on the promises, and it is radical hope! Amen.