

FLEA VIDEO #18: "Eternal Relief"
(Acts 5:27-28, 40-42; 16:22-25; Hebrews 12:1b-2)

8.4.20

I have always loved sports. Seeing people be really, really good at something is a pleasure that's never really gone away. I enjoy watching competition, and how often the idea of competing brings out the best in people. Something that has always amazed me, though, are those special athletes whose desire to play, to be alongside their teammates during a game, makes them play through incredibly challenging physical difficulty. I'm not talking about a twisted ankle or a bad cold or something like that. I'm thinking of guys like Jack Youngblood, who played defensive end for the Los Angeles Rams in the 1970s and 80s. He was a very good player - good enough to be enshrined in the NFL Hall of Fame. But what he is particularly remembered for is playing Super Bowl XIV against the Pittsburgh Steelers in January 1980 - on a broken leg, sustained two games before in a playoff game against the Dallas Cowboys. As physical as football is, especially along the line of scrimmage, that kind of tenacity is incredible.

Not to be outdone, of course, hockey players are often reputed to be the toughest athletes in all sports. Their playing through intense injuries, their coming back from horrific on-ice incidents to return to a game, is legendary. One such player was Ian Laperriere; playing for the Philadelphia Flyers in November 2009, he went down toward the end of the first period to block a slapshot from an opposing player - meaning a disk of frozen, vulcanized rubber was now moving at between 90-100 mph - and took it full in the face. He lost seven teeth in that moment - two fake and five real. His injury required between 50-100 stitches yet, after sitting out the second period, he returned to play in the third period. Unbelievable!

Why all this talk about playing through pain? Because it is equally amazing to me how many of the apostles of the early church in a sense also played through some extremely difficult pain:

- 1) While Peter is the only one specifically named, *[t]he apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ... [The Sanhedrin] . . . had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah - Acts 5:27-28, 40-42.*
- 2) From the apostle Paul's second missionary journey: After being accused of taking away

some men's livelihood, *[t]he crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them - Acts 16:22-25.*

How could they do that? Pain and humiliation - how could they rejoice, even to the point of singing hymns in some disgusting Roman prison? One reason - they believed in the ultimate victory of God, over everything. And because they felt that victory was completely guaranteed and assured, no moment of personal discomfort or distress, no matter how painful at the time, was going to distract them from the victory they knew was heading their way. How could a moment of difficulty on earth compare with an eternity of joy and triumph in heaven?

And, of course, they were following their Master's example. The author of Hebrews captured it so well: *[L]et us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God - Hebrews 12:1b-2.* Jesus kept His eyes always on the finish line, on the victory that had been promised from His Father. And because that victory was so sure, and the joy that was to come so absolute, the Greek says that He "despised" the shame that came with being crucified, with being hung on a tree. It literally carried no weight with Him - certainly when compared to the joy that was on its way.

What an example for us! How do we do, "playing through pain," so to speak, with our Christian faith? Are we willing to endure anything that this world throws at us? We should, because joys so far beyond this world are guaranteed waiting for us in heaven. The best is truly yet to come! So, the next time things get you down - difficulties, heartbreaks, discouragement, frustrations - remember the pain that Christ "played through." Remember Peter and Paul and Silas and so many others, who never allowed opposition or difficulty to mean as much as a moment when compared to the eternity they had waiting for them.

Do you believe that heaven is on its way, special delivery, from God through his Son, to all believers in Jesus Christ? Let that hold your days in proper perspective. We should all be able to radiate a joy that the world may notice but, outside of Christ, will never understand.

Remember: We can't imagine in our wildest dreams *the things God has prepared for those who love Him - Paul, I Corinthians 2:9b.* But one day we won't have to try and imagine those things anymore - we'll see them for ourselves. Praise God for all His promises for an eternity of tomorrows!