

Sermon Study Guide

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THE MAIN THING:

Hope for Troubled Times, Part 2

The Apostle Paul faced hardship and despair while serving God. Paul found that God was his only hope for deliverance. He learned to hold fast to Him as his anchor, firm and secure, in the midst of life's storms

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. When as a child you were sick or hurt, what expression of care was most comforting for you?
2. What kind of personality test have you ever taken? Did you think it was reflective of who you are?

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. From 2 Cor 1:8, identify some pressures Paul faced that caused him times of crisis and despair? (Acts 9:15-16, 19-25; 19:23-41; 2 Cor 7: 5-7)
2. In 2 Cor 1:9a Paul writes about the feeling of 'a sentence of death' but knowing that God raises the dead. How does Ps 42:5 and then again 42:11 reinforce the need 'to preach the gospel of hope' to ourselves, speaking hope to our inner beings?
3. What did Paul understand as the purpose of his pain? (2 Cor 1:9b)
How do Ps 103:1-5 and 2 Co 4:7-8 give us further understanding of how to respond in troubled times?
4. How did Paul's Christian community affirm that the Anchor holds in troubled times? (2 Cor 1: 10,11; Heb 6:19)

PURSUE MISSION: *Seek to be the community of God's people in your community as you live out your calling*

1. What steps can you take when you have times of crisis and despair?
What encouragement do you take from Paul's story?
2. How did the story of the execution of the Egyptian Christians unexpectedly demonstrate God's redemptive power?
3. Be bold and ask for prayer for troubled times that you are experiencing.

Poem written in the Egyptian Bible Society Tract: Two Rows by the Sea

*Two rows of men walked the shore of the sea,
On a day when the world's tears would run free,
One a row of assassins, who thought they did right,
The other of innocents, true sons of the light,
One holding knives in hands held high,
The other with hands empty, defenseless and tied,
One row of slits to conceal glaring-dead eyes,
The other with living eyes raised to the skies,
One row stood steady, pall-bearers of death,
The other knelt ready, welcoming heaven's breath,
One row spread wretched, contemptible threats,
The other spread God-given peace and rest.*

A Question...

Who fears the other?

The row in orange, watching paradise open?

Or the row in black, with minds evil and broken?

THE WORD (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

2 Corinthians 4:7-8

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair....

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

⁵For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. ⁶But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

Acts 9:15-16, 19-25

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."... ¹⁹Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. ²³After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

Psalm 42:5, 11

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God... Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?... Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 103:1-5

Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ²Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Hebrews 6:19

¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,...

Sermon Study Summary

Hope is our greatest need in a world facing many problems with few solutions. Our personal trials challenge and attack our hope. Hope is the oxygen of the soul. Isaiah gave us a vision of God, the Sovereign One. (Is 6) Even in our trials He is in control of the world and our lives; He is our anchor. (Heb 6:19) Corrie ten Boom wrote, "In order to realize the worth of the anchor, we need to feel the stress of the storm."

The Apostle Paul faced difficult times and his example helps us anchor ourselves in Christ. Too often we see Christian saints as strong and passionate in their faith, not weary or disheartened. Paul was a type A or dominant personality, determined and motivated by challenge but he showed a softer side by sharing his inner struggles when he hit rock bottom. (2 Cor 1:8-11) Paul faced unimaginable suffering for the gospel—a tough calling that God placed on him. (Act 9:15-16)

The time when a lynch mob threatened him and his companions in Ephesus may be what Paul described so vividly. "We were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." (2 Cor 1:8b) Paul was weighed down, collapsed under a too heavy load. To despair is to feel cornered with no exit or way of escape. "...we felt the sentence of death...a deadly peril" (v 9b-10) The official verdict of death had been issued. Paul expressed the intense physical, mental and spiritual agony brought on by his hardships. His prospects were bleak with no hope of survival.

Have you experienced that moment when you have exhausted all options? Have you battled depression when life looks so dark with no ray of hope? 20% of Canadians experience mental illness in their lifetime. People under 20 years of age have the highest rate of depression. Christians are not exempt. Great saints of the past suffered with depression: Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis, Mother Theresa; in the Bible we see the Psalmists, Job and Elijah. Over one third of the Psalms are psalms of lament.

The lowest point of life is when an inner voice says, "There is no hope; you cannot carry on anymore, so give up and die." Some people act on this thought. Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among Canadians aged 15-24 and 16% of those aged 25-44. Countless others feel dead inside having no motivation to live.

Do they have any hope? The Psalmist questioned, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?" He was drowning in discouragement and despair like Paul. But the Psalmist didn't surrender; he fought back with words of hope. "Put your hope in God for I will yet praise Him..." (42:5) He preached the gospel, truths of God's Word, to himself.

Why did God allow extreme hardships in the life of Paul, His servant? Paul had to realize his utter dependence on God and to know that God was enough. He is "God who raises the dead." (2 Cor 1:9b) This is why Paul wrote "...treasure in jars of clay to show that this surpassing power is from God..." (2 Cor 4:7-8). The content of the gospel is precious but carriers of that gospel are weak, fragile vessels. Paul asked the Corinthians to pray for him and attributed his deliverance to their prayers. (2 Cor 1:11) We in the west are self-reliant and don't know what it means to lean on the Lord. The very reason we have problems is to strip us of self-sufficiency and to bring us to our knees, giving God permission to act. When we ask for prayer, we admit we cannot do it on our own. When we ask for prayer, we admit we need other Christians.

Is there hope for the person whose spirit has died? The Psalmist says that God redeems us from the pit. (Ps 103:1-5) That is God's redemptive power; Paul saw God's deliverance as past, present and future. (2 Cor 1:10) God delivers us from our dark night of the soul in His way not always the way we want. After the recent execution of 21 Egyptian Christians, the Director of the Bible Society printed, "Two Rows by the Sea," a tract with the poem and Mt 10:28. 1.65 million tracts were distributed proclaiming Christian hope. That is God's redemptive power.

The God who turned the crucifixion and death of Jesus into a glorious resurrection is the same today. On Him we fix our hope. When the storms of life come, Jesus is the anchor that holds in spite of the storm. After a year of sorrows, composer Lawrence Chewning wrote the song, 'The Anchor Holds.' Millions of Christians can attest to this: The Anchor Holds.

Story behind the song, "The Anchor Holds" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxnQzwrF40U>