

# Make Me a Telescope

Joy by Example Part 04  
Philippians 1:19-21a 2-7-2016

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Summary: We all crave meaning in life, and the highest meaning that gives importance to your life is showing Christ to be great through your life. That requires courage, which comes from the Holy Spirit through prayer. Paul was full of joy about the future because he knew it would mean exaltation of Christ through him, whether by life or death. If life, it would be through working for the Philippians progress and joy in the faith.

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**Philippians 1:17** The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. **18** But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, **19** for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. **20** I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **22** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! **23** I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; **24** but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. **25** Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, **26** so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

## Introduction: The Need for Meaning

Years ago when I worked at Domino's, one of my jobs was to scrape the dried-up remnants of dough off the dough trays. So I would scrape off all these crumbs, dump them on the floor, scrape the next one, dump, and keep going until I got them all done, then I'd get a broom and sweep up the pile of crumbs and throw them away. One day I was working on that mindless task and my thoughts were, who knows where? I wasn't really paying attention to my surroundings at all. I finished a tray, turned around and dumped it on the floor, and right there where the crumbs hit the floor I see these two feet. And a broom. And I looked up, and attached to those feet was someone who had just swept that spot - like one second before I dumped the crumbs. He was a developmentally disabled kid who worked there, and about all he

could do was fold boxes and sweep the floors. So that's pretty much all he did the whole time he was at work – he would just keep sweeping the floor over and over. So he sweeps up this area all around me and I immediately turn around and just dump crumbs all over the place. I looked up at him, and that kid looked at me with this combination of anger and consternation and exasperation – he was furious. And I felt terrible. I apologized profusely, and I told him I would sweep it up, but that didn't assuage his anger at all.

Why was that so upsetting to him? Was it because I created more work for him? No. He knew I'd clean it up. It wasn't because I increased his workload. What was so upsetting to him was that I had taken some work he had already done and undid it. And if you have ever had someone do that with some job that you have done, you know – it's maddening. Even if it doesn't create any new work for you, still, it's so hard to take. Why? Because God hardwired us with a powerful need for our work to have meaning. We need what we do to matter. We need to make some kind of difference. People become suicidal when they see their life as completely devoid of meaning. If they see what they are doing as pointless, all motivation drains away.

So how meaningful is your life? How important is your work? How important are you? In the Old Testament, for a person to live and die without leaving behind any kind of lasting impact was one of the great calamities that could befall a person.

On the other hand, if your work does have meaning, and you really are doing something important, that can keep you motivated and happy even through the most arduous kind of work. A search and rescue team will put themselves through the most miserable conditions to try to save someone's life. Most of us wouldn't want to stand up for 22 hours working on some meticulous, difficult thing, but Ben Carson was willing to do that to separate 11-month-old twins joined at the head. The more important task, the greater the motivation. But when it feels like your work is meaningless, you have no motivation.

The Apostle Paul had enough motivation for about 10 people. He was an incredibly driven individual. And as a result, he was an incredibly joyful individual. Even in the most painful circumstances, both physically and emotionally, he was overflowing with joy because of the work he was doing. It was more important, impactful work than saving babies' lives or rescuing people lost in the woods or putting out fires or fighting for your country. It was the most important work there is. And so Paul was always full of both motivation and joy. And part of the reason for the book of Philippians is to teach us how to follow in his steps.

## The Goal: Exalting Christ

We have been studying verse-by-verse through this book, and we left off last time at verse 18. So we'll pick it up there, but before we look at verse 18, I'd like you to peek ahead to verse 20. Look at the end of that verse.

**Philippians 1:20 ...I will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body**

The word **exalt** means *to show to be great*. The ultimate purpose of Paul's existence and all his work was to show Jesus Christ to be great. Literally the word means *to magnify*. Someone looks at the moon, and it's just a little circle in the sky, but then they look through a really powerful telescope, and they can see it's much greater than they thought. The moon was big all along, but they couldn't see it as big until they looked through some magnification. That's the way Christ is. He is already big; he is already great and magnificent and awesome, but people can't see him as great and magnificent and awesome. Our eyes are bad, and we need some magnification to see him as he really is. We need some glasses. We need a telescope.

## Beneficial

And it's crucial that we get those glasses because seeing Christ as he is is the best thing that can ever happen to a person.

### **2 Corinthians 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all behold the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory**

Beholding his glory has a transforming effect on you. Think of some of your favorite things to look at. We enjoy seeing the stars on a really clear night. We love seeing spectacular sunrises and sunsets. People pay a lot of money to go see the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. People spend billions of dollars every year to watch movies. We want to see beautiful people. There are all kinds of things we like to look at. But imagine if looking at those things had a healing, strengthening, transforming effect on you. What if watching a sunset strengthened your muscles more than working out an hour a day for a year? What if 15 minutes of gazing at the stars would cure your arthritis or your bad back? What if you could cure the flu by watching a movie? Or if you lost 10 pounds of body fat every time you spent a couple minutes looking at some beautiful picture hanging on your wall at home? We like to look at beautiful things just for the sheer enjoyment of looking at beautiful things. And that, by itself, is enough to motivate people to spend thousands of dollars for that enjoyment. But what if on top of that enjoyment there were all kinds of health benefits – just from looking at something?

That is what seeing the glory of God is like. It improves you – and in much greater ways than just physical improvements. It improves your soul. So when they ask the Miss America contestants what they want to accomplish, and one of them says, “world peace,” and another one says, “ending hunger,” and another one says, “curing cancer.” The one with the highest and greatest most idealistic dream of all is the one who says, “I want to cause people to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.” If you do that, you have done the greatest thing there is, and you have benefited humanity in the greatest way possible. And even more important than benefiting humanity, is glorifying God. And exposing his greatness to the world glorifies him more than anything else you could ever do. And so it really is the greatest possible thing that can ever happen.

## Meaning Comes from Being the Telescope

Now, let's take it a step further. The world seeing God's glory more clearly would be one thing, but imagine this: Imagine the world seeing that transforming glory more clearly because of the lens that they are looking through, and that lens is you! You would think the highest goal in life would be for the world to see the glory of God, but an even higher goal would be that you would be the telescope through which they would see the glory of God. That would make your life supremely important.

In fact, the degree to which your life is accomplishing that is the only measure of your importance. It is the only thing that matters. If a person's life doesn't do that at all, his life is pointless. The more your life magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ, the more successful your existence is. The reason Paul is so happy sitting in that Roman prison is because he knew that what was about to happen to him would put glasses on lots of people's eyes. What was about to happen to him would be a telescope that would show people new vistas of God's glory that they had never seen before. What was about to happen to Paul was going to have a spectacularly important and beneficial outcome for generations to come.

What was it? What was this thing that was about to happen to Paul that got him so excited in anticipation? He wasn't sure.

“What? He wasn't sure? If he wasn't sure, how could he know that it was going to have all those fabulous results?”

That's what we will to see in today's passage.

## Review: Present Rejoicing

So we left off last week with Paul rejoicing. He is in prison unjustly. He might end up being executed by Rome. On top of that, there are brothers in Christ in town who are jealous of Paul, so they are preaching in ways designed to hurt Paul. So Paul is under fire from both the world and the church. And we saw his response is in verse 18.

**18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.**

His life is devoted to the ministry of the gospel, and the gospel is being preached, so he is rejoicing. And not only is he rejoicing now, but he plans to still be rejoicing in the future.

## Exalting Christ Requires Courage

### Future Rejoicing

**because of this I rejoice.**

That's present tense.

**Yes, and I will continue to rejoice**

That is future tense, and from that point on the verbs move to the future tense. I am rejoicing now because the ministry of the gospel is advancing, and you can check in with me next year and you will find that I will be rejoicing then, too. How do you know that, Paul? How do you know you'll be rejoicing in the future? Because of deliverance.

### Deliverance (Vindication)

**...I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.**

In the future he is going to be delivered. He is happy today because the gospel is going gangbusters, and he plans on being happy tomorrow because it is going to be delivered. Delivered from what? Delivered from prison? If you are awaiting trial where they are going to decide whether or not to either cut off your head or let you go, and you say, "I'm happy because I'm going to be delivered," most people would assume you mean you are going to get a favorable outcome in your trial and you get to go free.

But I don't think that's what Paul means here because in the next few verses he elaborates on this deliverance and he makes a big point of the fact that the deliverance will happen whether he lives or dies. Even if Caesar cuts Paul's head off, this deliverance will still happen.

So what is the deliverance? The answer is in the book of Job. That statement, **what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance**, is an exact, word-for-word quotation from Job 13:16. One of the most famous lines from the book of Job is when he said, **"though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."** That is in Job 13:15. The very next sentence is, **Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance.** In Philippians 1:19 when Paul says **what has happened will turn out for my deliverance**, in the Greek, it is literally **this will turn out for my deliverance**, and it is an exact quotation from Job 13:16.<sup>1</sup> Paul is quoting Job. So if we want to know what Paul means by that phrase, we need to figure out what Job meant by it.

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<sup>1</sup> That is, from the Greek translation of Job 13:16.

**Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. 16 Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him! ... 18 Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated.**

That's very clear – the deliverance Job is talking about is being vindicated by God. It will be made clear that he was not suffering because of his sin but was innocent and blameless before God and pleasing to God. That was Job's hope, and that is exactly what happened at the end of the book. So Paul takes that statement out of Job's mouth, and applies it to himself.

“Just as Job was confident that he would be vindicated before God, I have the same expectation.”

Some preachers were saying Paul wasn't pleasing to God. His friends were affirming that God had placed Paul in that prison for the defense of the gospel, but others were doubting that. They were against Paul, and they were accusing him of who-knows-what? And so Paul quotes Job – **I know that this will turn out for my deliverance**. When it's all said and done, instead of getting a report card full of D's and F's, I'm going to get the “Well done, good and faithful servant.” How can you be so sure, Paul? Not every Christian is going to get that. So how can you be so sure that you are going to? Paul answers that in verse 20. The English translations start a new sentence in verse 20, but in the Greek, verse 20 continues the same sentence.<sup>2</sup> The first word of verse 20 is actually a word that means *according to*.

## **Not Ashamed to Preach**

**19 ... this will turn out for my deliverance 20 according to my eager expectation and hope that I will in no way be ashamed**

Ashamed of what? Look at the next phrase: **I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage**. The opposite of being **ashamed** is having **sufficient courage**. And that word translated **courage** (your Bible might say **boldness**) – that word refers specifically to boldness in speaking out. Boldness in declaring something. So Paul is saying, “Instead of being ashamed to speak the gospel, I will be bold in speaking the gospel.”<sup>3</sup> It is the same thing he said in Romans 1:16.

**Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel**

**2 Timothy 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord ...But join with me in suffering for the gospel**

So being ashamed in that sense means being embarrassed by the gospel so that you are afraid to boldly proclaim it. Not being ashamed means you have so much confidence in God that you will proclaim his gospel no matter what the cost. That's what Paul was confident he would be able to do in the future, which is why he knew he would be rejoicing in the future. He knows he is going to be happy because of future courage.

Paul was going to have to stand before the authorities in the court of Caesar in Rome. This is the highest court in the empire. It is the Supreme Court. I once got what I thought was an unjust traffic ticket, and I went to court to contest it. And when it came time to speak to the judge, I was so nervous I forgot half the stuff I had planned to say, and he ruled against me. It's amazing how intimidating even the smallest court can be. Can you imagine appearing before the Supreme Court? And not for a traffic fine, but being accused of a capital crime where you get the death penalty if you lose? And you are representing yourself?

That is the situation Paul is in, but that is not even the part that's scaring him. The really scary part is being in that context, and standing before the most powerful men in the world in a court of law, and trying to divert the subject and bring up the gospel during the trial, and explain to the judge that he is guilty of sin before a holy God and then call on him to humble himself and repent. You think it's scary trying to

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<sup>2</sup> Fee says that this is one of the most complex sentences in the entire Pauline corpus, which would make it one of the most complex sentences in the entire Bible.

<sup>3</sup> When Paul uses the word *shame*, most often uses it to describe the opposite of being bold in his proclamation of the gospel.

bring up the gospel in a causal conversation at work? Imagine trying to do this! And if you think Paul was somehow immune to that kind of intimidation, or the fear of not having the right words, think again. More than once he asked churches to pray for him to have boldness in speaking the gospel.

**Ephesians 6:20 Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**

Paul repeatedly asked people to pray for him to be able to think of the right words to say, and to have enough courage to open his mouth and speak the word like he should. Paul remembered Jesus' sobering words about that.

**Luke 9:26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

It would be a horrible, horrible thing to be on the wrong side of that deal, wouldn't it? To have Jesus Christ stand there and be ashamed to be associated with you at the Second Coming?<sup>4</sup> For Paul, that was a terrifying thought. But he had joy because he knew that when the time came, he would have sufficient courage.

If you want Jesus Christ to be exalted by your life, you are going to need courage. It is going to require some boldness, because any time your life starts exalting Christ, it is guaranteed there is going to be some resistance – both from outside the church and inside. The enemy will do whatever he can to intimidate you into backing off, and so if you want your life to have meaning, and you want to be a telescope that exposes the magnificence of Christ to the world, you are going to need courage.

## **Courage Comes from the Spirit**

How do you get that kind of courage? You might think, "I've been timid about sharing my faith or about serving in ministry for the last 20 years. I've had preachers for the last 20 years tell me I shouldn't be that way, and I felt really guilty about it for the last 20 years. But nothing is changing. All the guilt doesn't seem to be helping. What can I do that would get me to go beyond just feeling guilty about it and actually have the courage I need?" Well, for that to happen, you need something that only the Holy Spirit can supply. Look at the end of verse 19.

## **The Supply of the Spirit**

**19 ...through the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.**

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<sup>4</sup> Some interpret Php.1:19 to mean "I will in no way be ashamed on Judgment Day." That would fit the preceding context well (the quotation from Job about standing vindicated before God), and it is most definitely a biblical idea. **1 John 2:28 ... continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.** But Paul's normal use of the word *ashamed* points in another direction. Paul never uses the word "shame" in connection with judgment day. He most often uses that term in connection with being ashamed of the gospel. That, combined with the following phrase (...but I will have sufficient boldness...) supports the interpretation that the shame he has in mind is embarrassment over preaching the gospel.

However, it matters little whether we take the being ashamed to refer to shame over speaking the gospel or shame before Christ on judgment day, because both interpretations imply the other. If we take it to mean shame before God on judgment day, that shame will happen because of lack of boldness in speaking (as seen in the following phrase). And if we take it to refer to being ashamed to speak the gospel, the result will be shame on judgment day (as seen in the quotation from Job). So either way, both ideas are present, and the connection between the two is seen clearly in Lk.9:26.

A third possibility is that he is talking about being put to shame in the Old Testament sense. For example, Psalm 25 begins this way: **Psalm 25:1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; 2 in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.** So being put to shame means the enemy wins. They rely on their gods; I rely on my God – which one of us ends up being humiliated for picking the wrong god? Don't let me be put to shame in that sense. That is definitely a biblical idea – you see it all over the psalms, but it doesn't seem like that kind of shame fits the context of Philippians 1 quite as well as the other two.

The only reason Paul was confident that he would have enough courage was because he was confident that he would have the help of the Holy Spirit. It is only through the Spirit that this can happen. I don't care how much evangelism training you get, you won't have enough courage and boldness without special enablement by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people are timid about speaking up because they don't have much knowledge. They are afraid they will be made to look dumb, because they can't really articulate things well. But it wouldn't matter if you were the top expert in the world – you still wouldn't have enough boldness to speak up unless you got enablement from the Spirit of Christ. Think about it - the Apostle Paul needed special divine intervention in order to have enough boldness to speak up. *The author of the book of Romans!* You would think a guy who can write the book of Romans would have a good enough handle on the gospel to where he could just share the gospel with people with no problem. But even he needed the help supplied by the Holy Spirit. And that help is exactly what Jesus promised.

**Mark 13:11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit will help you. But is that help automatic? Every Christian has the Holy Spirit, so does that mean we all have the same enablement to do our ministry? No, because the Holy Spirit supplies what we need in response to prayer.

## **The Spirit Comes through Prayer**

**19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.**

The Holy Spirit is a person, and like any person, he responds to conversation. If you have kids, there are some things you give them whether they ask or not, but there are other things you don't give them unless they ask. God is the same way, and so the supply of grace we receive from the Holy Spirit is dependent upon prayer.

**Luke 11:9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you...13 If you, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

All believers have the Holy Spirit already, but if you ask, you will receive the Spirit in even greater measure.<sup>5</sup> What does that mean? What does it mean when Jesus speaks to people who are already believers and tells them that if they ask God in prayer, they will receive even more of the Spirit? It's interesting, in the parallel passage in Matthew 7 Jesus says the exact same thing. The whole paragraph is pretty much word for word identical, except for the very last line. In Luke it says **how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him....**, and in Matthew it says **how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?** So in some sense, **good gifts**, and **the Holy Spirit** are interchangeable. Receiving the Holy Spirit in greater measure is how we receive more of God's good gifts (things like courage and strength and zeal). And the way we get all that is through prayer. That is why Paul so frequently asked for prayer. It wasn't just a religious exercise to appear spiritual. It wasn't an excuse to voice all his complaints. It wasn't an avenue for disguised gossip. Paul asked for prayer because he knew that in order to have courage at the moment of truth, he desperately needed more grace than he had. And so he asked the Romans to pray for him to be rescued from unbelievers, and that the saints in Jerusalem would find his service acceptable (Ro 15:31-32).

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<sup>5</sup> Fee argues that the word for **help** in Php.1:19 means “supply,” not help, and calls for an object. And based on the cognate in Gal.3:5, we should take it to mean the supplied Spirit. **Galatians 3:5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?** So Php.1:19 is saying that as a result of their prayers, the thing that was supplied was more of the Spirit. Fee may be right, but it seems to me the meaning is the same either way. Being supplied the Spirit, or being supplied by the Spirit results in the same thing, namely, getting that which the Holy Spirit gives.

He asked the Thessalonians to pray for him a couple different times.<sup>6</sup> Philemon was praying for him (Philm 22). It was the prayers of the Corinthians that carried Paul through what sounds like the hardest ordeal of his life. He was under great pressure far beyond his ability to endure so that he despaired even of life. But then God delivered him in response to the prayers of the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:8-11). He needed all kinds of prayer. But most often his prayer request was for boldness and courage and clarity in proclaiming the gospel.

**Ephesians 6:19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**

**Colossians 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:1 pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men**

Paul asked for prayer a lot because he needed a lot of prayer. He needed a lot of grace and a lot of help from the Holy Spirit, and he knew that would come through the prayers of the saints. And without those prayers, it *wouldn't* come. Otherwise it would be a lie for him to say that it happened as a result of the prayers.

So, here's what we have so far: Paul's joy is through the roof in the present, as he sits there in prison, because the gospel is going gangbusters as a result of his chains. But then he says, "On top of that, I plan on being full of joy in the future as well." Why? What is going to happen in the future that is so wonderful that you are already happy about it now? Answer: deliverance – A's and A+'s on Judgment Day. As a result of your prayers, I am going to get more grace from the Holy Spirit so that I'll have all the courage and boldness I will need to proclaim the gospel without fear in the really scary situations. And that fills Paul to overflowing with motivation and joy because look at the result:

**20 ... I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body**

"I will be a telescope! Christ Jesus will be shown to be great through me! I will be the binoculars that enable a nearsighted world to see the glory of Jesus Christ for the first time. I will be the eyeglasses that enable brothers and sisters in Christ to bring the glory of Christ into sharper focus. The greatest thing that could ever happen to humanity is going to happen, and it's going to happen through me! I know that's going to happen, because you are praying for me. And I know that the result of your prayers will be that I will gain a greater measure of the Spirit of Christ."

Paul calls him the **Spirit of Christ** instead of the Holy Spirit because he wants to emphasize the connection between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. One of the main roles of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory and honor and exaltation to the Lord Jesus Christ. And since that is the entire goal of this passage, it makes sense that he would remind us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He is the Spirit sent by Christ and whose objective it is to magnify and glorify Christ.

## **Conclusion: Progress and Joy**

So how is all this going to play out? Remember, beginning at verse 19, Paul is moving from the present tense to the future tense. He is saying, "Not only am I rejoicing now because the gospel is going gangbusters, but I'll still be rejoicing in the future because of what is going to happen." And I asked the question, "What's going to happen in the future?" And Paul's answer is, "I don't know." He doesn't know what is going to happen. He is in prison awaiting trial, he might get a not guilty verdict and go free, or he

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Thes. 5:25, 2 Thes. 3:2.



might get a guilty verdict and be executed. It could go either way, and Paul doesn't know which way it's going to go. So how can Paul be so happy and excited about what's about to happen in the future? He answers that question at the end of verse 20.

### **20 ...Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**

It doesn't matter which one happens – he gets to be a telescope either way. So you ask him, “Paul, what do you think the verdict is going to be?”

“I don't know, but I know that as soon as I hear it I'm going to be doing a fist pump. The judge is going to say either guilty or not guilty, and I'm going to celebrate. I don't know what the verdict will be, but if I could choose, my top two choices are death or life. I'm really hoping for one of those outcomes. If it's one of those two, I'm set.”

“Explain what you mean, Paul.”

### **21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

## **To Live is Christ**

What does that mean? If you take those words out of the context, it's a pretty vague statement, isn't it?<sup>7</sup> To live is Christ – Christ what? If you just isolate the words **to live is Christ** they could mean just about anything. So how do we figure out what Paul meant? Should we just look up every verse we can find that has the words *Jesus* and *life* near each other, and assume it means some kind of conglomeration of whatever those verses are saying.

### **Galatians 2:20 ...I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.**

Or Colossians 3:4 (“**Christ, who is your life...**”). Or John 17:3 (“**this is eternal life: that they may know ...Jesus Christ...**”) You could go all kinds of directions with this. That is not the right way to figure out what a verse means. If you want to know what a verse means, look at the context. The more famous the verse, the more prone we tend to be to ignore the context. If you want to know what Paul means when he says **for to me to live is Christ**, notice the first word – **for**. That word means, “Let me explain what I just said.” What did he just say?

### **20 ... now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 **FOR**, to me, to live is Christ...**

So the statement, **to me to live is Christ** is a reference to what he just said – that **Christ will be exalted** through Paul's life. For to me, to live is Christ – Christ what? Christ exalted! How will Christ be exalted?

### **22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.**

What is **fruitful labor**? In verse 25 he says that if he stays alive he would be able to continue with the Philippians for their **progress and joy in the faith**. If the verdict in his upcoming court case is that he is innocent and they let him go, he can head straight to Philippi and minister to them for their **progress and joy in the faith**. And when they make spiritual progress and have greater joy in the faith, that will exalt Christ. And that is what Paul is so excited about.

What about the death part? How would he exalt Christ if the verdict is death? We will have to save that for next time. (And by the way, if you know anyone who struggles with thoughts of suicide, next week would be a great week for them to come.) But for now, let's just close our time by thinking about this concept of exalting Christ by working for someone else's progress and joy in the faith.

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, in the Greek, it is even more vague because there is no “is.” Literally it is just **to live, Christ**.

## Living for Ministry

Paul doesn't say, "I've served a long time in ministry, I poured my life out, I'm getting old – if I ever get out of this prison, I'm moving to Florida so I can play golf. I'm going to retire and just be on vacation the rest of my life." No, his attitude was, "If God will grant me a few more years, that's awesome because I can spend it ministering to the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith." If Paul had a pulse, that was proof to him that he was supposed to be working for somebody's progress and joy in the faith. Think of some of the oldest people in this church. Why are they still around? Why hasn't God taken them to heaven yet? They are still here because they still have some work to do when it comes to our progress and joy in the faith. The reason you are still here is for someone else's progress and joy. The reason some other people are still here is your progress and joy. Your mission is to find those people who are here for your progress and joy, and cooperate with what they are doing. And also to find those people whose progress and joy you are here to advance, and work for that until you're dead. And if you don't know how to help someone make progress and increase their joy in the faith, then you really need to focus on finding a mentor who can help you with progress and joy; then you will have something to pass on to others for their progress and joy.

Progress and joy, progress into joy, progress and joy - that's our objective. That is what will give your life meaning. That is what will give you motivation and happiness even in the midst of suffering. That is what will make your life important and fulfill that huge appetite God has given you for meaning and significance. It's the way you can have an impact for generations to come and into eternity. It's the way you can be a telescope, so that Christ is magnified through your life.

The reason I am always pushing you to get involved in ministry in the church is not because I have certain programs I want to add, it's not mainly to lighten the load on other people – the biggest reason why it's so urgent on my heart that every single one of you find your calling at Agape and pour yourself into ministry is so that you will be able to have the kind of joy that Paul had, because you know that you are doing something that is contributing to the progress and joy of the saints, and as a result of that, your life becomes a telescope that exalts the Lord Jesus Christ and shows him to be magnificent.

**1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

### Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) What are a few opportunities in your life right now for being a telescope that shows Christ to be great (either through ministry or through joyful response to suffering)?
- 2) If the epitaph on your tombstone began with "Here lies \_\_\_\_ whose life exalted Christ by..." how would you most like that sentence to finish?
- 3) Whose progress and joy in the faith do you think God most wants you to focus on at this time in your life? And who has especially been used of God for your progress and joy?