

Tested But Triumphant

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Bible Verse: Philippians 1:12-26
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We've come to a new section in our study of the book of Philippians. It's an extended section that I'm going to read, chapter 1, beginning in verse 12 going down through verse 26. The Apostle Paul said,

12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, 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 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Now the emphasis on time that I made just a moment ago is more prevalent in this passage than it might seem on first glance as you compare Scripture with Scripture and remember the background of the letter and the circumstances under which Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians. By the time Paul was writing this letter to the church at Philippi,

he had been in prison well over four years. In the book of Acts 24:26 and 27, it tells us that he was left in prison in Caesarea for two years while they were fumbling about trying to decide what to do with him, waiting for Paul to make a bribe that never came. After that, he was transferred to Rome because he had appealed to Caesar for the resolution of his case. That journey took from Caesarea to Rome took several months and by the time he arrived in Rome and what happened to him when he was in Rome, he was placed under a version of house arrest. I'd like you to look just a moment at Acts 28:16, "When we," the "we" being the author Luke and Paul and others that were in their party, "When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him." So he was under house arrest. There was a soldier that was chained to his right wrist and there was a soldier that was always with him so that the prisoner couldn't escape and there would always be an accounting of where prison was, and so the soldier was with him continually and Paul, it says later on at the end of the book of Acts, was in these circumstances for another two years. In verse 30 it says, "he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." So his imprisonment here was not of the most severe, dungeon, dark kind of time, but he was under a house arrest and always in the presence of a Roman soldier who was guarding him. He was able to receive visitors, people were able to come to him and he would preach to them, but he did not have freedom of movement. He was not a free man and not only that, he had the cloud of these charges hanging over against him which had the potential to lead to his execution.

So Paul was under a burden, Paul was under adverse circumstances as he wrote this letter to the church at Philippi, and from a distance the Philippians were concerned about him. They knew that he had been taken away with the communications being different than what they are now. They needed word about how he was, they were concerned for him. They sent a representative named Epaphroditus, you can read about him in Philippians 2, to take a gift to Paul, to minister to Paul, and now Paul has written the letter of Philippians and he's sending Epaphroditus back with this letter that is doing a number of things in its purpose for them. 1. It's thanking them for their gift. It's also explaining why Epaphroditus is being sent back. If you send somebody to minister to someone and then he comes back, you wonder, "Well, why are you back here? Why are you not still with Paul? Did something go wrong?" Well, Paul is just writing to explain the circumstances of why he's sending Epaphroditus back and that Epaphroditus had served him nobly during his time with him. Paul is writing to correct them over some issues that we've addressed in the past: the division within the church; the threat of false teaching. So there's a lot going on in this short letter of Philippians but as we come to the section that we read just a few moments ago in Philippians 1, beginning in verse 12, what Paul is doing here is he is giving them a report on his personal circumstances. He is giving them a report on how ministry is going, how Paul himself is doing, and he's also giving them some words of encouragement about the future as well. And what's happening in the midst of all of this, beloved, to kind of tie all of this together for the purposes of this morning, we're going to treat this section in an overview passage in an overview message, I should say this morning and then we'll go back and deal with it in greater detail in the future, but what's happening here is that Paul writing from these multiple

years of imprisonment, is writing to tell them that all is well. Despite the adversity that he has been under for a very long time, all is well. Despite, as we'll see, the opposition of men in ministry to him, all is well. Despite the nature of the trials that he has been personally going through, the adversity, the opposition, the inward part, he would want them to know that all is well.

So while he writes in the midst of adversity, he is telling them that all is well externally with the Gospel, with ministry, and all is well within his soul as he writes to them under this form of house arrest and here's the thing that I want you to see, beloved, just in an overview way: circumstances were testing Paul. The external nature of circumstances were testing him but what you find as he writes this letter is that he as a man, he as a Christian is triumphant in the midst of them, and we see once again as Scripture teaches us so often again and again, that adversity does not have to be a vehicle of despair or discouragement in the Christian life. We have in Christ, you and I have in Christ everything we need for the sufficiency of our soul and the sufficiency of joy. To have Christ is to have all. To have Christ is to be able to overcome the adversity that comes in life. To have Christ is to have a comfort and a refuge in the midst of the temptations that relentlessly assault us. To have Christ is to have an abundance in times of scarcity. To have Christ is to have love in the midst of fractured relationships because in Christ we have the one who, as he promised, is with us always even to the end of the age. To have Christ as the one loved our soul, he loved them to the very end, it says of his disciples in the Gospel of John. To have Christ as the one who shared his righteousness with us, covered us in his righteousness that we would be acceptable to God in Christ. To have Christ is to have an elder brother praying for us in heaven. To have Christ is to have an elder brother who's going to come back for us. To see again and again and again that all that we need is to recognize who Christ is and what he has done for us and our position in him, and we come out on the other side of that engagement realizing all is well for me. You say, "But family circumstances?" You say, "But you're in prison but this is still happening?" Yes, yes, yes. Paul comes and as it were, taps down the concern and points us to Christ and Christ alone.

Well, as I said, we're going to treat this passage in an overview manner today. Let's look at the test to the Gospel, the test to the Gospel in Paul's circumstances and what he had to say about that, and what Paul says here, remember Paul is not able to travel about, he cannot go about, he's a missionary at heart, he's traveled to all parts of the known world preaching the Gospel and establishing churches but now he is restricted to his home quarters and he cannot do what he had so excelled in doing and which God had so richly blessed. Paul was brought to a position where, in a manner of speaking, the external success of his ministry was put on hold. He was not able to do that and he was placed in a position, in circumstances where he did not have the ability to continue doing what he had been before. You know something of that where after a time of flourishing in ministry or whatever you were excelling in for Christ, suddenly you've been set aside and you're silent and there's not opportunity and it seems like not much is happening. Well, this is a section of Scripture that's encouraging in the midst of it because what Paul tells them is that the Gospel is flourishing even in the midst of these adverse circumstances.

Look at verse 12 with me. He says in Philippians chapter 1, verse 12, he said,

12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

He says, "Yes, I've been under Roman guard and Roman imprisonment for several years now but do you know what? The Gospel is moving forward anyway. God is advancing the Gospel in other regions, in other places, in other circles despite my circumstances and even through my circumstances," he goes on to say in verse 13. He says,

13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

What Paul is saying here is, "Brothers, you need to understand that what my imprisonment has done has actually created new opportunities for the Gospel without which never would have happened." He says, "The praetorian guard," in other words, the Roman guard that was accountable to Caesar had heard the Gospel because as they cycled through guarding Paul, Paul had opportunity to talk with them and those guards would go out and they would talk with others, "You should hear what this prisoner said. Let me tell you what this prisoner said." And there was this electric going forth of Paul's testimony and his testimony to the Gospel to a circle of influential men who never would have heard it otherwise. Without the imprisonment, that would not have taken place. Paul says, "Understand that influential circles in Rome have heard the Gospel as a result of my imprisonment. I want you to know that. I want you to know that God is advancing the Gospel of Christ even in this time of isolation that I am experiencing."

Caesar's own Imperial guard was now under the sound of the Gospel, and he goes on, look at the end of verse 13 there, and he says that the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else. Others in Rome had heard about his case. Others in Rome were exposed to the proclamation of the Gospel. Paul was restricted in motion and yet it's like God brought the audience to him and then they went back out and proclaimed and talked about what they had heard. Paul's saying to these concerned believers at Philippi who were long partners in ministry, at least a decade by the time this letter was written, Paul says, "Have no fear, ministry is taking place, the Gospel is moving forward. It wasn't dependent on my traveling about. Even as I am instructed here in Rome, the Gospel goes forth and people are hearing about Christ. So there's no reason for discouragement. The Gospel is flourishing in the midst of this test."

So he says in verse 14, he goes on to say that it's not just the people that I'm speaking to, but look at 14 with me, he says, "and most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." He says, "My Philippian brethren, here's what I want you to know and understand, is that my circumstances have somehow produced a greater sense of boldness and confidence of the Christians that are around me here in Rome and they are speaking forth with greater

boldness as a result of my imprisonment that otherwise would not have taken place." We could state in modern terms, they were stepping up to the plate. When I was not able to go to bat for the Gospel, they were stepping up, they were taking the at-bats, they were producing, they were preaching, they were making Christ known.

So there is this wonderful sense that Paul says, "I'm speaking to people that I never would have had access to before as a result of being in prison," and he says, "and there is a secondary rebound effect to other Christians that look on me with sympathy, that look at Christ and say, 'I need to speak now. Look at Paul. If Paul's going to suffer for the Gospel, I'm going to go out and preach myself.'" So the Gospel is going forward, he assures them. He tells them that the Gospel is going forward despite the physical limitations that Paul himself was under.

So it reminds me, if you'll turn to the next book in the Bible in Colossians 1, we'll read verses 3 through 6 just to set the whole context. Paul said to this church, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth." Paul says the Gospel is always increasing. It may not be visible to human eyes what's happening or what God is doing at any particular time. It may take place in circumstances that you would not have predicted but the Gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, and God has an eternal plan that he is working out to redeem and to save his elect, to bring them all safely into the kingdom, and God is sovereign and God is powerful and God is able to do whatever he wants to do. The success of the Gospel is not contingent on what happens with any one particular man because the power of the Gospel is rooted in the power of God not in the power of man. So whatever the circumstances of individual men may be, whatever the circumstances may be in our individual life, God is at work through the proclamation of his word to save sinners, to sanctify the saints, and to exalt his name. That is happening.

So, just by way of a little bit of practical application here, whenever you hear stories about, you know, the church is going to die if it doesn't change and adapt to culture, or you hear sad stories about the decline of major denominations or something like that, you should never think that there is actually a threat to the accomplishment of God's purpose in the proclamation of the Gospel. He will accomplish everything that he desires. His word will accomplish everything for which he sends it forth and adverse circumstances for his people, or adverse circumstances or hostility in the world, are not a threat, are not a hindrance to what God intends to have done. So we recognize these things and we take confidence that those circumstances may test God's people, the word of God is going forth with success.

Now as you read on here, you find that there were other apparent challenges to the Gospel as well that Paul informs the Philippians about. He had just mentioned that there

were many brethren speaking the word of God without fear, but that was mixed with some ulterior motives on the parts of some that he describes in verses 15 through 17. He says,

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;

He says, "You know, I understand that there are people that are preaching the Gospel with less than the best of good motives. They are actually preaching from a sense of envy and strife. They are actually trying to afflict me in prison by taking prominence in their proclamation of the Gospel while I'm isolated here and so they are motivated by a desire for self-magnification rather than the goodwill that should attend the proclamation of the Gospel." Now he goes on and describes these two groups in verse 16, he says,

16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;

He says, "Some men are stepping up in my limitations, in my restrictions, and out of love for Christ and out of love for me, they are stepping up and they are preaching the Gospel with courage and with love and their motives are pure and God is blessing their ministry."

He goes on and describes in verse 17 the former, in other words, the first group that he mentioned preaching from envy and strife. Look at it there in verse 17, he says,

17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

"Hey, Paul, I'm out preaching. People are listening to me and they are following me now, not you," is the sense of their selfish ambition, elevating themselves and, you know, we see that in ministry today. This is always a problem, men finding that the Gospel is a way to elevate themselves and to become known and to become famous and what does Paul say about it in his day, about their bad motives? How does it affect him in prison? Well, what he says is those ulterior motives and agendas did not discourage him. They were incidental to the reality that was taking place.

In verse 18 he says,

18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.

Now that tells us that the men of whom he is speaking here were preaching true doctrine, they were preaching the true Gospel. Paul would not rejoice in the proclamation of a false Gospel, indeed in chapter 3 he rebukes false teachers who were trying to influence the church at Philippi with their Judaistic tendencies, their legalistic tendencies, turning Christianity into a matter of legal obedience rather than trust in Christ. He rebukes that.

Here we see that somehow they are proclaiming Christ even though they are doing it with less than the best of motives and what Paul says is, "That doesn't discourage me. It's a test, in a sense, but I'm triumphant in the midst of the test because what matters is that Christ is being proclaimed." And what Paul writes from this love for Christ, this devotion, this having been set apart for the Gospel of Christ and because that's the purpose of his life, Christ and proclaiming him, "Well, if Christ is being proclaimed, then I have nothing to do but to be grateful and thankful to God as a result of that. Even though men are trying to harm me, men are personally opposed to me in the midst of it, I'm indifferent to their motives, I'm indifferent to why they do it. The reality of Christ being proclaimed is what I care about and Christ is being proclaimed and I'll take the perspective that I am rejoicing in that."

So beloved, stepping back here for a moment at what we just looked at, the test of the Gospel, Paul was in prison, personal strife was animating those who were proclaiming the Gospel while he was in prison, and yet Paul was grateful, Paul was thankful. Look at it there at the end of verse 18. After four, four and a half years of imprisonment and in the midst of it with not knowing how it's going to be resolved, Paul says at the end of verse 18, "Christ is being proclaimed and in this I rejoice." God was overruling it all to advance the Gospel and this man who loved Christ more than anything else was satisfied to see his Master exalted, to see his Savior and Lord proclaimed, to see sinners saved, and if that was happening, then his personal circumstances were a matter of secondary importance to him in a way that would not diminish his joy. Pretty challenging, isn't it, to think about that?

Let's go on and look at the test to Paul in the following verses. The test to Paul. Paul moves from the Gospel to the attitude of his own heart. He moves from the Gospel to the attitude of his own heart and notice the sequence in what Paul has said here and what he's doing. Paul puts Christ first and talks about Christ and the Gospel first as he's reporting on his personal circumstances. You can see by the sequence that he reports things what his priority and what the most important thing to him was; he speaks first about Christ and the Gospel and he reports on that before he talks about his personal situation. But he's writing to friends, he's writing to a church that supports him, who legitimately want to know how he's doing, who legitimately care about him and, therefore, he shares with them how he personally is doing. He moves to the attitude of his own heart.

As you read this, picture, let's put ourselves in the sandals of the Philippians who love Paul and are concerned about him. They genuinely love him. Paul was not simply a hired gun preacher to them. They had known him for years. He was the instrument of their own conversion. They knew Paul loved them and they loved him back, and in a relationship like that, you really want to know how the other person is doing. This is one of the ways that we express care for one another in the body of Christ, "Tell me how you're doing. Let me listen and know because I care, because I'm praying for you. I want to know." Well, Paul goes on and then tells them how he is doing in the midst of the challenges, and what does he tell them? This is magnificent. What a noble soul do we see on display here. Paul himself is strong and he is at peace.

Look at the end of verse 18 with me. He had said that, "Christ is being proclaimed and in this I rejoice, I am rejoicing," and now he pivots to the future. He looks into the future of his circumstances and he says, "I'm rejoicing now and I'm going to be rejoicing in the future. It's all well with me, my Philippian friends. I will rejoice." Look at verse 19,

19 [because] I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

What Paul is saying here is this, he says, "I'm rejoicing now and I am going to be satisfied and confident as I look to the future as well. It's going to be well with me in the future. Whether I live or whether I die, either way I'm going to be just fine. Either way my heart is at rest, my heart is strong. I am at peace." And beloved, this is much more challenging to us today than it might seem to be at first glance. Paul is dealing with adversity of his imprisonment, he's dealing with the opposition of people who were trying to cause him trouble, and here he is talking about the uncertainty of his future, the uncertainty of his future. It's unclear whether he's going to live or die.

Look at the end of verse 20 with me, he says, "whether by life or by death," verse 22, "if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor to me. I have the desire to part and be with Christ but to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." What he's saying is, "I'm not sure what's going to happen in the future, I don't know precisely, it hasn't yet been clear what the outcome of my trial will be," and as he's writing this he's writing it in the midst of some uncertainty. What I want you to see is this, beloved, and let me just hit the pause button for a second to make sure we are engaging all of the right thoughts and emotions of our own hearts here this morning. Every one of us to one degree or another is living with an uncertain future, aren't we? We don't know what our lives are going to be like tomorrow, just as a general principle. Others of us are uncertain about what the future is going to bring for us for any manner of circumstances, difficult relationships, or health a condition, or what's going to happen to my unsaved loved ones, all of these things, the uncertainty of it can be something that we buckle underneath of. We buckle beneath it because we want to know, we want a certainty of outcome that's withheld from us. We don't know what's going to happen and therefore we are in a position of uncertainty as we go through things. Now it's no secret that as a result of that, some of us live in a lot of anxiety, some of us live in a lot of fear even. What I want you to see is that in this passage is the answer to that kind of uncertainty. In this passage is the perspective that lifts you out of those circumstances, even though the circumstances do not change, it lifts you out of them so that you are living in a different mental and spiritual realm of confidence that is engendered by your perspective on Christ. That's what we need to see here this morning. Paul is looking forward to the future with anticipation.

Look at it with me again in verse 20, he says, "according to my earnest expectation and hope, I will not," future tense, "I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, will be," future tense, "exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." Paul says, "What matters to me is that Christ would be honored through my life. If I live, I want Christ to be exalted. If I die, I want Christ to be exalted. And that is what will happen. Christ will accomplish that work in me," Paul says, so that, watch this, whether he remains captive, if he remains captive, he'll exalt Christ in his imprisonment. If he is freed, he will exalt Christ in his freedom as he goes back and returns to ministry. If he dies, he will be with Christ and he will exalt Christ in that immediate state of being apart from the body and in the presence of the Lord. He says, "Whatever happens to me, Christ will be exalted and that's what I rejoice in. Christ is superior to me. Christ is more important to me than what happens in my life." That's the key.

So beloved, as you're treading these rocky paths and the uncertainty of what lies ahead, we just have to come together as fellow believers in Christ and realize that Christ has the capacity to glorify his life through our adversity or through deliverance for us. Either way is acceptable to us as long as he is glorified, as long as people see Christ in us, as long as his name is made known and that is where Paul is at and that's why he can rejoice. Paul says, "Yeah, the circumstances, I don't know what's going to happen but my inner man is rejoicing." His inner man was flourishing. Why? Because Christ is the reason that he lives. "Christ, You want me to live in abject poverty? I'll manifest what it's like." Look at chapter 4. "You want me to live in poverty, you want me to live with little? I can do that. I'll glorify Christ in poverty." Chapter 4, verse 12, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." I rely on Christ no matter what my circumstances are and my inner man is at rest. That is the birthright, that is the privilege, that is the goal, that is what God does in the life of his people is to give us that level of satisfaction in our Lord that we become increasingly indifferent to how our circumstances go forward in life. If you have Christ, beloved, if you know Christ, if Christ is alive in you, if Christ has saved you, if Christ is keeping you, if Christ is going to deliver you into heaven at the end, then you have abundant grounds for joy despite the adversity that circumstances might bring in the meantime.

Go to Philippians 1:22. Christ is the reason that he lives. He says in verse 22,

22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

He says, "If I die, I'm going to be with Christ and that's the best that could ever happen to me. The worst that the world can do to me, if they execute me tomorrow, it's simply going to usher me into the presence of Christ and that's far better than anything I have

now. If Christ spares me and I live for a time, then I'm going to labor for him and it's going to be fruitful and I'll add to my eternal reward in the process. Either way I win and, therefore, I can rejoice in the midst of this test." Paul says, "I'll serve Christ if I live, and Christ will be my joy here in life. If I die, I'm going to see Him immediately. To die is gain. I can't lose here." And beloved, somewhere in that, somewhere in that spirit that Paul is expressing is the answer to your anxiety and is the answer to the inner struggles that you have as you go through admittedly difficult circumstances. The desire to be with Christ, to recognize the preeminence of Christ in your life and to rest in the fact that he has loved you with a deep deep love, as we sang earlier, you all sang, you all sang just a few minutes ago, "All I need and trust is the deep deep love of Jesus." Well beloved, what I am saying to you gently and to encourage you is that this passage of Scripture is testifying to that reality. To live is Christ and to die is gain, and in that I will rejoice because that's all I need. "Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He my comfort helps my soul." And beloved, even if you are being abandoned and betrayed by people that you thought were your friends, all that's being done here is, all that's happening there is setting the stage for you to grow even more in your realization and experiential knowledge of the sufficiency of the love of Christ. When all people around you abandon you and forsake you, you find even more the sufficiency and the beauty and the wonder and the grace of the love of Christ. "Christ, here I am and You loved me and set Your love upon me. You gave Yourself for me. I see what real love is and Your love is immutable. Your love does not change and You've loved me and that's enough. I'm content in love like that."

So the test to the Gospel, the Gospel was fine. The test to Paul, Paul was just fine. Finally, let's look at the challenge or the test, I should say, the test to the Philippians because the uncertainty about Paul's future affected them as well. Now this church had some problems, they had some difficulties, and what Paul says in verses 25 and 26 is that their need convinces him that God is going to give him more time to help them. In verse 25, look at it with me, he says, actually at the end of verse 24 he said, "to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." And he said,

25 Convinced of this [convinced of what your need is], I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Paul in his perception as an apostle says, "This church has need for my ministry a little longer." He tells the church therefore, "I think that I'm going to be with you a while longer because I am able to meet your need with my apostolic ministry to you," and he says, "because of that, because your need is great, I believe that God's going to leave me with you for a while longer so that I can meet your need and you can be built up in Christ." And the test to the Philippians then comes out well because God is going to provide for their needs through the Apostle Paul.

Now beloved, here's the thing that I want you to see as we start to bring this to a conclusion here for this morning. Let's take it in its full context, slow down just a bit.

Paul says in verse 21, he says, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Verse 23, "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ for that's very much better." That's true of all of us. If God took us today as believers, it would be far better for us personally, individually to be in the presence of Christ rather than being in this sinful flesh in this sinful world. You say, "But what about all the people that I'd leave behind, all my loved ones?" Yes, but don't you understand that the preeminent goal of your life is the ultimate presence of Christ? If God brought that to you today, that that would be very much better? That's how supreme Christ is in the affections of the believing heart. "I want to be with Him and if He takes me, it's going to be better. If He leaves me, I'll serve and that'll be great too."

What Paul was saying is this, he goes on to say, verse 24, "to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. I know I'll remain, continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith," and on it goes. What Paul is saying is this, saying to these friends who love him and displaying how great and how deep his affection and love for them is, he says, "Even though it would be better for me personally to be with Christ because that's going to be gain, that's going to be the outcome of the reason that God created me and set me into apostolic ministry was so that I could ultimately be with Christ, that would be the culmination, that would be the climax for me, that is everything to me," he says, "but that can wait out of my love for you. I am content even to wait on the climax of my salvation if it means that I can be with you and minister to you effectively and be the servant to your need." So Paul says, "I can wait to enter into the immediate presence of Christ because I understand that Christ will help you through me and you will then flourish as Christ builds His church, and that's just going to abound even more to the glory of Christ and so Christ is going to be exalted even more. He's going to be exalted in my body as I stay with you, one day soon enough, He'll take me and I'll be in His presence."

So beloved, let me wrap this up in this way. There's so much for you and me to take away from this survey of this passage that we're going to look at in more detail. Beloved, your life, your Christian life, just like mine, comes with opposition, it comes with adversity, it comes with uncertainty, it comes for some of you with a lot of discouragement, some of you are prone to melancholy and the fact that your pastor is like that doesn't help the matter much, some of you are more sanguine, more optimistic in your approach to life, but here's what I want you to see, beloved, and there is much rich encouragement for you in what we have just seen: Paul was writing in the midst of opposition, in the midst of personal adversity and uncertainty about his future, and he shows forth that his satisfaction in Christ helped him to overcome it all, that tells us that the opposition and adversity and uncertainty does not need to defeat you spiritually. It doesn't. It doesn't, in fact, it is meant to be the ground upon which you glorify Christ and find his sufficiency and display it in life and thereby Christ is exalted in your body whether by life or by death. We have to understand that the adversity of our circumstances does not mean the absence of joy in our souls. It is not meant to be that way.

Perspective is everything and, beloved, what you must see as a Christian is this, is that through all of that Christ is Lord. Through all of that, as we've been saying on Tuesday

nights, and I invite you to come to our Tuesday night study at 7:00 PM, as I make this point, through it all Christ reigns, Christ is Lord, Christ has it in his hands and is guiding it to his purposes so that he will be glorified through your life and that you will find that he has done good for you in the end no matter what's happening right now. His shed blood, his perfect righteousness secure you before a holy God and his sovereign love guarantees without fail your well-being. You don't need to know the future to know that it comes out well, you just need to remember, "Oh, I know Christ. I'm in His hand. No one can pluck me out of His hand. This comes out well for me." I view life through a new perspective, I view it from a perspective of strength and confidence and joy. I see the mountain ahead, "Do you know what? I'm just gonna go climb it with the strength that Christ supplies."

Jesus Christ, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, will be with you in life. Jesus Christ will be with you as you approach death. Jesus Christ will be with you in your death and as I like to say, as you exhale your last on earth and inhale your first in heaven, Christ will carry you through that divide and you will breathe your first breath in heaven in the presence of his glorious grace and his glorious being, and the fulfillment of why he saved you will take place and that, beloved, is the assurance of your joy and the ground of your joy.

Look over at 1 Peter 1. I'll close with this passage. 1 Peter 1. Notice how a different apostle writing under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit brings the same points to bear. Let's start at verse 3. We just have to. Context matters. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." It is reserved for you. It is waiting for you to take possession of it and it's not going to fade in the meantime, it's not going to perish, it's not going to be defiled. It's for you. Verse 5, "you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." There is a glorious future ahead, Peter says, for those of you who have been born again. Verse 6, now what's the present application of that future hope? Here it is, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials." Yeah, the trials are there but they are not the defining feature of life. They are simply an occasion for this in verse 7, "so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Do you see it? For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death. His glory and honor are all that matter. Verse 8, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

Yes, beloved, some of you are being tested right now. All of us will be tested at one degree or at one point or another in the future. What we see here is that in Christ you can come through triumphant, in Christ you can rejoice despite the uncertainty of this world.

And to my unsaved friends that are in the audience here tonight, watching over the live stream, I just invite you to Christ. He promises eternal life for those who believe in him. He promises the full and complete forgiveness of all of your sins. He promises to keep you and calls and commands you, "Repent and believe in the Gospel of Christ that you might be saved."

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we confess the sufficiency of Christ for the good of our souls. We rest in Him as we close our time together. We pray for each one here, those in adversity, those in uncertainty, those facing opposition, Father. May they, like Paul, draw upon the sufficiency of Christ and exalt Him whether by life or by death. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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