

Philippians 1:19-30

"To Live Is Christ; To Die Is Gain"

Let's remind ourselves that apostle Paul penned the book of Philippians from prison. He wasn't lounging on the beaches of Bora Bora enjoying sweet tea, while relaxing in the evening sun. He wasn't living large, touring the world in a stream lined chariot that really brought out the bass in his Spotify song list... He was chained to a Roman soldier 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week. He wasn't free to come & go as he pleased. Circumstantially, his situation was one of misery...

& It's important that we remember that because when we read his letter, he doesn't call attention to *his* plight, but rather he thanks God for *them*. He prays for *them*, he exalts the work of Christ *in them* & speaks of his great *love* for them... Pertaining to his own "problems" he said, "Hey, don't be bummed for me thinking somehow that because I'm in this place that the ministry has been hindered. The truth of the matter is; if anything, it's been *enhanced!*"

Many of the imperial soldiers of Rome, & the palace guard were coming to know Christ. Caesar's personal bodyguards were getting saved & people were being inspired to preach the gospel all the more... He realized that some had good motives, others had motives that were amiss, but the *message* was solid & in that he said, "I'll rejoice." Hey, the motives a man are between him & God, but the message of J.C. & Him crucified for the sin of the world will change lives & save souls so in *that*, we will rejoice.

Paul considered himself the bond-slave of J.C. He wasn't his own, he'd been bought at the price of the shed blood of Jesus. Therefore, if God's plan could be propelled w/him in prison... so be it. If it could be furthered w/him as a free man, great. He maintained the mentality that it wasn't about him, but the work & will of God, regardless of the cost.

But he didn't suffer from a martyr's mentality, he didn't *want* to be in jail any more than you or I would. So he assures them that he appreciates their prayers for *him* & should Rome *release* him, he'll come visit *them* again... Notice.

Vs 19-20

Paul says, "Listen, I know that I'm not the victim of circumstance... God is in control & I know that *through your praying for me*, ultimately I'll be set free." Did you notice that there? Paul connected the confidence of his deliverance *directly* to the prayers of God's people (that is, to the Philippians). "I know this will turn out for my deliverance *through your prayer*". Quick question, can prayer really change things?

According to the understanding of Paul the apostle; absolutely, emphatically *it can*. I'm reminded of a scenario that God drew to Ezekiel's attention when He said, "Tell the people of Israel that they're not a cleansed land! **Your prophets are like roaring lions tearing at their prey! They've devoured people, taken treasures & precious things from widows (they've made merchandise of the people of God)!**" On & on God goes indicting the priests, the prophets & the people... He said, "... they have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger."

Watch this: He said, **"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.**¹ God says, "I wanted to move, I wanted to do a great work, but there was no one to stand in the gap, no one to intercede, no one who would *pray*, so rather than save the people, rather than spare/deliver the people, I have destroyed the people..."

Will prayer make a difference? We touched on this Wednesday evening. Prayer actually begins in the heart of God. He places a desire, a burden, a yearning in your heart. You then (acting upon this burden) offer it back to God, you begin to lift it up to God that He might somehow move, or minister or whatever the need may be. & Somehow & in some way, as you pray, that then opens the door for God to do the work (it completes the circle, so to speak). You say, "How does that work?" I don't know. "Why has God chosen to partner w/man in the accomplishing of His plan?" I don't know. But in His infinite wisdom, He has.

This ministry (I believe) will only be limited by the lack of people praying for it. Paul saw the importance of prayer. He connected his deliverance directly to it. Should they stop praying, perhaps he'll stay right there... Maybe you recall when we were studying Daniel, in the 10th Ch we discover that Daniel had been praying & fasting from certain foods & creature comforts for 21 straight days. & When the angel appeared to him, he informed Daniel that he'd been dispatched to him the moment he started praying, but he was held up by spiritual warfare, yet his arrival corresponded directly w/Daniel's prayers.

Is it any wonder that you & I struggle in our prayer lives? The enemy wants us to see futility, a pointlessness to prayer. God wants us to pray more than ever before... He's looking for someone who will stand in the gap; & pray.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Eze 22:30-31]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But notice, it's not the prayer in & of itself that was going to meet the need (as I was alluding to earlier). It was "the supply of the Spirit of J.C." that would come to Paul *through* the prayer of the Philippians. It's not the prayer that does the work, it's the Spirit of God that does the work, but the supply of the Spirit will flow through the conduit of our prayers.

"...according to my earnest expectation & hope," ladies & gentlemen, these are words of faith. Paul had a great expectancy, it was a guaranteed certainty in his heart that he would stand boldly before Caesar in his defense of the gospel. He wasn't there because of he'd stolen from Rome, nor was he on trial because he'd murdered someone or committed some treasonous offense.

He was there because of the gospel of J.C. & He was not ashamed of the gospel. As He wrote to the Romans, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,*"² He wasn't embarrassed, or ashamed of the gospel. He was *excited* about the gospel, looked for every opportunity to *share* the gospel. Because God so loved the world... It's not condemnation that God holds out to people, it's *salvation* by grace through faith in J.C. Paul wasn't ashamed of that, he was honored to share it.

But did you catch the plot twist (so to speak) there in Vs 20? He said, "So long as Christ is magnified in body, it doesn't really matter what happens to me. Should I live, or should I die." "Hey, I might be set free, I might be executed, either way Christ will be magnified."

"Wait a minute Paul, I thought you said you were confident of deliverance through our prayers?" "That's right." "Well, what's up w/this 'death' talk?" & Then it dawns on us... Paul saw himself in a "win/win" situation. He might be delivered *from* death, or he might be delivered into the presence of J.C. *through* death. Either way deliverance was certain.

The only thing that concerned him was that Christ be *magnified* in his body, be it by life; or death. Family; our bodies are to be used to magnify J.C. Think of a telescope. It's so much smaller than the stars, yet it magnifies them so we can see them more accurately & behold their beauty. Even so, we are so much smaller than the glory of J.C. yet it's through our bodies that J.C. is brought near to people. *To the average unbeliever, Jesus is a misty figure who lived in distant history. But you bring Jesus right up close to them, where they can study Him, & learn of Him & see Him for who He is. Think about that...*

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ro 1:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Is it your concern that Jesus be “magnified” in your body? When people see you go through crisis, they should see how big Jesus truly is. Our bodies serve as a “lens” that brings Jesus up close & personal to people.

Paul says, “If Christ sees fit that I walk from here, if that will glorify Him, awesome. If He decides He will be best glorified through the laying down of my life, I’m more than willing.” Why? How could Paul say that kind of thing?

Vs 21-26

Paul has purposed in his heart that Christ (being the center of his life) will radiate through every aspect of his life. He says (Vs 21) “For to me, to live is Christ...” To the Col he said, “Christ... is our life” (Ch 3:4). The idea is that apart from Christ there is no life. Sure you may have a beating heart, breathing lungs & a fully functioning body, but apart from Christ you are dead in sin & in trespass. The apostle John said it like this; he said, *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*³

Everlasting life is found only in J.C. To the Galatians Paul said, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*⁴ To the Romans, *“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*⁵ To live is Christ. He is our all in all.

All of Paul’s activities, all of his interests, the entire round of his existence is ensphered within that circumference which is Christ. (Wuest)

& When Christ is your life; than to die is gain. Now the idea here isn’t that of the process of dying, but the consequence of death, death itself isn’t gain (death is an enemy), but to be in the presence of Jesus, to behold His beauty, His glory... truly is gain.

What is the central focus of your life? & Let’s not say what we know the answer *should* be, what *truly* has the central focus of your life? We all know the right answer is “Jesus”. But if we were to be honest, sometimes we tend to make “things” (cars, guitars, careers, hobbies, other people) the center of our lives.

This Vs becomes a critical test for our lives, “For me to live is ____ & to die is ____.” Fill in the blanks. “For me, to live is money & to die is to leave it all behind.” “To live is fame & to die is to be forgotten.” “To live is power, to die to lose it all.”

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 5:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ga 2:20]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 6:11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But when Christ is your life... to die is gain. It's a graduation to glory. Something else to consider is that if to live is Christ, then to die *to self* in this world, is gain. He must increase, but I must decrease.

Btw, for Paul to say that gain awaited him at death that argues against 2 things. #1 It argues against the idea of "soul sleep", not much gain in being in some sort of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs, he didn't say that. It also argues #2 against the idea of "purgatory". To live is Christ & to die is to be subjected to some sort of suffering until & finally & eternally I'm purged & purified from sin. No; to be absent from the body is to be present w/the Lord ☺!

"But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor." I love that. He knew he would have a fruitful life for the kingdom of God. In sad contrast, there are many believers today who really don't know if they do (or will) bear fruit for the kingdom of God in their life. Yet that's the call, right? ***"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."***⁶

Most people believe that they're nonessential, irrelevant to the work & to the body of Christ. "Sure, Paul could say that, he was a great church planter, missionary, wrote 2/3 of the NT. No one even knows I exist. Whether I live or die makes no real difference to/in the Body of Christ." 100% untrue. That's exactly what the enemy of your soul wants you to believe.

It's true that we're not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Yet equally true is that we shouldn't think ourselves irrelevant either. Read 1 Cor 12:12-27 later. We're many members, one body, & each part has need of the other if we're to function effectively/appropriately as God designed us to. ***Don't fall into the trap of contributing nothing to the kingdom of God, believing yourself non-essential. For you to remain, to stay, to serve & to support what God is doing is *needful* for us, you have a vital part/purpose in the Body of Christ, there's no insignificant aspect to His Body, of which you are a part.***

Paul, deep down, really wanted to be w/Jesus. He knew that heaven was far greater than anything this world has to offer. When he says that his desire was to depart & be w/Christ he wasn't saying that he was so miserable that he'd just rather die. He wasn't longing for death as a way *out of* unbearable circumstances. He saw it as the way *into* unspeakably *glorious* circumstances. Where he would be "w/Christ".

⁶ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Jn 15:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Yet he realized (Vs 25-26) that his work wasn't done... We get the idea in this passage that though Paul was full of faith, he was just short of absolute certainty one way or the other, which in reality serves to comfort us. He couldn't say exactly what the future held for him, only that he was good w/whatever came his way because he knew that God was in control & either way Christ would be magnified/glorified through whatever fell his way.

Vs 27

"Regardless of what happens w/me," Paul says, "I want to hear nothing but good things regarding what's going on w/you." It was paramount in Paul's heart that believers lead lives that are becoming *of* believers. Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."⁷ Paul says, "Only let (make sure that) your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The idea of "conduct" here is tied to citizenship, he's telling them to be good, patriotic citizens of the kingdom of God, to represent their "homeland" well.

Here's the point. Our behavior should be such that it can be identified w/the gospel of Christ (the word of God). Someone once asked Gandhi, "What's the greatest hindrance to Christian missions in India?" His response? "Christians". His point was that the things that they were saying & the things that they were showing (by the way they lead their lives) weren't matching up!

Paul says, "I don't want to hear that about you". Let your conduct be "worthy". That is, what we *profess* should be equally balanced by what our lives *produce*.

& One way that we demonstrate that our citizenship is not of this world but resides in heaven is through the way we interact w/one another. (That you love one another) Stand fast (or firm) in one spirit, not disunity, not division, contentions & separations. **But unity, community, & reconciliations. The church fragments & fractionalizes at the drop of a hat, a simple disagreement or misunderstanding... The Holy Spirit says, "Hold your ground." We don't wrestle flesh & blood, but powers, principalities, rulers of darkness & spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. Our flesh, this world, the devil, these things work against us, but the Spirit of God is working *in us & for us.***

Write down Ps 133 & read it later, there's an anointing & refreshing that flows through unity in the Body of Christ... A 19th century pastor by the name of R.C. Chapman wrote, "Pride nourishes the remembrance of injuries: humility forgets as well as forgives them."

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [In 13:35]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Again, “When mutual intercession takes the place of mutual accusation, then will the differences and difficulties of brethren be overcome.” Here’s one more, “Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division”.

Paul says here that there is a right kind of strife. It’s when we strive (not against one another) but together, for the faith of the gospel. The common goal of getting out the word of God, promoting a productive purpose.

Vs 28

What does that mean? It means that when those who persecute you realize that what they’re doing doesn’t startle you, doesn’t intimidate you, it reminds them that they’re on the losing side & it reminds *you* that your salvation is sure. The only real weapon the enemy has is fear. & When your faith remains steadfast in the face of otherwise fearful circumstances. It reminds your enemies that you’re on the side of salvation (& that from God), they’re on the side of condemnation (perdition/destruction).

Vs 29-30

How many of you have ever looked at affliction/suffering as a gift from God? Jesus said, *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”*⁸

F.B. Meyer has said, “Everyone cannot be trusted with suffering. All could not stand the fiery ordeal. They would speak rashly and complainingly. So the Master has to select with careful scrutiny the branches which can stand the knife.” & Again, “Look up and take each throb of pain, each hour of agony, as a gift. Dare to thank Him for it. Look inside the envelope of pain for the message it enfolds. It is a rough packing-case, but there is treasure in it.” (Meyer)

Tough times will make us stronger, we grow through opposition. Write down & be encouraged by James 1:2-4.

Paul was under persecution (conflict) for the sake of the gospel, so to were the Philippians. But if they could experience the same conflict that Paul did, they too could expect the same faithfulness from God that Paul was strengthened by. So to w/you, so to w/me. Family, it’s not about us, it’s about the glory of God, who has loved us & given Himself for us in the Person of J.C. & God is faithful, if He calls you *to* it, He’ll see you & strengthen you *through* it. Amen? Amen.

⁸ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [In 15:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You & give You praise for Your overwhelming faithfulness. You've never failed us, & You never will. Forgive us when we drift, when we fall short, when we fail... Teach us the meaning of "To live is Christ". Jesus be the center of our lives, & may we never buy the lie that says we're nonessential to Your plan. Bring forth fruit that remains for Your glory, from our lives.

To depart & be w/Christ. I pray that's the position of every heart here today. That should this day be your last day, you'll be w/Christ. If that's not where you're at, then let's tend to that right here, right now. Believe on the Lord J.C. Turn from your sin, cry out to Him, believe in Him & you'll be saved.