

Priorities: Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

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[0 : 0 0] and I didn't expect that and that was lovely so if that's you I mean it's a long time ago but thank you that meant a huge amount so it's great to be with you and I've got a very simple message and thank you for giving such a wonderful passage keep the main thing the main thing that's not original Canon J. John has a message that he speaks for years much more eloquently than me keep the main thing the main thing so if you need to have a little rest now for 20 minutes record them out that's fine I'm going to end with that as well and begin with that so church keep the main thing the main thing now Hearn Hill Baptist Church is known in heaven actually in heaven I'm going to be out of a job no need for preaching and my wife no need for a GP so no sickness that's fine no need for preaching but we're here now right we're called now and in your calling keep the main thing the main thing

Philippians is focused on church it's an epistle a letter of joy although there are shades of struggle that are woven there so joy yes struggle yes but it's about church but the kingdom of God is bigger than church so this is the weekend when 30 years ago we remember the death of Stephen Lawrence it wasn't just on the streets of Elton where violent racists lurk actually they they come from Chislehurst very nice leafy Chislehurst they lived in in Bromley one of the families in particular beautiful house but in that beautiful house in leafy Chislehurst there was hatred and racist struggle being planned so yes the kingdom of God is bigger than the church but Paul writes to the Philippians and he gives signposts for us as a fellowship and we read that as a fellowship trouble is the gateway to witnessing verse 12 says what's happened to me

Paul has really served to advance gospel the whole palace guard and it's probably that it's in Rome because the palace guard was sort of Caesar's crack it could have been Ephesus but that's not going to help him on a Monday morning at work but it's from Rome probably and he was guarded with a chain and can you imagine the conversation of the soldiers what are you doing today oh I'm going to be Paul for 12 hours oh no gives me earache he goes on and on and on about this Jesus I know can we stop I don't know I don't it's done my head in maybe others of the palace guard are interested especially those who belong to Caesar's household get a greeting in chapter 4 verse 21 so actually Paul's imprisonment was a means of witnessing the bad that was happening to him it was actually an opportunity

Thursday morning we had breakfast together on the island of Malta at the end of our few days looking out on St. Paul's Bay okay that's that's a bay in Malta which is sandy and which is facing the northeast and when I read Acts at the end I realised there was a northeasterly wind blowing a ship who just cut all their anchors off and they ended up hitting a reef and we could see a reef in St. Paul's Bay sandy bay northeast reef well again that's not going to help me on a Monday morning to know that it really really did happen but it really did happen and Paul ended up in Malta was that on his itinerary did he give his prayer lists out for people for missionary work no but because he was there he was taken to Publius the chief ruler of the island and he healed Publius' dad and Publius became a Christian and today you might say nominal Catholic faith predominates but somebody got there somebody preached the gospel the church is all over the place and God used something bad a storm a hurricane a wreck to enable

Paul to preach the gospel and Paul is more gracious than me in verse 18 he says the important thing is that Christ is preached I'm thinking I don't like the way they're preached they don't like me the important thing is that Christ is preached the Bible says in Christ's name in this world you will have trouble but take heart I've overcome the world and trouble means like a heavy weight opposition sickness mental illness physical concerns family concerns divorce breakdown of relationships in this world you will have trouble so if anybody preaches a gospel that says you should be 100% happy healthy and wealthy all the time I would say that's another gospel in this world you will have trouble but those troubles Paul says are opportunity T.S. Lewis in an old fashioned world writes at the time he brings rail and steam trains he said we travel with our back to the engine and what he meant in his old fashioned way was it's only as we look back that we see sometimes that God was at work we might not have felt it at the time we might have just seen trouble that we didn't need but God was working his purpose out as year succeeds to year the providence of God all things work together for the good of those who love him who are called according to his purpose and there is

[6 : 03] Paul in prison Caesarea Ephesus I think Rome and all things work together for good and he witnesses to Christ and soldiers are affected the SAS in those days they're affected Caesar's household is affected for good for God for Christ but he said that the mountaintops inspire us but the valleys mature us Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that the God of all comfort comfort strengthens us in all our troubles why?

so that we can strengthen those in trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God now I'm not saying come on bring trouble persecution opposition sickness mental illness I'm not saying come on bring it on poverty misery but I'm saying as and when stuff happens then that is an opportunity for us to receive comfort and strength of God and to witness to him by our life and by our lips Jesus Jesus is Lord keep the main thing the main thing secondly in this passage I see that death is the gateway to life verse 21 says for me to live is Christ to die is gain now Paul hasn't got a death wish he's not saying this as a 20 year old who are 40 years he's actually writing this I believe at the end of a long long ministry remember his qualifications for apostleship are mainly suffering

I mean he's not going to turn up to her and hill in a Porsche these days and say God has blessed me and he would have been Eterbo he would come and he wouldn't be very impressive a little kind of ugly figure whose eyebrows apparently met in the middle according to his tradition he's been beaten up a number of times nothing impressive but at the end of his life having appealed to Caesar and he hopes he might still have ministry in him but with so much ministry and hardship behind him he says well look I need to live is Christ it is better for you that I remain fine but to die is his game George Verwer the founder of the Christian movement Operation Mobilization wrote to so many and I was just one of probably thousands who wrote to a few weeks ago and he said that he'd received a terminal diagnosis and he said please don't pray for my healing basically it's time to go home pray for my passing and pray for my healing and he signed it in typical

George Verwer fashion yours in his grip in brackets and the NHS a few days ago George was in the words we can't glamorize the process of dying phone rings and our life is changed but death is the gateway to life it's the perspective from which we engage with the kingdom now knowing there's a kingdom to come Graham died a few years ago 1899 and he thoroughly prepared his own funeral and he asked for these words to be included someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead don't believe a word of it I shall be more alive than I am now I'll have just changed my address I will have gone into the presence of God there are two possible words for moving on or dying the first is to strike camp to pack up your tent how evocative is that from Paul the tent maker for him to die is just to pack up a tent and to move to his new address or to weigh anchor to set sail

I remember taking part in a funeral year I hadn't culturally experienced a service like that before I've been asked by the family to take part and I was very privileged to do that but at one point the human director stepped forward and I hadn't experienced this before he said we will now have the viewing of the body and literally came and took the lid off the costume and people are dying hello that is there but that is not the end for those who put their trust on God you strike camp you move to your holy heaven you weigh anchor and the ship sails away somebody wrote there's a ship sails and I stand watching it that it fades on the horizon and someone at my side says she's gone from where gone from my side that's it the ship is as it was when I saw it begin to sail away the diminished size and total loss of sight is in me not in the ship but just at that moment when someone says by my side it's gone there are others who are watching that same ship approaching here she comes but on a farther shore and in a greater light

[11 : 30] God's word says no eye has seen nor ear has heard no mind can see what God has prepared for those who love him trouble is the gateway to witnessing and death of those who put their trust in the risen Christ is the gateway for life and lastly integrity is the gateway to victory Paul said verse 27 whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so in the face of opposition integrity walking the talk is a sign quote you will be saved and that salvation by God conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ Philippi was a Roman colony you got rewarded by citizenship often if you were an ex-soldier it was to be a little

Rome you know about kind of bargain hunting Brits in the sun you take Brits and you put us on the Costa del Sol and no sooner have you arrived and suddenly there's full English breakfast every day and whether you had a full English breakfast when you lived in Bromley or Hearn Hill you get on the Costa del Sol and you have a full English every day because you're British you're from England and you become more British the further away you are Britain and in a funny way Philippi was like that a long way from Rome but they were proud that they were Romans and they they were more Roman than Rome if that makes sense it was a colony of Rome and Paul says be a colony of heaven church is meant to be just a flavour a foretaste of what heaven is like

I mean we get things wrong I know I get things wrong sometimes news sheets at churches get things wrong at the evening service tonight the sermon topic will be what is hell come early and listen to our choir the minister will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing break forth into joy the sermon this morning Jesus walks on the water sermon tonight searching for Jesus so yeah we get things wrong I remember one church meeting I led and I say this with regret another church and I had the privilege of baptising a former police officer he was an inspector down the road at Brixton an inspector at Brixton and a baptiser's wife and both of his children and we had a very difficult church meeting and he's a young Christian and I had a word with him afterwards I said sorry how did you how did you do it and he said well

I think the nearest I can judge that meeting that must be it was the police community liaison meeting in Brixton just before the riots sorry about that they're better than that eventually they did move churches after my time to another church they're still walking the walk that they couldn't do with that keep the main thing the main thing so Philippi a little Rome and Paul says walk worthy not just on a Sunday but seven whole days not one in seven I would praise you somebody at my youth group back in the day and that probably accounts for a lot of my views of God that need to be unlearned sometimes if Peter if you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you Paul says live as a colony of heaven that means class isn't really relevant the way we organize church

Lydia was a posh business lady and she was part of the church early on in actively reading the jailer maybe middle class the civil servant she was part of the church and the slave girl who was miraculously released maybe she joined the church maybe she was lower class and there should be no place for intellectual superiority just because I appear to speak partial I've got a degree or something that doesn't mean that I should be a leading light in any local fellowship how is my walk with Jesus every day and that is relevant to somebody who left school with no qualifications whatsoever and somebody who got a doctorate somebody said we only need two qualifications we need a BA and an MA we need a BA to be born again and we need to be working towards our MA working towards being marvellously altered Mark Green who is somebody who's pioneered our discipleship relevant to the workplace whether we're paid to work or just our everyday lives

[16 : 50] Monday through Saturday said apply the test to church teach teach teach this time tomorrow what am I doing this time tomorrow former CEO of McDonald's other burgers are available by the way said that for him his priority was God family business unless he was in the office in which case it was business an investment banker who came to faith back in the 1980s and I did decide for him I really did my best said to me one day years later he said thank you thank you for discipling me you got me to the office door really well prepared just when I got in the office I didn't really know what to do in the middle of a hostile takeover in terms of telling the truth in terms of not gossiping in terms of working to the best of our ability if we're in paid and paid people know that we're a follower of Jesus without us having a badge of saying anything I can say this because

Elizabeth's here but she was a GP and trained at Guy's Hospital and was an orthopedic surgeon and all that kind of malarkey they're very violent people aren't they we haven't seen a proper orthopedic operation but we went to an event where some of Elizabeth's contemporaries were there and one person came up and said you're Lizzie Bedpan aren't you what and I asked Elizabeth had a reputation of actually being alongside Mercy when she could when she could not being a kind of standoff doctor in the wrong sense I'm talking about packing today I'm not saying that's true now but Lizzie Bedpan what and as a Christian she was certainly hearty and it was obvious her colleague what's the equivalent for you in your bank or retired or neighbourhood or nursing or whatever walk worthy of Christ the main thing the main thing unity keeping children with one another forgiveness isn't the same as restored trust but forgiveness is something called a major unity worship our whole lives in order as best we can and witness in trouble in illness in life in death teaching church turn home at this day for you and get if you have peace for you and go and ing for you and you and go to the other fellowship and encounter sweet them and you