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Sermon 514 - Philippians 4:4-8, Philippians 1, Acts 16

Perspective of Praise

Hey church family welcome back! So great to see you once again. How great is a place where we get to get lost in our consideration of the love of God and his heart for us. It's another great day! Welcome if you are a guest or visitor. We're in week 2 of our series Anxious for Nothing, and taking a look at anxiety from the spiritual lens - and today we'll see how praise is a powerful remedy for anxiety. But sometimes it's hard to praise. And to start off I have a thought, *The chains of suffering often break our praise*. Suffering like chains bind our hearts and lips from praising.

Can we talk about this. To do that I wanted to ask you a question. *Why do we suffer?* What comes to your mind when I ask that question. Now we could talk about this for the rest of our time together. It's kind of an unfair question because it is loaded and complicated. I was doing on-going learning through the American Association of Christian Counselors, and they talked about having a theology of suffering. So there are so many potential answers. Can we go through a few of them. You might want to write them down. Now first and we learn this in Starting Point - suffering has its root cause in **sin**. Adam and Eve rebelled and we are left with a broken world. Until this world ends we are stuck with the chaos that sin created. It was the ultimate Pandora's box unleashing evil on the world. Yet praise God he sent Jesus to reverse the curse. **Pride**. God is always wrestling with us and teaching us to get us to depend on his strength rather than our own. We learn this from Paul's thorn in the flesh, and how God told him his grace was sufficient. **Discipline**. At times our suffering leads us to repentance and to seek God above all things. Sometimes we suffer in direct correlation to sinful choices, and sometimes God is just reminding us to course correct and seek him. Yet another reason is that God uses suffering to remind us we are not yet home. In the session they way they put it, is that suffering is used to break us from the love affair we have with this world. **It points us to heaven**. Now all of these I knew pretty well and have had times to teach and preach on. But I came across one reason in my study that I hadn't considered in depth. Sometimes **we suffer for the sake of others**. Not because of others, for the sake of others. That sometimes our current misery because our ministry of compassion and comfort to others.

Consider this. If you've ever dealt with something severe in your life. Let's say it was a bout colicky child. It's one thing for other people who have kids who never had it, or don't have kids try to guide you. Another thing when someone who has dealt with it turns and talks. Or let say it's a bout with cancer. It's one thing to be comforted and encouraged by someone who never had cancer, but way more powerful when you meet someone who has gone through it and they encourage you in how they dealt with it. Or consider a person dealing with the death of a spouse or child. It can be way more powerful to talk to someone who has been there. In fact this series is borne out of one man's suffering. Pastor Craig Groeschel who had an incredible bout with anxiety and used his experience and what he found from the Lord to encourage and comfort others who may struggle with their own anxiety.

When it comes to suffering for the sake of others I consider this passage from 2 Corinthians, “3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.” (3-5) Some have referred to this as a *comfort chain*. Christ suffered and came through to comfort us, so that we when we suffer could come through and comfort others. And because of this reason and all the rest I come to this point. No matter the suffering there is always reason for praise.

It’s what a man named Job found on a day he lost his children and all his material possessions saying, “The Lord has given the Lord has taken away the name of the Lord be praised.” And it’s what Paul found. Paul writes to us about the praise while he is in prison. He had the chains of suffering that could have broken his praise - but they didn’t. In fact he shares some of the greatest words about praise with us. And we have two accounts this morning - one where he tells us to do it, and another where he shows us they he does it himself. Could you please stand in honor of the Word. And turn to your neighbor and ask them, “Guess what always means.” Turn to someone else. Always.

I think it is so easy in our culture to think of worst case scenarios, sometimes we even get fascinated by the idea of just how bad things could get. Psychologists have coined the term catastrophizing. It’s where you make a catastrophe out of a current situation or imagine a future situation as a catastrophe. People who imagine impending nuclear warfare, global economic collapse, or a zombie apocalypse. That just happened nationally with Hurricane Dorian. While it was a catastrophe in the Bahamas, it didn’t turn into that for many. My sister lives in Vero Beach and she was saying the news reporters were guilty of catastrophizing. Before it came close they were showing on the news examples of what level 5 Hurricane would do to your house. We both agreed that wasn’t really helpful. Now who wants to see or imagine that? It’s like watching the movie Twister as the tornado sirens are blaring. Like just tell me to evacuate - I don’t need a video. Do you ever engage in catastrophic thinking? Does anyone here have the gift of worst case scenario thinking. You wake up with a sore throat and immediately you imagine you have throat cancer and are going to die - let me see what does Web Md say? You don’t hear back from someone you texted within 5 minutes, and you think - ahh they hate me, they are just done, our relationship is over. Money is tight and you get an unexpected bill in the mail, and you picture packing up and moving from your house - there it is. When we talk about anxiety, what we do with our minds matters a great deal.

Can you imagine if Paul engaged in catastrophic thinking during his time in prison. He would write Rejoice. He would write, “Ahh I’m going to die, and all this work will be for naught, the Jesus movement will stop with me, and the devil will win the day.” But he doesn’t do that. In fact earlier in the book look at his perspective. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. (Phil 1:12-13) He sees through his suffering, and picks up on what God is doing. Greater than what he feels, the meal he just had, or his personal happiness is the activity of God through his life. And he encourages others that even here he has a chance to make an impact with the Gospel. In fact look at the subtitle the Bible has before this section. “Pauls chains

advance the Gospel.” If he was stuck in worst case scenario thinking, here’s what it could have said, “Paul’s great suffering before he meets his grueling death.”

What Paul does here reminds me of a child’s book I grew up with called Where’s Waldo. You had this book filled with events and had to spot Waldo. You remember this? And here is Waldo by the way. Sometimes Waldo was really easy to spot, and sometimes you really had to search for him. So imagine this picture has the events of the day, and everyday has a mixed bag of things going on. What we are to do is to pick out the God’s grace. If you’re taking notes. *Train yourself to pick out and praise God’s goodness in every situation.* Now sometimes it will be really easy to spot. I rejoice because I feel good, it’s sunny, kids are good, weekend. Like Waldo is huge right now. God you are sooo good. Other times it may be harder. A diagnosis you didn’t expect, a hard day with many attacks, Hurricane Dorian is coming. But even then pick out God’s goodness.

And let me say this, even when you can’t see anything good, or feel anything good - God is still good. When I am sick as a dog and feel horrible, God is with me. When everyone is mad at me for something stupid I did, God forgives it and loves me. When I face the bitter reality of death, God has overcome it. Yes, even on the rare days when I can’t see anything good, or feel anything good - God is still good. So you know what I say rejoice in the Lord, always - when the sun is shining or the sky is gray, when I got promoted or fired, when people love me or write me off, when I’m rich or can’t pay my bills - I will say it again rejoice! Because usually he is up to something good, and if I can’t see that he is good. I will rejoice.

And if we get this right. If we have the perspective of praise - primarily this is good because we will glorify our God and Father. And this always primary. But secondarily I believe it will lead us to be anxious for nothing. It reminds me of things that are hard to do simultaneously. Some of you remember pat your head and rub your tummy. A new one is write the letter 6 with the right hand, while turning your right foot to the right in a circle. And perhaps the clincher that cannot physically be done. You cannot sneeze and keep your eyes open. Not possible. So rejoice in the Lord always. Keep the perspective of praise. Why. *It’s hard to praise and anxiously catastrophize at the same time.* It’s hard to think the worst over something you just thanked God for. Take Hurricane Dorian as an example. What if before it we had the perspective to say, “Lord I praise you for your goodness. You right now are bigger than any hurricane, and your arm is not too short to stop it. But even if it comes I praise you for you have promised never to leave me. I praise you because even if it comes you will work all for my eternal good. I praise you because even if I or someone I love lose their earthly life, you have promised eternal life to all who believe. God even now you are good.”

How good are you at picking out God’s goodness in any and every situation? How good are you at best case thinking, over worst case thinking/ If God kept a record over the words that came from your mouth, how much praise would he hear? I consider the children of Israel brought out of slavery in Egypt, and for sure they could have picked out God’s goodness. We praise you God for rescuing us - we are no longer slaves, for giving us wealth as we plundered the Egyptians, for leading us to a land of our own. But no look at what they said, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” (Ex

16:3) Have people changed so much. Instead of picking out God's goodness, we often focus on the world's brokenness and give complaints rather than praise. For this we repent.

And let me remind you of our primary reason for praise. We praise God primarily because of Jesus. We praise God primarily because out of all the people in the world, he chose us to know the salvation story. Out of all people he chose us to come to a knowledge of the truth. The truth that broken, complaining sinners find forgiveness and peace at the cross of Jesus. The truth that salvation has nothing to do with our good works, and all to do with the finished work of Jesus. His perfect life is our perfection through faith, his death means release from punishment, and his resurrection speaks of our very own. That we will not die, but live and praise God forever and ever and ever. Singing with people from every nation, tribe and tongue. "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever." If you're new to Christianity or to church today - you have the same right to peace, and the same reason for praise. Jesus has come for you so you could know his unfailing love.

But how would our world change if we got better at praise, at rejoicing always? What would this mean for us and those around us.

To talk about this I want to refer to the impact of someone singing. I don't know about you, but you can always notice someone who is singing, they are hard to miss. Just curious anyone here every do karaoke? One of the reasons it is so fun is that good or bad - it will be a memory - singing sticks in the mind. You may have noticed this in Chicago sometimes there is music on a corner or at O Hare in the transit tunnel. It's hard to miss. Reminds me of one of my favorite movies Elf, Christmas is coming. And when he pauses to prove singing isn't. "I'm singing, and I'm in a store and I'm singing."

As we turn to the story of Paul and Silas - they kept a perspective of praise. They had just been beaten with rods for proclaiming the risen Jesus who is the Savior of the world. And while they could have been belly-aching they instead were praising. It seems they were led to some sort of solitary confinement, and in the midst of that dark space they praised God. Look what Scripture says, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them." So they were singing who else picked up on it. All the other prisoners, they couldn't help but listen. And this praise is so effective that when the jailor had a near death experience, and Paul told him to stop - he wanted to know. He wanted to know what made Paul and Silas different. He wanted to know their story, and most of all how to be saved. And he found salvation. But first he was influenced by a perspective of praise.

Our mission at Amazing Love is to Reach so many more with the Love of Christ. And what I've come to learn is this, *Perhaps the most effective witness to the lost is our praise.* Perhaps the greatest way we have with people is a posture of peace, that was a result of our praise. When those closest to us see us go through things - all the same experiences we have in a broken world. Stressful situations, and heartache, physical or financial difficulties and praise God through it. That can be witness. I'll never forget one witness when I was a teenager. My science teacher Mr. Bauer told me of a boy born with physical difficulties. He was missing his leg from the knee down and also missing many fingers on one of his hands. Think of how that could change your life. But instead of whining and complaining this was a boy who was so happy go lucky. A boy who played all the sports anyway, and who wanted to serve the Lord as a

pastor. Later in life I had a chance to meet him as well, going to College and Seminary with him and my teacher was right - one of the most positive figures for Christ. Love you Pastor Bode.

But it's not just what is done for others when we praise God. It is also what is praise does for us. Back to the story. So they were singing and praising God. And look what happens next. 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. (26) As they were praising God changed the situation. Paul and Silas would not meet their demise here, not in the midst of this. No, the praise did something. Remember how we said that beginning that the chains of suffering can break our praise. And we could let suffering do that friends. Or we could be like Paul, and maybe just maybe, oh are you getting it do you see the reverse do you know what's coming. *The sound of praise can break our chains*. Now it may not get us out of a literal prison. But consider this the praise we offer might just be strong enough to release us from the chains of anxiety. The praise we offer can break the chains of catastrophizing. The praise we give may even break the chains of an awful situation - you never know. That's what Paul experienced. So you know what. Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again rejoice! In prison or in freedom, on death's row or walking in the daisies.

What I thought would be fitting today is closing with song. Could you stand. I'm going to sing a line and then you respond. I will worship - I will worship. etc. Amen and amen.

