

# RADICAL HOPE

By Charlie Moore

Have you ever wondered why the children of Israel didn't serve God with joy and gladness? Deuteronomy 28:47 says, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart" and it goes on to describe the bondage that would befall the Hebrew people because of their hardened hearts. They saw plenty of signs, wonders, and miracles performed every day, so why weren't they filled with joy?

I think we could ask ourselves that same question: God, why am I not happy? Why am I not serving you with a glad heart? I don't know about you, but many times I lose my perspective when things aren't going the way I think they should. When my hopes and expectations aren't met, my heart isn't exactly what you'd call "glad."

Proverbs 13:12 say "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." That's the way it was with the children of Israel. Their hearts were sick. Their problem was that their hope was in everything but the Lord. Their hearts were not aligned with the heart of the Lord, and their plans and goals for their lives had little to do with HIS plans. Has this ever been true of you?

## STRIVING AFTER WIND

Years ago, when I was pastoring a church up in Canada, I planned an evangelistic crusade and was so sure the Lord was going to move in a powerful way! I wanted to be a "great man of faith," so I picked out the biggest building in town to try and rent for our crusade. It was a huge old boat marina, and I could just envision seeing that place packed out with people hungry for the Lord! Well, the whole church prayed and fasted. Some of us even went down to that old marina, laid hands on the building, and stomped our feet as we cried out to God with all of our hearts. And you know what happened? Absolutely nothing.

And during that time I began to get a nervous disorder soldiers had during World War I when they were being shot at continually in the trenches. They'd be so anxiety-ridden that their mouths would actually break out in a rash of blisters and sores called "trench mouth." So while planning this "great move of God," I developed a case of trench mouth! Can you believe it? I was that tense about the success or failure of my plans. And if success was dependent upon my human efforts - I'm sure that crusade would have taken the town by storm. No one could have put out more energy than I did to make that thing come together - yet it didn't happen.

So I lowered my expectations. You know how it is - when you lose hope you just lower your expectations. I kept trying to find a place for our big "crusade," but the building possibilities just kept getting smaller and smaller. Finally, the only room I could secure was in the back of a big

hockey arena. It was a little cubbyhole of a room that no one could even seem to find. Well, I was not a happy camper. I was just like the Israelites. They were not happy campers either.

My hope was deferred. When the evangelist arrived, he just looked at me as I stumbled all over myself explaining the situation and apologizing profusely for the tiny room we'd ended up with. Finally he just looked at me wisely and said "Charlie, do you remember the story of the prophets of Baal and Elijah?" "Yes," I replied. Well, it seems you've done everything else," he said with a wry smile. "Maybe it would've helped if you'd try cutting yourself!" I got the message.

It was quite obvious that my plans had nothing to do with God's plans. I wanted the Lord to bring in huge crowds and wow us with all the signs, wonders, and a powerful move of the Holy Spirit, but the Lord wanted something totally different. His desire was just to encourage and build up the Christians in the local body there - because that's exactly what they needed! I'm sure when the Lord saw me and my little helpers pounding our fists on the building and going through all those "spiritual" contortions, He just sort of sat back and said "Well, I'll still be here when he gets tired of all this"

#### HOPE THAT DOESN'T DISAPPOINT

In Romans 5; 3,4 it says "we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope" Now that's a really wild thing. I would not have ended with hope if I were writing that scripture. You know what I mean? You start with hope! You hope your marriage will be happy, you hope your kids will grow up to love and serve the Lord, you hope your job will provide enough money to feed your family. Every human being in their right mind starts with hope! But this scripture ends with hope!

The hope you start with can easily disappear, but hope that comes forth as the result of tribulation and perseverance and proven character - that kind of hope does not disappoint. You can take that kind of hope to the bank.

God is in the process of letting each one of us work our way through to this thing called "hope." Real hope. Radical hope. You know, when we first give our lives to the Lord, we start to excitedly make plans about what we are going to do and what we are going to accomplish for God. We have a long shopping list of hopes and dreams for the future. We're just so excited about the endless possibilities of our new life in Christ, and we say, "I'm going for it!"

So you start praying and planning and hoping. But how many of you have found that many of those goals were never realized? You're praying like

crazy, you're fasting and believing, you're giving it your very best shot - but nothing is happening.

Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Luke 24; 21 gives a real clue as to why they were so downcast: "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." They were hoping but hope deferred makes the heartsick. These disciples' hearts were sick. These were men who had given their all, and now they believed their hope had just died on a cross at Calvary. But Jesus said to them "Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (Luke 24; 25-27)

That's very much like the words of the angel who spoke to the women at the empty tomb. In Luke 24; 6, we're given a clue as to what we're supposed to do when we find ourselves downcast and without hope. The angel spoke an incredibly important exhortation from the heart of God "Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee." Remember? We need to remember God's words to us. Hope lies in God and His promises to us - not in the changing circumstances of this world.

Think about people you know who have started out so strong in their Christian walk only to abandon everything a few years down the road. Think about what those people were like. Weren't they usually the "sprinters" who started out with great hopes and high expectations? But when things didn't work out as they had planned, they couldn't handle the disappointment. Instead of readjusting their misplaced "hope," they just disappeared from the Body of Christ.

There seem to be a lot of "sprinters" in the Body of Christ today, but not a lot of "long-distance runners." Yet the most crucial part of our race (Hebrews 12; 1) comes at the end. Those who make a strong finish are those who have exchanged their earthly hope for radical hope. The "end of the sentence" kind of hope that will not lead to disappointment.

The key is this: to fix our eyes upon Jesus. He is the author and the finisher of our salvation. Galatians 3; 3 says "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" So many of our disappointments come when we try to work out our own "goals and agendas" in the flesh. And the Lord says "No, don't do that."

#### SEEKING THE LORD'S FACE

We live in a society that is so production-oriented. The culture I was raised in believed that a man is only worth what he can produce, so when I started out as a pastor, I was ready to produce a perfect bunch of Christians. Yet God had other plans - and right now I'm producing new

bodies on old cars. I know the Lord led me to open this auto body shop, but recently I lost hope as I spied the stack of bills on my desk. I felt overwhelmed as I said "God - this can't be Your will. I'm doing all I can do and still have all these bills. There are no more hours in the day left for me to labor!"

And so night after night I paced up and down on the road in front of my house crying out "God! Pay these bills!" Now I'd been praying like this for many months, and nothing was changing. And finally one night the Lord quietly spoke to my heart and simply said "Charlie, seek My face." That's all He said to me.

So I began to do that. I began to just seek the Lord's face and His presence, and a wonderful thing happened. As I began to focus on God, those heavy burdens and concerns began to slowly melt away. The pressures didn't lift - instead -- God lifted me! The Lord gave me a lift that was not controlled by circumstances - a hope that is not of this world. I don't pretend to have "attained" some spiritual superiority through this, but I really want to encourage you to take your misplaced hope and put it in God and God alone.

Can you imagine having a set of values so radically different that your happiness doesn't depend on your circumstances? Years ago I remember driving down the street and getting mad as I watched people coming out of a bar. I got mad because these people weren't serving God - but was I mad for God's sake? No! I was angry because they weren't fitting into my religious program. Paul said, "I die daily." But what did he die to? He died to his earthly hopes. He died to his idea of the way things should be. He died to his perfect agenda for the Christian life.

Does your hope lie in balancing your checkbook raising perfect children a nicer house a newer car fuller Sunday School class a better-paying job more respect from your co-workers? Do you realize the thing that is now causing you the greatest frustration is probably just what God is using to shift your focus to Him? Go ahead -- make the shift! It is only at our point of greatest despair that our goals (worldly hopes) are exchanged for God's goals (radical hope).

Let me give you a good piece of advice. Stop waiting for circumstances to make you happy. You'll be on an emotional roller coaster the rest of your life if you insist on putting your hope in earthly events. But if you turn your eyes to God and faithfully seek His face, you'll begin to experience the peace that passes understanding. It's that peace that Paul felt in the Philippians' jail. It's the peace that came upon Stephen as he was being stoned to death and the peace David found in the barren wilderness of Israel as he sought the Lord's face.

In Psalm 16; 11, David said "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life, in Thy presence is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." David wasn't happy because of his circumstances - he was happy because his hope was in God! We need to fix our gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ and hope in Him! Hope only in Him! David says, "I was always beholding the face of God." Isn't that an awesome statement? David's priority - the one thing he desired above all else - was to constantly behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm 27; 4).

My friends, you will never see that destiny worked out in your life that God has ordained and set you apart for unless you fix your gaze upon the Lord. If we continue to be people who compare ourselves to one another and set goals based on the precepts of men - we will never be effective for God. We'll just become like the children of Israel - a bunch of hard, critical, downcast, sad people who never entered the Promised Land.

#### SURRENDERING ALL

It's a humbling thing to lay down our earthly hopes and expectations, but for some of us it will be the greatest step of freedom we've ever taken. You just surrender yourself to the Lord and say, "God, I'm going to let You do what You want to do in my life. Maybe I'm not supposed to be a great pastor - maybe I'm supposed to work on car bodies in East Texas and serve in the local church. You show me who I am and what I'm supposed to do."

I think that's the cry of all of our hearts: "What am I?" God knows what you are, but you will only find out as you fix your gaze upon Him. Some of the hopes we've entertained are nothing but the "worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things" (Mark 4; 19).

Our goals have been our own and not necessarily God's goals for us. We need to be humble enough to say "God, I've put my hope in everything but You. Take away my hope for 'other things' and give me the hope that does not disappoint." Let your goals proceed from the mouth of God. Don't let them be empty schemes you've held onto from your past or from comparing yourself to others - that's death and discouragement. The Lord wants us to put our hope in Him. Seek Him. And when God speaks His word to your heart that will be a word you can take to the bank.

"My soul, wait in silence for God only. For my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold. I shall not be shaken." (Psalm 62; 5,6)