

**Joke:** The Pastor went to visit one of the older gentleman from his church. They began talking about all sorts of topics. They talked about his time in the war, his family, and then out of the blue the pastor looks over at the man and said you know at your advanced age you really should be thinking of the hereafter.

Not missing a beat the old man looks over at the pastor and says, "Oh, I do it all the time."

"No matter where I am - in the living room, upstairs, in the kitchen, or down in the basement, I am always asking myself: 'Now, what am I here after?'"

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We're in a message series I'm calling, "Worry. . .who me?"

It's a series that's dealing with worry and anxiety and as I mentioned last week anxiety is a very complicated subject, because the truth is it can be physiological, psychological, emotional, even situational. Often times it's spiritual.

And the problem is it can hit different people different ways. And has affected many families.

But since I'm a pastor and not a therapist I'm dealing with only the spiritual perspective of this subject.

And what we're doing in this series is we're focusing on one portion of scripture throughout our weeks together and it's found in Philippians chapter 4.

Let me remind of the context, because I think knowing that makes the text even more powerful.

The Book of Philippians is written by the apostle Paul. And one of his goals in his life was to go to Rome to preach the gospel.

Why? Well the reason is Paul knew if he could reach the leaders in Rome, there was so much commerce, so much influence that was coming out of Rome, that he believed he could influence a big portion of the world if he could just reach Rome.

So his dream was go to Rome to preach the gospel.

The problem was, he made it to Rome, but not as a preacher. Instead, he was there as a prisoner.

In fact, as he's writing this Letter of Philippians he's under 24-hour-a-day house arrest. He's locked up, non-stop, to a Roman guard, awaiting trial.

Month after month goes by. He has no idea what's going to happen to him. He might be there for years or he could be executed and this could be the end of his life, Paul just doesn't know.

And if there's anyone ripe for anxiety, it's the apostle Paul. He's awaiting judgment, he was wrongfully accused, and now sitting in a Roman prison chained to a Roman guard.

He could've been incredibly anxious. And out of that context, he writes this in Philippians 4:4.

Paul says. . .

Philippians 4:4 (NIV): Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Out of a place where he could've been overwhelmed and overcome with anxiety or tension, and carrying a heavy weight, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. "I'll say it again, rejoice."

What an amazing verse. That verse, rejoice in the Lord always that's an exciting verse until. . .

Until your right in the middle of a difficult situation.

I'm excited about that verse until. . .until someone quotes it to me when I'm along the side of the road because my car broke down and it's 20 degrees outside. And your stranded waiting when someone comes up to you and says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. "I'll say it again, rejoice."

And all your thinking is you better rejoice that I didn't punch you.

And your like, really Paul, seriously? Rejoice always? Under all circumstances? You can't be serious. You don't really mean always right?

I mean rejoice when you lose your job and you don't know how you're going to make rent, rejoice then?

Rejoice when your best friend betrays you or your boyfriend cheats on you, rejoice then?

Rejoice when you find out that your child's been making horrible decisions?

Rejoice when you can't sleep at night and the anxiety is so real, so deep, that you don't even want to leave your house? Rejoice then, Paul you can't be serious?

And it's out of that context, awaiting his judgment, Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. "I'll say it again, rejoice."

Then he continues. . .

Philippians 4:5–7 (NIV): Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How could Paul rejoice when he's locked up? How could he praise God when he wanted to preach, but instead goes to bed as a prisoner?

Great question church. And the answer is, it's all about perspective.

What does perspective mean?

The simple definition of perspective is, how you see something.

In other words, two different people can look at the same thing and they can see it from two different. . .perspectives.

In fact, the word perceive in the Latin, actually means, to look through.

Let me illustrate it this way. . .how many of you have ever heard of magic eyes? Anyone?

What is magic eyes? You may not know it by name, but I'm sure you know what a magic eye is.

A magic eye is a picture with colors on it that are just kind everywhere and it looks like nothing but a bunch of colors. It's not a Van Gogh masterpiece it's more like this **(Show the magic eye)**

And some have claimed that if you look at the magic eye in just the right way, 3D images will jump off it and there might be circuses, fish, bicycles, or other things that you can see through the colors.

Now, I must be honest I really haven't had much success in locating the 3D image. I think I may have done it once or twice.

Anyway they say what you need to do to see the 3D image is that you need to look through it. You look through it, you look beyond it.

So, anybody see the image? What is it? Want to know?

(Show the image of picture)

In order to see it you have to look through it. It's all about the perspective.

And today I want to talk to you about the perspective of praise.

The apostle Paul could've looked at his situation at face value, and you know what he would've said? This is not good.

What he was looking at was ripe for anxiety. He's chained to a Roman guard. He could have very well asked himself. . .How can I function? Thinking my ministry is over, my dreams are crushed.

This could've been really bad.

In fact, what I want to do is I want to show you a scripture it's actually from a different version of the Bible then we are used to looking at.

We have used the NIV, the KJV, NLT, as well as others.

But today I want to share a verse from the MUPV anybody ever heard of that one? It's a newer translation. Anybody ever use that one? If you raise your hand ai know your lying, because I just made it up.

It stands for the Messed Up Perspective Version.

And quite often, this is the very way you and I look at our situation. With the Messed Up Perspective Version. We look at our problems, our situation, our circumstances with a messed up perspective. We have even looked at God and who He is with a messed up perspective.

But church truthfully It's all about perspective.

Had the apostle Paul had a bad perspective, what he could've said was this. "Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what's happened to me really sucks. My God let me down. I'm overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. And because of the hell I've been through, I'm quitting the ministry and because of how that church treated me I'm never going back to any church ever.

Can anybody relate to the Messed Up Perspective Version?

See the problem is often we look at our situation and we say, this is bad, I've got anxiety, it's getting worse, I can't function, I don't know what to do.

But church it's about perspective.

And instead of focusing on his situation what the apostle Paul did, is looked at it and yes it was a bad situation.

And hear this church I may not know what your going through but I don't want you to think for a moment that I want to minimize your situation, but what Paul did as he looked at his situation is he looked at it through a perspective of praise.

I'm going to rejoice in the Lord always and I can do that as I look at my circumstance through a perspective of praise, that is what the apostle Paul said.

Look at why the perspective of praise really matters Paul earlier in Philippians wrote this. . .

Philippians 1:12 (NIV): Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

Wait, what?

He said, what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

Then he continues. . .

Philippians 1:13 (NIV): As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

In other words, through a perspective of praise, you might look at this and think, I didn't feel like it was good. Truth is I thought it was bad, but then I realized, that God said, He will never leave

me or forsake me. And that no weapon formed against me will prosper. And I know that God is working for good in all things and that means my thing.

Paul said, as a matter of fact, what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

Instead of concentrating on how bad my situation is I'm going to have a perspective of praise.

In fact, for a long time they thought I was their prisoner. But in reality they were locking me up to some of the most influential Roman leaders and for eight hours at a time I was able to preach the gospel to them.

Talk about a captive audience. Who is the real prisoner now?

Somebody say, it's all about perspective.

You can look at the very same situation and say, this is bad, this is horrible, I can't stand this, or you could have a perspective of praise.

And Paul when he looked at it from the proper perspective he began to see that God was with him, that He's working for good.

And was able to say that what's happened to me actually served to advance the gospel.

What makes this even more powerful is that this isn't the first time that the apostle Paul was in prison.

In fact, you can read another time in Acts chapter 16, and there was probably other times not ever recorded in scripture.



But in Acts 16, this same Paul and Silas, they were going to their bible study, to a place of prayer.

They were kind of going to their church and there was this woman possessed with an evil spirit. And when they cast the evil spirit out of this woman, a fight broke out, and they ended up being arrested, the crowd joins in on the attack against Paul and Silas, their then ordered to be beaten by the religious leaders or as the text says magistrates.

Which is basically a judicial officer who presides over certain legal proceedings. It's very similar to what we would call a justice of the peace.

But look at it verse 22. . .

Acts 16:22 (NIV): The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.

Now church, I'm hoping that none of you are stripped of your clothes this week and beaten with rods, but the truth is there may be some of you who might be stripped of your confidence. There may be someone here who feels stripped of your faith right now.

You're trying to have faith for your situation, but you just can't find it. You're beaten down with worry and anxiety. You're beaten down with your doubts. You're doing everything you can to hold onto your faith, but the anxiety feels so real that your having a tough time pressing through it.

The apostle Paul along with Silas were doing everything right.

Yet they were beaten and thrown into prison.

I want you just, for a moment, to try to visualize that. They're in prison, maybe with a broken nose, maybe a couple of broken ribs, for sure hurting, wiping dried blood off.

I don't know but the situation they find themselves in certainly isn't what they were hoping for.

And do you know what they decided to do as their locked up in that jail?

Paul looks over at Silas and says, you know what, things are bad. This isn't fair. We don't deserve this.

But I have an idea. . .we might as well have a worship night.

It'd be kind of the equivalent of you finding out that someone you love has cancer, so you say, hey, let's just get together and worship God.

Or hey, I just discovered my kid's on drugs. Let's get together and worship God. That's kind of what it was like.

How did they do that? How could they do that? It's a matter of perspective.

See here's the thing, you may have an issue that's very real, and I'm not going to tell it's not. I'm not going to try and minimize what your going through. I mentioned last week we all have our stuff it's just that May stuff may be different than our stuff.

But if your looking at it through your anxiety I'm here to tell you it's time to look at through a different perspective.

See church the truth is there's so many things that are right, but the reason that you're panicking is because you're only looking at what's wrong, don't forget to look at what's also right.

I don't know who this is for right now, but there's someone here, someone listening online and you have an issue, and it's big, and I'm not minimizing it in the least.

It maybe complicated maybe you even have more than one issue going on right now.

And they're real, but I want to remind you today don't forget to look at the whole picture.

Don't just look at what's wrong. Look also at what's right.

Do you have other family and friends? Do you have your health? Still have a job? Do you have even a glimmer of faith? Because just a mustard seed of faith can move mountains. Do you have a church family that cares for you?

How could Paul and Silas, when they've been beaten, and falsely charged, worship God?

Maybe Paul leaned over to Silas and said, Well, there's a lot of bad, but you know what we're not dead! And if we're not dead, we're not done!

And church I'm here to tell you that if you've got a lot of bad in your life, at least you can say I'm not dead and If I'm not dead, I'm not done.

You can look at it from a different perspective and what they did is they said, let's just go ahead and worship God.

Here's what they did, verse 25.

Acts 16:25 (NIV): About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Now, I want you to notice this. They were praying and they were singing hymns when they were bound up in prison. And singing at least loud enough that the others prisoners were listening.

God had not delivered them from prison. There was no miraculous provision. There was no miracle that had taken place.

They weren't praising God at this moment for the what, they were just praising Him for the who.

This wasn't praise for the what, this was praise for the who, this was praise before the provision, before the breakthrough.

This was praise for the character, the nature, the love and the goodness of God.

It wasn't praise for what they had seen, it was just praise for who God is.

Spoiler alert, if case you don't know what happens, I'm going to tell you the end of the story. We will come back and look at it in a few minutes, but I want you to understand the context.

In the middle of their praise, God is going to show up. When? Not before, but in the middle. And He's going to shake the cell with an earthquake. The doors are going to swing open and their chains are going to fall off.

Why do I tell you that now? Because knowing what God has done, but rather what God did not do when Paul was in prison in Rome brings way more power to the truth when he says, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Paul knew, from Rome as he was chained to those guards, the power of God to deliver him from the exact same problem. Paul knew, God could deliver him from prison, He had experienced it before. He also knew how God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but in this situation before God did anything, in spite of all that Paul still offered Him praise.

And that brings a whole different perspective to the idea of rejoice in the Lord, always.

Rejoice when He delivers you and rejoice when He doesn't because this is not praise for the what. . .you see. This is praise for the who. . .He is.

The writer of Hebrews says this. . .

Hebrews 13:15 (NIV): Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Well pastor I had a hard week and just don't feel like going to church this week. That's why it's called sacrifice. But you don't understand my life's been a living hell this week. That's why it's a sacrifice.

I need you to understand praise will change your perspective.

And right now you may not see the purpose in your pain but what your going through may just help you understand when somebody else is going through a similar situation. And

because you've seen the grace of God, the goodness of God, the hand of God in your situation you know that if He did it for you, He can do it for them.

Now, I want you to imagine, if you can, this context. Paul and Silas were beaten, bloody, they're in prison, and they decide to worship.

In fact, honey come on up.

I'm going to read to you from the text, and then I'm going try to help you visualize it.

Scripture told us. . .

Acts 16:25 (NIV): About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Then all of a sudden God shows up.

When does God show up? He doesn't show up before, but he shows up during, during what? Their praise.

And this is what the text says. . .

Acts 16:26 (NIV): Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

Did you pick that up it says, all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

Hear this church your praise may help free someone else from their bondage.

But can you see it, it's midnight. There's no visible reason to praise God. No miracle happened as a matter of fact they're in jail, they've been stripped naked and beaten.

And Paul leans over to Silas, who might be asleep on the floor and says, Hey, bro you awake? Silas maybe a bit startled looks over and say well I am now, thanks a bunch Paul.

And then Paul goes on and says, I was just thinking, man. We're still alive. We still got breath. Our God is still on the throne. Jesus is risen. He's still watching over us. Why don't we just give Him a little bit of praise? Why don't we just worship him?

There's a lot of reasons why we could be anxious right now. But Silas says, that's a great idea, Paul.

What song you want to sing? Paul goes, let's sing that one. You know, that one the one Joy is playing right now. Let's do that one.

Visualize it if you can. Paul and Silas, they're praying, they're singing hymns. They're worshiping God for who He is, not just for what He might do, and in the middle of their praise, the ground shakes. The doors fly open. Their chains come loose. In the middle of their praise.

Listen church, sometimes you might find out that the key that unlocks your miracle is the sound of your praise.

Scripture tells that God inhabits the praise of His people.

It's all about perspective.

We praise Him not just for what He does but for who He is.

Those who have something to surrender to God, and we talked about surrender some last week. But maybe it's a weight, a burden, and you're looking at it maybe from the wrong perspective.

You need to thank Him in the middle of it. You trust Him even when you don't see how the provision, the answer, or how the solution might come about. I want to encourage you praise before the breakthrough.

What was it that changed Paul's perspective from prison? He said, All this has happened to me to advance the gospel.

What is the gospel? It's the good news. The good news that God loved us so much that before we even knew Him He sent us His Son, Jesus to take upon Himself our sin and He who knew no sin, became sin for us. He died in our place so that we can have forgiveness of our sins. But it didn't stop there on the third day He rose again and the tomb is empty so that anyone who calls on His name can be forgiven and be a new creation and become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

And today if you don't know Him I want to encourage you to come taste and see that the Lord is good.

And for some others maybe your dealing with an issue that seems overwhelming don't let the enemy stop you from giving God praise. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice.