

**Sermon 5**  
**Joy In Prizing Christ**  
**Philippians 1:18b-26**

**Intro**

A Christian advanced many years in age thought that John G. Paton was wasting his life when he decided to go as a missionary to the South Sea Islands. "You will be eaten by Cannibals!" the aging Christian said. Paton responded, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and [are] soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms;...I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer."

As we would say today, Mr. Paton put Mr. Dickson in his place. Paton's desire and dedication to live for Christ and die for Christ was similar to Paul's who famously says in this passage, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" Later in chapter 3 he says that he presses "*on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (3:14). This statement expresses Paul's desire to someday attain spiritual perfection. Above all, Paul wanted to look like Christ, sound like Christ, and be like Christ. And while living on this earth, he pursued just that because he knew that when he died he would gain the perfection of Christlikeness in heaven. But he goes on to say in the very next verse, "*Let those us of us who are mature [speaking of being mature spiritually] think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you*" (3:15). In other words, he's saying that every truly mature believer will share Paul's same desire of being like Christ. And those Christians who

think spiritual maturity is wrapped up in something else, say a high position in the church or having notoriety for being a good teacher in the church or being considered godly because you are a successful Christian businessman or have people underneath you at work or something else are wrong. True spiritual maturity is evidenced in how much a Christian looks and sounds like Christ. And those Christians who think otherwise will likely be humbled in some way by God Himself who will “*reveal*” to them they aren’t as mature as they think. None of us would want to be humbled by God in this way. That’s why the passage before you is so important. You are being given a chance this morning to check your spiritual temperature to see whether you are hot or cold for Christ.

As we saw last week, Paul rejoiced at the beginning of v18 that Christ was proclaimed even if it was done by those who tried to cause him harm while in prison. Now at the end of v18 he strikes the note of joy again, the theme of his whole letter. He says, **Yes, and I will rejoice**. He goes on to tell show us that in spite of possibly being executed after his long imprisonment he still rejoices because Christ is the prize of his life. If he lives he, will prize Christ. If he dies, he will enter the presence of Christ.

**Proposition:** In 1:18b-26 Paul testifies to the joy he has in a life that is centered around Christ. From such a testimony we learn that a life that is centered upon Christ prizes Christ above all things. Such a life that joyfully prizes Christ above all things will bear *2 distinguishing marks*.

How do you know if you are living a life that rejoices in prizing Christ above all things? The answer is found in whether or not your life bears these distinguishing marks. We would all like to think that our ultimate joy is wrapped up in Christ. But have we really oriented our lives in the

radical way Paul did? When we do, we will find the purest experience of joy this life can afford.

As I said, this morning is an opportunity to check your spiritual temperature. Every morning before I run, I do two things. First, I check the weather app on my phone to see what the temperature is so I can dress accordingly. Second, because I don't trust it, I step outside on the back patio to see what the temperature really feels like. My app may say 70 degrees, but its possible that it feels more like 60 if there is a strong wind.

Spiritually, we always want to think the best about our walk with Christ. Someone asks us what or who is most important to us, and without thinking we answer Christ is. But the passage before you will tell you your true spiritual temperature.

The two distinguishing marks of a life that joyfully prizes Christ above all things are easy to remember. The first mark is *a Christ centered dedication to magnify Christ in your life* and the second is *a Christ centered decision to minister care to the church*.

*Trans:* Let's consider the first one together found in vss 19-21.

### **I. A Christ Centered Dedication to Magnify Christ In Your Life (19-21)**

In these verses, we find that Paul's joy in prizing Christ is revealed in a lifelong pursuit to bring honor, not shame to his Lord. Paul's was a life lived with a:

#### **A. A Christ Centered Motive, 19-20**

Notice what he says in v19: **for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.** Paul had confidence, but it wasn't cockiness. He admitted

he was ever dependent upon two things, not of equal power. The lesser power came through the **prayers** of the church. We cannot expect to live a life dedicated to magnifying Christ apart from the church's prayerful help. Every week at our men's study we spend the last 20 minutes with a prayer partner. These are times we share our struggles, pains, and concerns because we know we can't be the men God has called us to be apart from **prayers**. Paul humbly acknowledged his neediness. Facing trying times just a few years before this, he asked the Corinthian church to pray for him saying: "[God] will deliver us again, [but] you also must help us by prayer" (2 Cor 1:10b-11a). We know that God's sovereign plan includes "the effective prayer of a righteous man [because it] can accomplish much" (Js 5:16).

But even more than prayers, Paul knew he needed and would receive **the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ**. This is the greater power. The word **help** (ἐπιχορηγία) refers to the sufficiency of God supplying our every need. It would ultimately be God who upheld Paul in his hour of trial and therefore he confidently asserts at the end of v19: **this will turn out for my deliverance**.

Of course, Paul is in prison when he writes this. Therefore, some have taken the **deliverance** Paul mentions to refer to being acquitted before the Emperor and released from prison. But Paul has no way of knowing he will be released and further he is talking about something much more serious. He seems more concerned about standing before the judgment of Christ in heaven not so much the judgment of Rome on earth.

This is seen when we understand that the word **deliverance** (σωτηρία) can be translated as *salvation*. Last Sunday at lunch someone was asking me questions about different versions of the Bible. Paul would have used a

Greek Old Testament. Now the OT was originally written in Hebrew primarily. But due to the influence of Greek, Jews and Christians in Paul's day had a Greek (not Hebrew) OT. In Phil 1:19, Paul is quoting from the Greek Septuagint referencing Job's reply to his friend Zophar as to how he would approach God on the matter, "*I will argue my ways to His face. This will be my salvation*" (Job 13:15-16). Job has in mind his vindication before the judgment of God because he was confident that his trial infested life was not the result of God punishing him for some secret sin. As we saw last week, some preachers tried tarnishing Paul's reputation by saying that God put him in prison as a form of punishment for some secret sin. Paul feels like Job and says he is confident that whether is executed or exonerated, he will stand before God vindicated. He will be saved, or *delivered* to God if and when he dies and God will vindicate him.

In one sense, Paul didn't care if he lived or died. He had one motive in life and that was to be faithful to Christ. So he says in v20: **it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed**. Shame is the feeling we get when we commit a dishonorable act. In Paul's case it would be not speaking up for Christ before the Emperor. But he knew through the prayers of the Philippians the Holy Spirit would supply him with what he needed to be faithful to Christ. Perhaps Paul had in mind the promise of Christ, "*When they bring you to trial...say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit*" (Mk 13:11).

The word translated **eager expectation** (ἀπο-καρᾶ-δοκίαν) is a compound word made up of ἀπο meaning *away from* and καρᾶ meaning *head* and δοκίαν meaning *to look*.<sup>1</sup> So it refers to stretching the neck to turn away

from everything else and fix your eyes on one object of great desire. All of us will either bring Christ glory or shame by our lives. Paul was motivated with the singular desire that focused on bringing Christ honor, not shame so he declares his motive: **that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.**

Paul wanted to stand before the throne of Rome's judgment courageously in a manner that Christ would be **honored in his body**. This is simply another way of saying with his entire existence he wants Christ **honored**. This word means *made large*. Like a diamond under a microscope that is enlarged to see it better, so Paul desired Christ to be seen in and through his life. Paul was only a servant, so he viewed himself as disposable. He had the philosophy of John the Baptist who said of Jesus, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (Jn 3:30).

Paul's candor is really refreshing. He knows it will require the prayers of the church and the supply of the Holy Spirit's help to not deny Christ before intimidating Nero. His main motive was not being delivered from prison or the executioner's block, but rather not bringing shame to Christ by failing to honor Him. He longs to hear "Well done!" coming from the lips of his master on the final day.

*Trans:* And so his motive in vss 19-20 gives way to his motto seen in v21.

### **B. A Christ Centered Motto, 21**

He says, **For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** We are talking about whether we joyfully prize Christ above all things. One way to find out is to put a blank after the phrase "to live is" and another blank after the phrase "to die is". How would you fill in those blank? Would you say

“to live is money”? If so, then “to die means you leave it all behind.” If you say, “to live is popularity”, then you must be prepared to also say “to die is to no longer have that attention.” And the list goes on. Just fill in the blank.

Paul gives his own commentary on what this verse means in *Acts 20:24* when he tells the Ephesian elders, “*I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course.*” Finishing the course of life strong is the key, isn’t it? We don’t want to get to the end of our lives and reflect back that it was a waste. Mr. Dickson was wrong and Mr. Paton was right. A life lived for Christ is no waste. *The Heidelberg Catechism* question one asks, “*What is your only comfort in life and death?*” The first part answers, “*That I with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.*”

The logo of one missionary organization bears a picture of an ox with a plow on one side and an altar on the other. Underneath the picture are the words, “Ready for either.” For Paul he could be executed or exonerated. But in either case, he did not want to shame Christ, but only bring Him honor whether he lived or died.<sup>ii</sup>

Paul lived by this motto, **to live is Christ and to die is gain**, understanding that money, power, fame, influence, possessions, social standing, good health, business success and any other pursuit has no eternal value. Many people are quick to admit this, but few can really say, **to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain**. But this is a life that is dedicated to magnifying Christ.

As Christians you are not to live to please your boss, your friends, your children, or even your spouse. Your life is being lived out before an

audience of one. I am reading through a book with the men of our church entitled *Masculine Mandate*. The author gives a helpful illustration of an accomplished young pianist making his concert debut at Carnegie Hall. His playing was extraordinary so that even after departing from the stage the audience erupted in cheers. The stage manager urged the young man to do an encore. But he refused. The stage manager said, “Look out through those curtains. They love you! Go take you encore!” But the young pianist answered: “Do you see the old man in the balcony on the left?” He continued, “That man is seated. I will not give an encore until he stands and cheers.” Exasperated, the stage manager said, “Only one man is not standing, and you will not take an encore?” At this, the pianist said, “You see, that old man is my piano teacher. Only when he stands will I take an encore.”<sup>iii</sup>

The illustration is not to make us think that God can't be pleased even when everyone else loves what we are doing. It also is not to make us think that with the right priorities there is *no* place for pleasing our boss, or our spouse, or our friends, or our children. Rather, the illustration is meant to show us that we must measure success in life according to God's standards given in His Word. We play before an audience of One. And if you lived your whole life pleasing everyone but God it would be a waste. And if you lived your life never pleasing anyone but God it would not be a waste!

The central lesson in these verses regarding a Christ-centered dedication to magnify Christ in your life is to take Paul's cue seen in his dependence on the church. Isn't this beautiful? The bold apostle Paul of whom we read received 39 lashes on 5 separate occasions by his own people the Jews for being a follower of Christ, was beaten, was stoned, 3 times was



shipwrecked, in constant danger from robbers on his travels, danger from his own people the Jews, danger from the Gentiles, danger from false Christians, including the daily pressure of caring for all the churches (I Cor 11:23-33) is dependent on this tiny congregation in the city of Philippi to pray for him that he wouldn't falter in denying Christ as he stood before the Emperor; that he would bring honor to Christ in his life!

It's a reminder that if Paul needed the church so do you. You need the church to live a life that magnifies Christ. Men, when you tell your wife that church isn't important you are telling her that Christ isn't important. Parents, when you prioritize other things, events, etc. over church you are telling your children that those things are more important than Christ. Remember, I told you at the beginning what Paul says in 3:15- that those who think they are spiritually mature, but aren't seeing spiritual maturity as a matter of being like Christ, then God will somehow reveal to them they are wrong. This may come in the form of chastisement- a Divine spanking that will humble you to make the right priorities in your life. You can't be like Christ apart from the church.

It's a wake up call when we realize that the spiritual growth in our relationship with God is not individualistic. We are dependent on the Spirit's power and the intercessory prayers of the saints if we want to have a life dedicated to magnifying Christ. The Spirit helps us through our fellowship in the local church.

The value of Paul's letter to the Philippians is seen in the apostle's relationship with the church, which is one of joy. Joy in prizing Christ manifests itself in a life that is dedicated to magnify Christ. The place that will help you the most is the church. So the good news is that if its

your desire to magnify Christ, you are in the right place with the right people.

*Trans:* But that then begs the question as to how Christ is magnified in our lives. The answer is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> distinguishing mark of a life that joyfully prizes Christ above all things. The 1<sup>st</sup> mark is a Christ centered dedication to magnify Christ in your life. The 2<sup>nd</sup> mark is found in vss 22-26, which is...

## **II. A Christ Centered Decision to Minister Care to the Church (22-26)**

It's clear from v21 that Paul is weighing the value of living verses that of dying. He now seems to speak as if the choice were his though he knows it's God's. But he, like all of us, *do* have a decision to make if he were released from prison and lived many more years. But he begins by expressing his desire followed by his duty if he makes it out of prison alive.

### **A. A Christ Centered Desire, 22-23**

Notice what he says in v22: **If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.** He will define exactly what the **fruitful labor** is in v25. For now simply observe that he can't decide whether it would be better to live or die because God had not given to him and special revelation. Therefore, he did not know **which to choose**. Since he was not sure of the Lord's will, he was not sure which he preferred. **He was hard pressed between the two.** The word translated **hard pressed** (συνέχω) was used of a traveller in a

narrow passageway with rock walls on either side preventing him from turning in either direction, forcing him to move straight ahead.<sup>iv</sup>

Most of us will not die with the knowledge that it's happening. We are to move straight ahead in life and let God take care of that day. Corie's grandfather died with Alzheimer's and was likely was not aware of it. My grandfather (my dad's dad) died with full awareness several minutes before it happened. And right when it was happening made remarks that it was a good thing, I like to think, because he knew he was entering God's presence.

But whether we know death is near or not, we all should be **hard pressed between the two** options of living or dying in one sense. But God had not revealed to Paul if he was soon to die or not so he wasn't going to put one foot in the grave. Nevertheless, if he was executed, so be it. After all, as he says in v23: **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

Now here we have to be so very careful. There is suffering so painful that death is a gracious relief through God's good hand. But Paul is *not* saying that death is better than the worst of life. He is saying that death is better than the best of life.<sup>v</sup> You know the difference don't you? Paul was actually not longing for death to escape his suffering (as hard as that is for us to imagine). He longed for it because it meant being in his Savior's presence.

I have known many Christians who justified taking their own life because their suffering was so bad and I have known and done the funeral of at least one Christian man I knew very well who took his own life because he claimed that his suffering was unbearable. Taking one's own life is,

of course, murder. And let's be clear that Paul is not having suicidal thoughts here. I fear that some Christians take Paul out of context.

During my time in LA a few weeks ago working on my doctorate, we had a visiting professor from another very well known seminary who has written multiple books. He is in the process of writing a book on professing Christians who commit suicide. I happen to believe that Christians are capable of committing suicide as wrong and sinful as it is. No sin is too great for God's grace to forgive. This professor wants to meet with me since I ministered to at least one Christian man who committed suicide because hardly any preachers seem willing to talk about it. But suicide is a real temptation for some Christians and they may read this verse and try and justify it. **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

The word **depart** (ἀναλύω) means "to unloose". It was used to talk about boats that were untied to set sail. When we die as Christians, we set sail to heaven's shore. But this word is also used to describe a military breaking camp. Paul speaks about death this way in *2 Cor 5:1*: "*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" For Christians, death is breaking the temporary earthly camp and moving to our heavenly home to be with our Christian Commander who is God.

V23, it must be pointed out, denies the false doctrine often called soul sleep, which teaches that the dead are simply unconscious ("sleeping") between death and the final resurrection when the Lord returns. But the thief on the cross immediately entered Paradise with the Lord. When Stephen was stoned he called on the Lord to receive His spirit (Acts

7:59-60). Paul states in 2 Cor 5:8 that to be “away from the body” in death is to be “at home with the Lord” in spirit. The *WSC* says: “*The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an inward subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.*”

If this is the case- that departing this world in death means being in Jesus’ presence- then what Christian would not look forward to death in one sense? But again, Paul will not make that decision. He will not try to be executed by Nero. But if it happens it will be okay because he will finally see his Lord Jesus again.

This is a Christ centered desire to have. And I would encourage you, young or old, that if you are a Christian do not be afraid of death. But understand that it is the gateway to your long awaited meeting with your Savior Jesus Christ.

*Trans:* But its up to the Lord, for Paul and for you, as to when your time is up and His purposes for you on this earth have ended. So Paul moves from the proper Christ-centered desire to his Christ-centered duty if he continues to live.

#### **B. A Christ Centered Duty, 24-26**

As the old saying goes, “*You can’t be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good.*” Paul has a strong desire to be with Christ because its **far better** (v23). **But**, he says in v24, **to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.** In other words, Paul would put his heavenly desire aside in order to fulfill his earthly duty toward the church. His desire to be with Christ gives way to his duty to the church. As long as he was alive, it meant the Lord had work for him to do.

And that is true of all of us as well. Its wrong when the younger generation thinks that they are dependent on older saints to serve and give to the church just as its equally wrong when the older generation thinks they can retire from Christianity. As long as we have breath we are to “*be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord [our] labor is not in vain*” (I Cor 15:58). If Christ is truly the Lord of our lives and the one we prize above all, then He determines in His sovereign will when He is done with our earthly service. This was Paul’s perspective on duty and it should be ours as well.

Now this leads Paul to describe the **fruitful labor** he mentioned in v22.

Notice what he says in v25: **Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.** Now you might ask how Paul is so **convinced** that he is going to remain alive to serve the church instead of being executed. What he is **convinced** of is what he just said in v24. If it be the Lord’s will for him to live, then he will do all he can to serve the church. He is not confident either way as to whether he will be released from prison. It really doesn’t look good for him, though we learn later that he was released only to be arrested, imprisoned, and executed later. But he is **convinced** that if he remains alive his presence in the Philippian congregation will be a necessary and profitable thing.<sup>vi</sup> If he lives he promises to **continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.**

Now remember last week that Paul spoke about the “advance of the gospel” (12) in spite of his imprisonment. And I told you that this Greek word speaks about moving ahead in spite of roadblocks. We see this same word translated this time as **progress** but here its used to describe

spiritual growth. Paul would come to their aid to help them grow and to do so with **joy in the faith**. He therefore concludes by saying in v26: **so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.**

This means that the Philippians would worship and rejoice in Christ.

Because of Paul's release they would see God working in his life to send him to work in their lives for the **progress and joy in the faith**. They would give **glory** and praise to Christ for sending Paul to them.

That's what this whole letter is about: growing in our joy in the Christian life. The entire first chapter is about joy in the practice of Christian living. What kind of growth does Paul have in mind? Growth in love and knowledge that he mentioned in v9 and fruitfulness that he mentioned in v11.

No matter who you are, you are to be a ministry to others. We are to place our duty over our desires. We are used to thinking through decisions based on what's best for us, our jobs, our families, etc. When was the last time you made a decision purely based on what was best for the church?

What are you living for? Part of your answer must be Christ. Paul says "to live is Christ". But the other reason for living should be for the church. Christ lived His life to the glory of and in obedience to the Father. But He gave His life for the church.

How do you give your life for the church? By encouraging others to grow and rejoice in Christ. This is what it means to joyfully prize Christ above all things. You prize Him so much that you can't stand to see another Christian not prizing Him. You joyfully prize Him so much that

you can't stand to see your brother or sister eek their way through life with no joy because they aren't progressing spiritually.

Adoniram Judson was the first overseas missionary sent out from America.

In the early 1800's, he went to India with his wife and then to Burma shortly after that. I read his biography many years ago and it changed my perspective on what I was living for. After 14 years, he had only seen a handful of converts. But he managed to write a Burmese grammar book. During these years he was imprisoned for a year and a half, lost his wife and children to disease, and like Paul longed to be with the Lord. But he never stopped working until the Lord took him. He prayed that God would allow him to live long enough to translate the entire Bible into Burmese and to establish a church with at least 100 believers. The Lord granted the church request, but his labor to translate an entire Bible never came to fruition. He did write Burmese-English dictionaries to help with translation that proved useful to other Christian missionaries through the years. He wrote the following, "If I had not felt certain that every trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings."<sup>vii</sup> His life is a reminder that spiritual maturity will undoubtedly desire to be with Christ, but it will also recognize the duty to serve the church and participate in the advancement of God's kingdom in serving Christ while on this earth.

Christians who have few gifts, or are weakened by sickness or advanced in old age may think they are useless or even a burden to others. But it is these very ones who often contribute the most to the joy and growth of the church. And all the rest also have a duty to minister care to the church. This means you are to serve in anyway you can to the glory of God and the sake of the church.



Paul saw himself, as all Christians should, as married to Christ for better or worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health, in freedom or prison, in life or death. He joyfully prized Christ above all things and it caused him to impact others and help them find their joy. This is our duty as well.

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<sup>i</sup> Barclay Comm, 30-31.

<sup>ii</sup> Philipps Comm, 58.

<sup>iii</sup> *Masculine Mandate*, Phillips, 28-29.

<sup>iv</sup> Barclay Comm, 33 and Mac Comm, 78.

<sup>v</sup> Ellsworth Comm, 28.

<sup>vi</sup> See O'Brien Comm, 139.

<sup>vii</sup> Mac Comm, 77.