

Your Faith Has Become Known Everywhere

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It is an honor and a privilege to be here this morning.

! Imagine that you had come to Hilliard to start a church.

So you come to Hilliard and your plan is to share Jesus with some people and see them believe and start a new church. And you start by going to Walmart to buy some gum.

It's always good to have fresh breath when you're going to start a church. And so you go into Walmart and you're buying your gum. You're talking to your cashier, Susan, and making some small talk with her.

And finally you say, you know, Susan, do you know anything about Jesus? And much to your surprise, her eyes light up and she says, yeah, yeah.

[1 : 21] You know what? I've heard all about what Jesus is doing at Maranatha Baptist Church. And it really has motivated me to try and find out more. I bought a Bible and I've been reading it.

And you're kind of taken back. You didn't think it would go that way, but you're happy. And, you know, you finish talking with her. You say, you know, that's great, Susan. I'll be praying for you. I'm glad to hear that.

And so you leave there and you go over to Starbucks. And you sit down at Starbucks with your vanilla bean frappuccino. And you're kind of sizing up the room, think, okay, I could probably meet some people here.

And there's a group in the back sitting around a table. And you're kind of eavesdropping in on them. And they're talking about Maranatha Baptist Church and what God's doing there. You're kind of listening in.

You think, this is interesting, two times in a row. But then a lady gets up from a table at the front of the store and walks back there and says, Hey, you know what? That's nothing. Let me tell you this story that a friend of mine who goes to Maranatha was sharing about what God was doing there.

[2 : 23] Again, you're delightfully surprised. And you think, well, that's great. That's great news. So you leave there and you head out to the gas station. You've got to get gas. You're trying to share with the cashier there.

And she starts talking about what God's doing at Maranatha. Okay? You go to a park. Well, maybe not a park in the winter. But you go and you sit down.

You're trying to share. They're talking about Maranatha. You're kind of surprised. You go by one of the high schools and you're talking to some students as they're getting out of class. And they're talking about what God's doing at Maranatha.

You think, well, praise the Lord. Guess Hilliard's okay. You head down to Galloway and you're trying to share with people there. And they're talking about what Jesus is doing at Maranatha Baptist Church.

Go to Lincoln Village. People are talking about Maranatha. Go to Grove City. And people there are talking about what God's doing at Maranatha.

[3 : 23] You think, okay, I just got to move out a little further. You go out to Plain City and to Marysville, to Delaware. And all of those places, everyone you engage and start talking to them about Jesus says, I've heard what Jesus is doing at Maranatha Baptist Church.

I mean, that would be awesome. Wouldn't that be awesome? That would be amazing. I mean, the truth is, as long as Maranatha has been here such a long time, it would be amazing still to see that kind of influence pervading all of the people, even in the surrounding area.

But yet, what if Maranatha was just a new church? Let's say a year old. How amazing would that be to see God working in that way? And that's exactly what we're going to see in 1 Thessalonians this morning.

But before we begin, would you join me and let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you. And Father, we ask for your grace.

Lord, I pray that you would direct this time, that you would have me speak your words, that your spirit would come and dwell among us.

[4 : 39] You would minister your word to our lives, that you would challenge us, that you would convict us. You would encourage us, and that you would compel us to be more like Christ. Father, we confess if you do not move in power, then our time will be spent in vain.

So we just ask, we beg you, please, to do a work that Christ might be exalted, and we might love you as we should. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

If you want to turn to 1 Thessalonians 1, that's what we're going to look at. If you're using one of the Bibles here, it's page 986.

Page 986. 1 Thessalonians 1. And as you're doing that, let me give you a little background information. Paul and Silas were in Philippi, and you probably remember, as things went in Philippi, you know, God was working, everybody got upset, they got thrown in jail, and you remember the Philippian jailer, his household comes to Christ, and then finally Paul and Silas get let out of jail, and the brothers and sisters in Philippi urged them to leave, and so they do, they leave, and when they leave there, they end up in Thessalonica.

Now, at that time, Thessalonica is the largest city in Macedonia. They estimate about 200,000 people.

[6 : 07] I don't know how they know that, but about 200,000 people at that time, and the majority of those people are Greek, and a large population of Romans, but even there, a strong minority of Jews are also living there, and as Paul normally does, he comes in, and Acts 17, 2 says that for three Sabbaths, he's ministering to the Jews.

So some people think Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was only three weeks. Other people say, no, no, that probably was just his ministry to the Jews, but you know how he is.

He goes to the Jews first, then he goes to the Gentiles, so, you know, maybe he was there longer, but the bottom line is, everybody agrees he was in Thessalonica a short time, several weeks, several months, but again, as God moves, and the church is started, the Jews get jealous, and then persecution begins again, and the church encourages them to leave.

So Paul and Silas leave, they travel on from there, ending up in Corinth, and in Corinth, and in Corinth, eventually, sometime later, Timothy comes and meets them in Corinth, and brings a report to them about the church in Thessalonica, and after he gives them that report, how the church is still facing persecution, and what's going on with them, Paul writes this letter back to the church at Thessalonica, and so that's the background of what's happening, is Paul writes to them, to this young church, in the middle of persecution, and if you would, follow along, I'm going to read to you, really the whole first chapter, starting in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, starting with verse 1, and it says, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, and God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you, and peace.

We give thanks to God always, for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father, your work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 30] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

You know what kind of men we prove to be among you, for your sake. And you became imitators of us, and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example, to all the believers in Macedonia, and Achaia.

And for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you into Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

So did you catch it? Did you see it in there? Paul talking about this church, this young church, and he says, you've become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

[9 : 45] Now, Macedonia, just to give you kind of a frame of reference, is about the same mass, land mass size, maybe as the state of Vermont, a little bigger than that. And so, he's saying, you've become an example to all of them, but also, notice he says, the word of the Lord sounded forth from

them into Macedonia and Achaia, and that everybody has heard about the faith in God.

So Paul's trying to share with them, trying to talk to these new people about what God's doing and Thessalonica, and they're saying, no, wait, wait, no, we know, we know how this story ends. We've heard. And so Paul is encouraging them.

And in short, what we see is this young church has already made an eternal impact on its community and on really much of the known world at that time.

The gospel's spreading out from them. Well, if you're like me, at this point in the story, you start going, wow. Wow, how is that happening?

How is this young church making such a big impact? How are they having such influence? And that's what we're going to look at.

[11:03] I think we see here in verses 2 and 3, Paul lay out for us three characteristics that God was using for them to impact eternally their surrounding community and country.

Look at verses 2 and 3 again. It says, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And those are the three key points that I think Paul's bringing up here and in many ways lays out the outline for the rest of the book of 1 Thessalonians. He talks about their work of faith, their labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ.

And let's look at these three things. First, the work of faith. The work of faith. I think we see a picture of what Paul is referring to lower in the chapter where he talks about in verses 4 through 6.

We know, brothers, loved by God, He's chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction that you knew what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake, you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit.

[12:33] We see his talking here is reminding them of how they had heard the truth about Jesus but that not only had they heard it but they believed it. That in faith they accepted what Paul had told them about Christ and grasped onto it.

They held to it in faith. And if we look down in chapter 2 he says it a different way. Chapter 2 verse 13 says, We also thank God constantly for this that when you received the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is.

The word of God which is at work and you believers. And so this work of faith he talks about this first step is they had heard the word of God and they'd received it in faith.

They believed it. You know they had no definite assurances. They just had to accept in faith what the Holy Spirit was bringing about in power in their lives.

And they believed what God had said. They believed who Jesus was. But not only do they believe it it's not an intellectual pursuit but you remember in verse 6 it said you became imitators of us and of the Lord.

[13:49] They just weren't saying oh yeah I think you know Jesus son of God I think that's true. No they had accepted it in faith such that it was changing how they lived. They were walking in obedience to it.

And in verse 9 it said they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

You know their acceptance in faith was changing how they lived their lives. It wasn't just an intellectual knowledge it wasn't just doctrine it was about life. Their theology their beliefs about God was compelling them to live in a certain way.

If we look down in chapter 4 verse 1 Paul says it this way finally then brothers we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God just as you are doing that you do so more and more.

So this work of faith hearing the good news about Jesus hearing all that Paul was teaching them from the word of God and believing it accepting it in faith and living it out is this picture we have where he says I remember the work of faith among you.

[15:08] Now that brings me to the first point of application. The first point of application is this has there been a work of faith in your life? Has there been a work of faith in your life?

Now most importantly have you believed what the Bible says about Jesus? Have you turned from your self-centered life and set your heart on living in a way that honors him?

You see the Bible is very clear. There is a God. He's the creator and the sustainer of all things and your sinful self-centered heart that you were born with and the selfish way you have lived your life has shattered your relationship with the God who made you.

But God in his grace and his mercy and his love has made a way to forgive you and restore or renew that relationship with you through Jesus.

Now this this new life in Christ this new life through Jesus is a free gift. There's nothing you can do to earn it. There's no way you can do anything to deserve this new life but it also costs you everything.

[16:35] You see you have to be willing to give up your self-centered life and live a life that's focused on reflecting Jesus' love and grace and mercy and beauty. Now of course if you truly know Jesus it's a decision that you're more than willing to make.

you know the first step towards making an eternal impact is realizing the universe isn't all about you. You know and let me just add a loving warning at the end of this if you choose to not make Jesus the center of your life now if you prefer to live your life without Jesus now God will give you what you want.

You can have life without Jesus now but you will also have eternity without Jesus after you die. So you won't be looking forward to heaven spending eternity with him but only towards having to face the eternal wrath of God.

So if you haven't had this experience if you haven't had a life changing experience with Jesus don't leave here today without talking to somebody around you or to one of the pastors or to me.

You know there's no better way to start a new year than with a new life. So please please hear me. That's the first important question to ask. Now assuming you have had this new experience this new life that you've received in faith what the Bible says about Jesus the next question is are you an imitator of Christ?

[18:12] And if you are an imitator of Christ in this coming year what's your plan to become a better imitator of Christ? or as it says in chapter 4 how are you going to live or walk in a way pleasing to God and do so more and more in this coming year?

Now the only way I know to be a better imitator of Christ is spending time with Him. And I'm going to make a confession to you guys you might as well know this now sometimes when I'm studying I kind of get caught on a rabbit trail and I go off and something sparks my thinking and I read some more on it and as I was reading about this I kind of started thinking about Elvis impersonators. I know you might not see the connection but you're talking about imitating and you know and so I started reading on that what does it take to be a good impersonator? And there's really a lot of information out there if you need to know but I'm just going to give you one quote that I thought was a good summary of the things I read.

This was the expert advice on being an impersonator. It said listen to recordings obtain recordings of those celebrities and public figures you are learning to impersonate.

If possible watch videos to learn mannerisms listen for tone and inflections in specific words. keep practicing. Becoming an impersonator takes repeated practice.

[19:46] Try out new voices to determine which ones sound the most authentic. Record and listen to yourself and to your impersonations to determine what areas you need to work on.

Now folks if it takes that much work to become an Elvis impersonator how much more work should we be putting into being imitators of Christ?

How much more should we be spending time listening to him studying him looking at how is our life a reflection of him? What areas do we need to change? What is it that we're saying that's not a proper imitation of him?

What is it we're doing that is not a reflection of his love and his grace and his beauty? And how should we be laboring to become a clear reflection of Christ?

And so this year as things are starting you know I'm sure you guys have already thought through this it's a good time to start a new Bible reading plan you know read through the Bible this year or you know start a new prayer journal start a new time you know your old time for spending time with Jesus wasn't good maybe you need to change your schedule some and I'm confident you've thought through those things but let me challenge you to step further than that and realize it's not just about checking the box off of your Bible reading schedule it's about being with Jesus you see you want to be in his presence you want to take time with him you want to make sure just like the other relationships in your life that it's a priority to spend time listening talking intimately with him

with his word with his people you know it makes perfect sense if I talked about my relationship with my wife and that you know this new year

[21 : 43] I've worked out a plan I'm going to spend 30 minutes a day I'm going to sit down with my wife I'm going to tell her what I need I'm going to ask her if she needs anything maybe we can have some quick conversation and then I'm going to check that off did wife today done there would be some discussion about that in my house okay but so often that's how we approach this work of faith is that we can just schedule it and check it off and we don't take the time like Jesus is a live living person and coming into his presence and being with him so this year let me challenge you you know the first thing to do if you want to impact eternity is be with Jesus accept his word and faith and let it change who you are that's the first point the second thing that we see Paul say here is he remembers the church at Thessalonica's labor of love labor of love now

I want you to turn with me to this passage I think it's one of the most amazing descriptions of a church in the Bible it's in chapter 4 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 9 and 10 I just want you to see it with your own eyes I'm going to read it but it's such an amazing description of the church I want you to see it for yourself okay 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 9 and 10 it says wouldn't that be an amazing thing to have written about Maranatha as far as loving each other I really don't have anything to say from the Apostle Paul you know you guys have been taught by God to love one another just keep going you're doing it just keep doing it more and more

I mean how amazing is that when I got to this point in Thessalonians I thought surely this is the key surely this is why the church at Thessalonica was making such a big impact because not only is it talking about them loving each other but loving all the brothers in Macedonia they just didn't love their own church but every opportunity they were loving those around them and you guys know John 13 34 and 35 says a new commandment Jesus speaking a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another by this all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another so it's not really surprising to think as the church at Thessalonica was loving each other in such a powerful way it was impacting their community and their world but I think we need to stop and define love you see because in our culture love is a very loosely used word

I can love my wife and I can love my car and I can love pizza and if my wife ever thinks I'm referring to her in the same manner as pizza there's going to be another discussion right and so let's talk about what does it mean here when Paul is talking about their labor of love I think the first thing we can do to define that is look at the ways Paul has loved them how has Paul shown love to the church at Thessalonica because we know he's already said they're imitators of him and Paul's very clear in chapter 2 verse 7 Paul describes his love for them like a nursing mother in chapter 2 verse 8 he says being affectionately desirous of you we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us chapter 2 verse 11 he says like a father with his children chapter 2 verse 12 he says we exhorted each of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God so we see

Paul is talking about a very passionate love it's very heartfelt it's the kind of love that explodes out like for your children but we also see Paul talking about very practical things if we were to turn down to chapter 5 1 Thessalonians 5 starting in verse 12 1 Thessalonians 5 12 Paul says we ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you to esteem them very highly in love because of their work be at peace among yourselves we urge you brothers admonish the idle encourage the faint hearted help the weak be patient with them all see that no one repays anyone evil for evil but always seeks to do good to one another and to everyone and so we see this description of love that is both passionate and practical it's not just emotional see we we have a tendency in our culture to use love in that way it's a feeling you know

[27 : 35] I just I have this feeling young people young people have that feeling and then they want to get married because they have this feeling it is passionate but it's also very practical it's about how you live your life love is a verb it's an action and so Paul's description here in talking about the church at Thessalonica gives us that view passionate and practical love and so the second point of application is how is your labor of love how is your labor of love now if you are like me we'll just I'll take all the blame in this sometimes you may think and maybe even say I love them I just don't like them now I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but I'll confess there have been times in my life where I have had those thoughts and probably have said them out loud I do that often I love them

I just don't like them and we think that somehow we can have this intellectual love for each other and we're fulfilling the biblical mandate what God is asking of us but that's not the picture that we see here when Paul's talking about like a nursing mother being very desirous of you you know there's a passion it's not just intellectual assent okay I have to love them it's a heartfelt explosion that I'm committed to them I will give of myself to them I will open my life to them you remember Paul says that we didn't share just the gospel but our very selves and that's the view we're called to in the body of Christ how is your labor of love are you loving passionately the challenge is it's inconvenient it's hard it's hard to deal with matter of fact I would say for us to genuinely love each other is not just hard it's impossible it's impossible but I think that's why we read in chapter 4 verse 9 where

Paul said you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another you know we need an external influence to love the way we're called to love God has to do a work the Holy Spirit has to move in our hearts if we're really going to love each other and not just each other you know we've been around since Thursday and we've gotten to be with many of you and hear your stories and everybody constantly talks about how much you guys love each other that's awesome we love that you love each other that was a lot of loving but you know that's great but remember the picture that we see here is not just that it's not just a love for each other but it's a love for those outside the walls here it's in our communities it's our neighbors it's the brothers and sisters at other churches throughout Columbus and throughout the world and it's not just oh yeah we should help them out but it's this passionate love and so how are you doing we need the Holy

Spirit to do that and I would I challenge you this year okay this year try I'm trying I'm not doing very well so far and I've had more time to practice than you guys but trying every day to pray this simple prayer okay it's a very simple prayer I tried to make it simple so I'd remember it but I still forget it says father help me to overflow with love for you and for your children and for all those around me and let me challenge you you don't have to pray those exact words it's not a magic formula or anything but that concept that every day you are coming before God and you are asking him through his spirit to give you supernatural love if we know it's impossible for us to do it then we also need to realize that we should be diligently asking him to do what we can't do you see so first let me challenge you in your labor of love pray daily for his work of love in your life the second thing as I worked through this and contemplated how does this need to work out in my life is

I thought about one of the ways I need to help myself love this way is regularly reminding myself of how God loves me and we see throughout the Bible many ways that God talks about his love for us many ways that God shows his love to us we see many ways that Jesus loves others and I think that I need and I'll just be bold and say I think you need it too how do we live that love out so spend time reflecting on the love of Christ and on God's love for you so you can love in that way and look for practical opportunities to express that love I started a list for you things that you can do number one notice when people aren't here and contact them okay that's good you probably do that okay number two make a schedule to connect with a different person and family each week you could do that look for those with a need and secretly meet it okay that one might be harder plan ways to show hospitality several times a week now

[33 : 23] I was making a much longer list and I thought nobody is going to listen to your stupid list and they're not going to remember that stuff so I thought I better summarize it so I got something quick and easy for you Romans chapter 12 verse 10 Romans chapter 12 verse 10 you can turn there if you want but it's short you'll remember it it says love one another with brotherly affection outdo one another in showing honor when I got to that point I had to take a few minutes and ponder that could you imagine try to imagine imagine with me what the body of Christ would be like and our communities if we really came to each situation actively trying to out love each other

I mean really think about it if that was your intentional goal when you came to your small group when you got together with somebody else from the church when you were with your neighbors when you were in your community that you were actively looking to outdo them and honoring them if you are looking to love them passionately and with your brothers and sisters to out love them I contend that the church would be transformed and along with it the community if we merely did that one thing if we loved the way Jesus loved us and sought to out love everybody else that was our goal whenever we're going to get together I'm going to out love that guy our lives would be changed our churches would be changed our communities would be changed people really would know we are disciples of Christ because of our love for each other so you can make your own list I don't need

to do that you just remember that this this challenge is in our new year to out love each other and through that labor of love to make an eternal impact number three

Paul talks about remembering their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ I think we need to stop for a second as well and define hope because it's also a word that has gotten diluted and we talk about hope in our culture in our ways as kind of like a wishful thinking you know I'm not sure what's for lunch but I hope it's cheesecake you know what I'm saying if it's not cheesecake it's okay but man if it's cheesecake that'd be great you know and we think of hope that way it's kind of this wishful thinking I hope it works out probably won't I hope it happens if it doesn't it's okay but biblically that is not the way the word hope is used you need to understand that you probably know that but let me just remind you in scripture hope is a much stronger word it's this sense of trust it's this sense of eager longing it's this expectation that something will happen it's far stronger than our use of the word hope now and so when Paul talks here about their steadfastness in hope it's not like they're sitting around going man I hope everything works out no they are set they know everything is going to work out and see the foundation of their hope you remember we read in 1 Thessalonians 1 9 and 10 it said they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turn to god from idols to serve the living and true god and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come you You see, the foundation of their hope is clear.

Their eyes are set on Jesus. Their eyes are set on eternity. If we look down in chapter 5, 1 Thessalonians 5, 8 through 11, we see it again.

[37 : 47] 1 Thessalonians 5, 8 through 11 says, But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God has not destined us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with Him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. You see, their hope is set on Jesus. Their eyes are set on eternity. Remember, we talked about they're in the middle of persecution and affliction right now, but they know that there's something good coming. Or as 1 Peter 1, 4 says, They have an inheritance that's imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for them. Their eyes are set on eternity.

And that's the foundation of this steadfast hope. So whatever's happening, they look beyond it to Christ and know there is something more.

[38 : 51] So that's the foundation of their hope. But what we also see here is the fruit of their hope. The fruit of their hope. You've read already, we've read it several times.

1 Thessalonians 1, 6. He said, You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. You see, they were in the middle of affliction, but their hope enabled them to have joy.

They could face this trial, this trouble, this hurt, this brokenness, this persecution, and still be rejoicing because they were waiting for something more.

They knew something good was coming. Something else we see as a fruit of their hope is in 1 Thessalonians 4. I didn't tell Pastor Andrew that we were preaching all of 1 Thessalonians.

I thought he cut me off, but I just said the first chapter, but it's all connected. 1 Thessalonians 4, 13 through 18 says, But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

[40 : 01] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore, encourage one another with these words. You see, their hope was set on the foundation of Christ, and the fruit of it was that they could endure all of these things that were happening with a sense of joy, with an awareness that good is coming.

At the very worst, it could only hurt for a lifetime. And so, they were able, even in that, to grieve with hope.

So, third point of application is this. How is your hope? And what is it set on? If it's set on worldly things, your new job, your new car, the house you always wanted that you now have, all of those things are going to disappoint you.

[41 : 23] They're going to let you down. If they're set on Jesus, though, then nothing can take away your hope. Your hope becomes indestructible. Whatever happens in your life, in your family, you can step back and say, yeah, this is really bad, but Jesus still wins.

Because, see, we know the end. Jesus wins. And it gives us the ability to endure everything with joy. Now, I know I'm already too long.

Thank you for your patience. I have to add this point. Hope is not fake. Hope is not fake. And what I mean by that is sometimes we get the idea that Christian hope, being a Christian, being a good Christian, is putting on this facade that we're okay.

You know, come to church. How you doing? I'm okay. Because you don't really care anyway. You know, and we just have this sense that we have to be okay on the outside.

But notice, here it talks about grieving with hope, and that presumes we grieve. We can't grieve with hope without grieving. And I think one area that we make the mistake in is not suffering together, being open, being transparent, and being willing to admit our struggles so we can grieve with hope so the world can see it's different than what they have.

[42 : 59] So, here's the challenge for hope for this year. This year, let me challenge you. Find one person in the church that you are going to be transparent with, with your struggles, and together seek to grieve with hope.

But let me give you a further challenge and find somebody in your life, could be a co-worker, could be a neighbor, that you are going to prayerfully seek to open up the struggles of your life to so that they can see you grieve with hope as well and know that you serve a living God.

Here's three things to change the world. A work of faith, a labor of love, and a steadfast hope in Christ. I pray that you will commit with me this year to pursue those things until all the world has heard that Maranatha has a living God.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word and that by your word you bring life. Father, we thank you that you have given us faith, that you have shown us your love, and that you have given us something to hope in.

Father, I pray that by your spirit we would live those things out and show the world that we serve a living God and that we have a risen Savior who is worth it.

[44 : 43] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let's stand together. Sing together.

I am thine, O Lord. I have heard your voice and it told your love to me.

But I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to thee. And you are holy holy