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St Paul was my hero. I love that man. I think about it for a minute, he was an ambassador for Jesus Christ to the Roman world, the whole Mediterranean world. And he was an expert on 1st Century Mediterranean prisons. He was in so many of them. He started out... remember, when he first went to Europe he was put in prison after being beaten with rods because a mob said that he and Silas were disturbing the peace. And so, he was beaten with rods, put into prison for only one day, and an earthquake happened that night. But one good thing that came out of that is the jailer of that prison became a believer, one of the early believers in the Philippian church. Then, he was imprisoned for two years in Jerusalem and then down to Caesarea, in the Mediterranean coast. Two years captive, and that's a bad captivity, because he was not able to write any letter, no one was able to get through to him, or meet with him or talk to him, and he was incognito two years.

And then he became so bored with that imprisonment, and he was a Roman citizen, so he appealed to Caesar, appealed to Rome, and they put him in a prison ship, and he was in a prison ship for about 40 days and then a northeastern storm hit the Mediterranean and his ship fell apart at sea and completely incinerated. Fortunately, near an island: Balta. And so, Paul and everybody on the ship was able to get to shore. So, that's another heroic experience. Then, he was brought again by a prison ship to Rome. And that imprisonment was a fatal imprisonment. He never got out of that imprisonment. And that's where he is when he writes some letters that we call the prison letters. The prison epistles. And that's one good thing, he was able to write letters there. And he wrote letters to people. Some of the young men that he had been training: Timothy and Titus, and then a man named Philemon, a runaway slave that Paul had befriended in prison. He wanted to be set free. And then to three churches: he wrote to the Ephesians, that's the great Ephesian Letter; he wrote to the Colossian, that's the great Colossian letter; and the best letter of all, in my opinion, he wrote to that little church, Philippi, the Philippian letter. And it happens to be the last letter Paul wrote to a church. The last letter was Second Timothy, that he wrote to a young friend, but the last letter to a church was the Philippian letter.

I love that letter. I think it's a high-water mark in all of Paul's writing. The Philippians are very worried about him, and they love him very much because when he was finally put in the Roman prison, they sent a young missionary to take care of him, to watch him; that was often done with prisoners. If they were wealthy enough, they had people would come in and kind of watch out for them. Well, he wasn't wealthy enough to have that happen, but the church sent this missionary. A young man named Aephephroditus, and he was there to kind of guard and watch and care for and bring food and stuff like that, who knows what. But to be there for Paul. And then he got sick. And we're not happy that happened because Aephephroditus was a very young man, but he got sick and had to be sent home, to go back to Philippi. The good thing about it is that Paul

sent a letter with him, and the letter that he sent with him to the Philippians is the Philippian Letter. That letter has an absolutely amazing chapter in it, and if you want to take one of the pew bibles, cause I'm going to do an exposition now of an amazing chapter in that letter, and you can open the page 955 and find the 4th chapter of Philippians.

I would like to draw your attention to a great chapter. It's the chapter in which Paul is trying to help these folks not to be worried about him, but it's more than that. He has something else up his sleeve. Something else he wants to work with. He wants to help them keep their minds clear and to keep their sanity in the midst of the turbulence of what was happening in the Roman world when he wrote that letter. He writes the letter during the Nero empire. Probably after the Fire of Rome, 64 A.D. Because, after the fire of Rome the believer's persecution was severe. We know from Second Timothy that Paul says three times: "I will spare for the lions". Because that's how, probably, Paul was executed. He was thrown to the lions by Nero, because Nero did this to entertain the crowds. Because he was blaming the Christians for the Fire of Rome. And we know that from Tacitus. So, it was a very stressful time, and the Philippians were probably very worried about this man, especially now that Apephroditus had come back, who's going to watch for Paul now? And so he writes this letter and the fourth chapter is vintage. Is vintage Paul. Here, let's take a look at it. Let's start with verse 4:

" Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness"

It's interesting he used this word, it's from the Greek word that's sometimes translated kindness, sometimes is translated gentleness, sometimes forbearance, and sometimes moderation. It is a noun word. It's very interesting, it's sort of a calming word. It's not an agitating word. It's not like let your seal be known, after all, it's a very stressful time, maybe that's what you should say, let your seal be known, so we can see some action around here. He doesn't say it, he says: "let your moderation be known to other people. Let your mildness be known, let your restraint be known". That's what this word mean, your kindness, your gentleness, be known to all people.

"The Lord is nearby."

The Lord is nearby. The Lord is near. Maybe now, that's when you can be mellow, if you know the Lord is nearby. If you're a Chronicle of Narnia fan, you know that CS Lewis says that the Lion, the great golden Lion Aslan is as big as the lion in Trafalgar Square. If you've been to Trafalgar Square in London, those lions are so big that sometimes 40 to 50 children are on the back of those lions. Imagine when Susan and Lucy got to ride on Aslan's back. What would they be frightened of now? If Aslan is nearby, what would you worry about? And in a way, that's what Paul is doing here. He is saying: let everyone know that you're calm. The Lord is nearby. And then he invites them to pray. Notice:

"Do not worry", see they're very worried. So, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer". And you know, we're going to get all the prayer vocabulary here in one sentence: "By prayer and supplication..." which means, it's the word for intersection, it's to think with God, it's a thinking word. "Supplication with thanksgiving" that's the praise word, "let your requests" there's another prayer word, "be made known to God".

They have a lot of concerns about Paul, Paul says: "ok, bring them all to the Lord, that will calm you for sure. Bring all your prairie quests to the Lord".

"And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding", wow, "will guard", and that's the actual word he uses, like a soldier, "will guard"... have you ever thought of peace as your guard? Peace is your guard. Not a weapon, but peace. And this peace that passes all understanding "will guard your hearts", but he's not finished, "and your minds". Now, that's a clue to what this chapter is really going to be about. He wants to work with their minds as well as their hearts. "It will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus".

Then, following this prayer, he invites them to meditate. You know, the Christian tradition has meditation tradition. Some people aren't aware of that. A meditation isn't the empty garden type of meditation like you see in many religious movements, with an empty garden, or the empty feel. No, no. When you say a word over and over again to clear your head of any thoughts at all. Our Lord warned against that. He said: "Don't empty your house of all spirits, because if you empty it, then the evil spirits will come. Rather, fill the house with something you care about". So, that's the meditation tradition that's the Christian meditation tradition. You see it in the songs. Our tradition is to focus your minds on things that are true in the face of things that are stressful. And that's exactly what Paul now does:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, breathe, whatever is true...” Paul likes lists, so he’s going to give a list now: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”.

He uses a very strong word for “think” now, it’s the Greek word, *Logistai*, we get the English word “logical” from that. Another word is “computos”, press the save button on those for sure. Keep those in your hard drive, keep those in your record, don’t lose those. Those are your meditative focus points, and focus on them and remember them when you face great stresses. So, think about these things and keep on doing these things that you have learned and received, and heard, and seen and made. Cause you know what, Apephroditus has told them a lot about Paul and what he’s been doing, and what he’s been up to. The word for “do” there is “praxis” in Greek. By the way, that comes in English, in English educational theory they talk about “Praxis”, which means to put into practice, literally, put into practice what you’re learning. So, put into practice what you’re focusing on in this meditation tradition. So, “put them into practice”, and once again he brings up peace. “And the God peace will be with you”. And now, the next paragraph:

“I rejoice”, there again the word rejoice, he’s going to use that word three times in this chapter, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly, and now at the last you revived your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned for me, but you had no opportunity”. What he’s referring to there is the two years that he was incognito in the prison in Caesaria, in Jerusalem. No one could get through to him, no one could send anybody to help him out or see how he was doing, even the beloved physician Luke was not there with him for that. So, they had no opportunity, and then when they found out that he was sent to Rome and was in the Roman prison, they sent immediately their young missionary to help them out. So, that’s what he’s referring to there. “I rejoice in the Lord Greatly, and now at the last you revived your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned for me, but you have no opportunity to show it”. Then comes a great set of sentences. In fact, one of the most famous lines on all of Paul’s writings is about to confront you, that many people call their favorite verse. I had a man, who I talked to not long ago, that he has cancer. I asked him: is there a verse that means a great deal to you? And he said yes, it was this verse: “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me”. And that’s the verse you’re about to see. Now watch him bring that verse in front of you:

“Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have”. I have to do a word study with you on “content”. It’s one of the sanity words, one the mental health words of the great vocabulary. It is literally the word Autarkés, that is made of two words: “auto”, which means I, myself; and then... auto mixed with Akao, and akao means “enough”. I enough. And this interesting little word is used to refer to a person who is able to cope with all kinds of things that are coming toward them in waves. When you can cope with things that are coming with waves, they will say that you have this Autarkes, you’re Autarkes. You can handle whatever is coming toward you. And we call this coping skill “sanity”. It’s the ability to tell what’s true, what’s false and to handle what’s coming toward you. And to be able to cope with it, and to manage it without paranoia, without panic, and without runaway fear. And so, that’s the word they use is Autarkes. Here, the RCV decided to translate it “content”, which is rather a weak translation. But there it is, “I am content”, I am able to handle whatever is coming toward me. And now you can see that’s exactly what he means by the word “follows”. So:

“I learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, I know what it is to have plenty, and any at all circumstances I have learned the secret”, ah, what’s the secret? We’ll look at that in a minute, “of being well fed and going hungry. Of having plenty and of being in need”. And now comes the famous verse: “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me”. By the way, the word “do” there, or “can do” is a very powerful verb, it’s not a weak verb, just simply an intransitive verb. It’s a word that should probably be translated: “I can take in strike”. It’s that strong “do”: I can take in strike whatever is coming my way because of Christ. Him. The Him is referring to the Lord in the beginning of the passage. Because of Him who strengthens me. Many people have written that verse down as a favorite verse. Maybe you should too, it’s a tremendous verse. “I can take in stride everything that comes my way”. Then he goes on:

“You Philippians indeed know...” but notice the next sentence: “but in any case, it was kind of you to share in my distress”. By the way, now he uses a really harsh word. The word for distress, flexus, we get the word “affliction” from that word, is the strongest of all the affliction words in Greek. It sometimes can be translated: tribulation or distress, or pressure. You shared my pressure. Flexus. You shared that. Because he had that when he was in the prison in Rome. “You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel when I left Macedonia”, that’s their province, the province of Macedonia, “no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone”. That is amazing to me. I mean, Paul had been a pastor in Corinth, a very wealthy city and a wealthy church, and in Ephesus. And yet, this little poor church, probably the poorest church Paul was ever at, it’s the one that kept sending him letters and sending him gifts and stuff, to follow his ministry. And then they sent the young missionary to Rome to watch out for him. “No other church had shared in giving to me. For even when I was in Thessalonica”, that’s the capital of Macedonia, “you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift...”, now just why just thank you to them? “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account”. And then comes his thank you note. I don’t

know if you've received a thank you note from a missionary you supported, or if you sent a thank you note to people who give support to mission projects in the church... notice, you're going to get a thank you note from this missionary and there's no return envelope in it. Ever get a thank you note with no return envelope for your next donation? Or suggestion to use PayPal to give your next donation? Now, you're going to get it now. Listen to this. I'm amazed at this.

"I have been paid in full", he's thanking them now, "and I have more than enough". I never read a missionary letter that said that, I never said a church say we have more than we need. "I am fully satisfied, I have more than enough, I'm fully satisfied now that I received from Epaphroditus". Notice how he honors that young man. "The gifts you sent of fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God, and my God will fully supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus to our God and father, be glory forever and ever. Amen." That's technically the end of the letter, except we know from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians that he always takes a pen and writes his personal reading at the end. Cause he dictates his letters to someone else so that it could be written in very small Greek, with no separation between words. But then, because his eye sight is bad, he takes his pen and writes. Like he says to the Galicians: at the end of Galicians he says: "see with what large letters I'm writing to you with my own hand". So, believe me, if we ever found an original manuscript of St Paul's, think of that of that would be worth, that would be the most valuable manuscript you've ever found. But we never found one. But he takes the pen at his own pen now, and writes: "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me..." Paul had an amazing ability to make friends. "The friends who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you. Especially those in Caesar's household". How do you like that? It's the guards! He won the guards right underneath Nero's nose. He did that everywhere. He's calling on saints, and now they're greeting the people in Philippi. "They greet you to the grace of Lord Jesus Christ, be with your spirit".

I want to reflect on just a few minutes now, on the secret of St Paul. What did he discover? What is it that kept him sane in the midst of the stresses of the 1st Century world? Maybe we'll get some hints on things that will keep you sane and me sane, they will help us to keep us moderate, so that our minds and our hearts are encouraged. Alright:

Number 1: the very opening line is the clue. He starts out: rejoice. Let everyone know your calmness, your unflappability, the Lord is nearby. Notice: what he doesn't say. He doesn't say "because you are close to the Lord". He doesn't say that. Because you may or may not be close to the Lord. That is a nice truth, and it's wonderful, in fact. When you pray, that's what you do when you're praying, you're bringing yourself close to the Lord. But that's not how he begins. He begins: the Lord is near you, whether you're strong or whether you're weak. He's the one that's alongside. Last week I preached you prayer. I said prayer for such windy time, a windy

place, and I started by making the point that Jesus makes. In a certain amount, Jesus says: “whenever you pray, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to go into your room, by yourself, into your private room. And speak to your Father. You Father can see you and your Father can hear you. And he knows you before you speak”. Notice he doesn’t say: “go in the room, confess your sins and then pray”. You don’t have to confess your sins to pray to God. You will, believe me, when you start praying to God, but that isn’t a requirement. It’s just pour out of your heart. He is near you, before you’re near Him. Pascal put it this way: “God loved us before we were born”. Do you believe that? Before you were born he loved you. He came near you before you were born. He found you before you found Him. Our Lord preserves this in the parable of the prodigal son: young prodigal is on his way home, and his father saw him and ran and greeted him. Before the boy got there. And then, the father goes out at night to an angry elder brother and finds him in the dark. The father finds the boy, not the boy finds the father. He finds us, He first, and that is the reason why Paul kept his sanity. That’s the reason Paul can know the Lord strengthens me. The Lord is there first.

If you’re on Aslan’s back, what are you afraid of? Aslan was there first. He’s there first. So, that’s where it starts. The Lord is nearby. Then, he invites us to pray. I think prayer is a terribly important thing, that’s what I want to speak of on our last week. Prayer is something Jesus taught us, it’s a prayer for all sins that Jesus gave us, and we are to pray, and notice how this prayer in Philippians is a kind of all seasons payer. Pray with intersection, pray with thanksgiving, pray by asking and pray. Bring yourself to the Lord and the peace of God will guide you. So, prayer is another reason that Paul keeps his mind clear. His mind is clear by praying. Praying is a good intellectual exercise. It helps keep your mind clear when you’re praying for people.

And then, three: he focuses on the greatest truths in every windy place. This amazing paragraph on meditation, I think it’s a winner. You should write it down and put it in your own if you want that as a mantra. Have that as a mantra. Whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is good, whatever is in God’s grace, focus on that. In the midst of all the terrifying things you’re facing, focus on those. That keeps your minds clear. And then the sanity word appears when he says: “And when things come your way, and when these waves start coming toward you, ride with them. Handle them. Cope with them. Take them. Do something with them”. By the way, Paul did that. Paul knew how to use his advantages to his benefit, and his advantages were good. One, he was very bright. Two, he came from a wealthy family, that helped him on one very important case. And three, he was a Roman citizen by birth. That helped him. He uses his advantages to the benefit of the gospel. And also, he’s able to make friends. A wonderful ability to make friends. And he’s linguistically very talented, being able to use other languages. All those things were advantages, he uses them.

What about disadvantages? Well, when Paul was in Ephesus he wanted to teach, and he was there for two and a half years teaching in Ephesus, that great city. And he tried to rent a room, a hall, and we know from the book of Acts that he did rent the tyraneous hall. Believe me, I've been to Ephesus four times, and the archeologists are all trying to find tyraneous hall. They would love it if they could find tyraneous hall. The hall that Paul rented. He used it for two and a half years. But guess what? Tyraneous hall was a popular hall, and it was used at night for oratories, and used at night for theatre, and then in the morning it was used for serious lectures by wealthy people, and the only time he could rent it was between 2 in the afternoon and 4 in the afternoon. That would be the hour, everyone that wanted to deliberately take a class and watch him between 2 and 4, and if you lived in a sunny climate without air conditioning, would you ever want to take class between 2 and 4? No! And yet, Paul could rent Tyraneous Hall between 2 and 4, and that's when nobody wants to come to church, nobody wants to go to a lecture on Paul when he's going to teach about the gospel. But guess who could come between 2 and 5? Slaves. Slaves have to work in their master's house at night, and they have to work in the morning to open up the house and get breakfast ready for everybody. But in the afternoon, everyone gets to siesta in the Mediterranean world. It's the siesta tradition, and the slaves get time off, and the slaves can come to hear Paul. And you know something interesting about the slaves in Ephesus, we know a lot about them. Most of the slaves in Ephesus were slaves that were caught by pirates on ships, that means they're well educated. Then, they were captured then sold in the slavery, and they ended up slaves in Ephesus. They were the teachers of the youth in Ephesus. You read Will Durant, and all the people on the age of Greece, the teachers of the youth were slaves. Very intelligent slaves.

And St Paul had a chance to talk to slaves, and he won them. He was very successful in relating to these young intellectuals. And they are the future of the church, believe me. And so, Paul had the disadvantage of not having time to rent the hall, and so he goes with the time that he can rent it, and it works to his advantage. Pascal has a great quote that I love: "Do great things as though they were small, because of Jesus Christ". That means, don't be intimidated by great things, do them as if they were small, because Jesus Christ is greater. And then do small things as though they were great because of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ can take small things and make them great. Small things can make him great. Work with what you got, and that's how you keep your sanity. And that's how you make yourself really effective, and Paul believes he did it.

Then five, he stayed close to his friends, and they stayed close to him. We see all these tributes here. His tribute to young Epaphroditus. His tribute to the church, the church taking care of him, watching out for him, Paul watching out for them. And that amazing ability of Paul to make friends, to be a friend, to watch the back of other people, is one of the reasons Paul was able to survive. It's one of the reasons he's able to stay, in a sense, stay moderate and stay on track. In fact, those friends often helped Paul when he was making a major mistake. In Ephesus, a riot broke out at one occasion, in this huge arena, it's still there to this day, can seat 23 thousand



people, and they were in the arena, and they were shouting: “Greatest artemist, gods of the Ephesians” because they were outraged at the spread of the gospel in that city. And St Paul said: I want to go and address the crowd. And his friends, one of whom was the treasurer of the city, said: “no, if you go in front of the crowd, they’ll see you’re Jewish and they will go into a rage”. Because there was a lot of anti-Semitism in the Roman world. “Then they’ll riot, and if they riot the Romans will send their armies here and take away our freedom. So, don’t you do it”. And so, Paul was pulled back. His friends, that’s the value of the church. The church becomes friends who can counsel you and keep you from doing crazy things and doing foolish things.

I had a lady who told me her husband was an accountant, and that he had predicted nine of the last three recessions. And I said: “well, he was an accountant, but he wasn’t a very good one on it, was he?”, And she was like: “no, I had to correct him on that, we only had three recessions, but he predicted nine. So, he’s not so good at counting”. So, she had to play the role of hamming a man for giving financial advice, because he just wasn’t that good at financial advice. So, Paul had friends that played that role. Paul played that role too. And then finally, he enjoyed living. Joy is the word that appears throughout the book of the Philippians, it appears three times in this chapter. Rejoice in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, I rejoice that I’m with you guys and that you guys sent your friends to help me. And joy is a big thing, and if you notice, the last words of this text are sheer joy. Paul is happy.

People think that I can’t preach a sermon without mentioning CS Lewis, well I can. I just hinted that today, I didn’t quote him at all. And I’m not going to mention Lewis now, I’m not going to quote from him, but I am going to quote from GK Chesterton, who was Lewis’ hero. And in 1989, GK Chesterton wrote a book called “Orthodoxy”. It’s a book that tells about how he became a believer, and we know from “Surprise by joy”, that when Lewis was first wounded in World War One, he was put into a French hospital, he read a book, he said: “I read a book by GK Chesterton, and though I don’t agree with him because he’s a Christian and I’m an atheist, I had to explain he took immediate captivity in me”. And that was GK Chesterton in his book “Orthodoxy”. And that became a big part in bringing Lewis toward Christian faith. But listen to what he wrote. In this book, he’s making the case to how he became a Christian, and at the end of it, he says this: “The mass of men and women have been forced to be happy about little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless, I offer my last dogma defiantly. It is not native to men or to women to be so. Man and woman is more himself... Man is more manlike when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind. Praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul”. And now, listen to this one, folks: “Pessimism is, at best, an emotional half-holiday”. Don’t make it a whole holiday. Don’t give a whole weekend to pessimism, it will do you in, believe me. Don’t give a week to pessimism. Give it one day. One day to be pessimistic, and then you better start pondering some true things. Listen to Chesterton: “Pessimism is as best an emotional half

holiday. Joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live". And that's how Paul kept his perspective.

Heavenly father, thank you for that. Thank you that he did more than tell the Philippians not to be worried. He charted out a way to stay sane. Stay calm. To stay genuine and rightly motivated, even when times are stressful or when they're good. Thank you, Lord, for what he modeled and how that has been an inspiration to the men and women down through the years, and still is to us today. Now bless us, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.