

The Dead Man's Joy

There is a saying that as we grow older, we attend more funerals than weddings. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that life is only a vapor. Like a puff of smoke, it is here for a moment, then disappears. Difficult seasons of life make us think about our death more intensely as those we love leave this world behind. Sooner or later, we realize that I, too, am running the course of life, and one day the race will end.

This thought process is where we find the Apostle Paul writing a letter to a church full of ordinary people in a city called Philippi. You remember from Acts 16 Lydia, a vendor of purple, and the Philippian jailer. Philippi was a colonial city on a trade route. In many ways, there are similarities with greater Nashville. The economy was good, comparatively, and there was easy access to other places. Because it was a Roman colony, the citizens of Philippi enjoyed many freedoms, such as lower taxes. The church in Philippi was full of hard-working middle-class, entrepreneurial types just trying to live their lives faithfully. The Apostle Paul is writing them a letter so they might learn something important about the Christian faith through his suffering. It's with this context we find **Philippians 1:18b-27**.

What does Paul believe that causes him to resolve so firmly that he will rejoice? What is behind this passion for the glory of God on display through the exaltation of Christ and the edification of the church?

Christ's Exaltation

Paul is in jail, awaiting trial. We need to understand that Roman prisons were not places for serving a sentence. As far as he can tell, this is death row, and he's writing them his farewell address.

When we think of goodbyes, we don't usually think joyful thoughts. Yet, the Apostle tells us that he is not simply trying to endure, but that with the church's prayers and the help of the Holy Spirit, he resolves to rejoice in his suffering for the cause of Christ and His glory. **Paul's joy is supernatural, and it comes from applying his theology.**

Theology matters and Paul believed what he taught. **1. He believed in the attributes of God.** He knew God to be faithful, wise, all-powerful, and sovereign. Likewise, he knew that God is love himself. After all, he wrote Romans 8:28, *"And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* Romans 8:28 Indeed, he wrote about God's faithfulness as it is God who provides the way of escape when we are tried in **1 Corinthians 10:13**. When he pleaded with God to take away the thorn in his flesh in **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**, he wrote of the sufficient grace which the Lord personally promised to him.

Paul's theology was more than just the attributes of God applied to specific circumstances. **2. He believed that Christ's death is our death.** Turn to **Romans 6:5-13**. Read v5-6. There it is. This is the glorious truth of particular redemption with shoe leather. He did not die to merely offer

salvation but to complete and apply redemption. Each one who comes to God by turning away from their sins and believing that Christ is risen from the dead has died with him. Who we were before Christ was crucified with Him and now are being transformed. Our thoughts, desires, and will are no longer the same. **We are putting off the old man and putting on Christ.**

Christ's death as our own is essential for understanding that if you belong to Christ, you are forgiven and not who you were. Who you were and the sins you committed before Christ don't have a hold on you any longer. They don't define you. You might still live with the consequences, but they're not where your identity lies. The only identity that has value is to be identified as a child of God. If we are a child of God, our old self was crucified with Christ.

Paul, in his affliction, embraces this reality. Functionally, he's already dead.

*Galatians 2:20 **20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (ESV)*

*Colossians 3:1-3 **1** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (ESV)*

We are united with Christ in his death by faith; therefore, we are to bury the old man and **put on Christ** as our new life. This is why there is hope for the addict and the prostitute. There is hope for the abused and the grieving. *"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and the new has come."* 2 Corinthians 5:17

3. He believed that Christ's resurrection is our resurrection. Read v8. We not only share in the death of Christ, but also we share in his eternal life. Jesus came saying things like *John 6:40**40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* (ESV). And *John 14:3 **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be as well. (ESV).*

For Christians, Christ is our life. He has promised to prepare a place for us. One day, our spirit will depart from our body. Though our loved ones here will mourn for us, we will behold the glory of Christ face to face, where no sin or shame dwells no longer. Heaven is God's promise to those who repent and believe Christ was raised from the dead. Do you believe it? I pray that today would be the day when you see the living Christ who was dead but now is alive forever, worth the cost of following. I pray that today you would believe in him for the forgiveness of sins and that you walk in the newness of life.

Paul has spent the last twenty-five years proclaiming this truth. As he enters this trial, where he is facing the death of his body, his theology is more real than ever before. **Because of who God is and what He's done, Paul is not afraid to live as one who has already died because he's in Christ.** He's not looking backward to what was or what could have been. He's only pressing forward toward what God has promised him: eternal life in and with Christ Jesus. With these truths as his convictions, he resolves to be continuously joyful in the face of the trial. His focus is now to glorify Christ through preaching the gospel and building up the church. Paul sees himself as the Lord's obedient vessel, and the Holy Spirit is pleased to supply the supernatural joy Paul resolves to have. This is the joy that only a dead man can experience.

The Nature of Joy

This joy is not ordinary. Consider all that Paul has endured: Imprisonment, beatings, stonings, exile, shipwreck, the aches and pains of a broken body, losing his sight, and the everyday emotional strife that accompanies being in the ministry. Through all of it, Paul refuses to take his eyes off Christ. In fact, due to his sufferings, his faith grows stronger. How does he have such focus?

This joy, or happy calmness, comes from Paul's assurance that this circumstance will result in his deliverance (Soteria). This is the word from which we derive soteriology or the study of salvation. Across Paul's letters, this word is used for spiritual salvation almost exclusively. It's his reward in glory, the finish line that Paul's theology tells him he will cross. Especially in the context of these options presented before us, it becomes clear that Paul has spiritual salvation in mind. It's as though he says, "it doesn't matter if I live or die because either way, my soul will live." Paul is a man who is not afraid to die.

The story of Jim Elliot comes to mind. Jim and his wife, Elizabeth Elliot, were part of a missionary team commissioned to the Huaronai people in Ecuador. After months of trying to make contact peacefully, the team prepared to go in. As they were making preparations, the decision was made not to carry weapons for the sake of their testimony. This is what Jim Elliot had to say about the decision, ultimately leading to his death. **He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.**

We spend so much energy trying to keep this life. It will escape almost as fast as we can blink an eye. Don't you see that you are losing your life even now? But Jesus says *Mark 8:35* **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (ESV).** Jesus isn't just saying this for fun. **Christians are those who are willing and have often been called to give their lives in service to their king Jesus.** This sacrifice is not in vain. Christ has promised a great reward to the ones who die for his sake. Paul understood this. He trusted God's goodness and faithfulness. In Paul's mind, he was already dead and nothing more than a tool in the hand of the master redeemer. As he faced danger time after time, he looked forward to the glory of what was to come.

Do you fear death? Have you made peace yet with the fact that this life will end? The world as we know it is not our home. The fear of death must be conquered. For those who seek to emulate Paul and be useful to Christ, joy must overpower fear. Paul doesn't concern himself with fighting for his life. He's looking forward to being in the presence of Christ however God chooses to bring his willing vessel home.

He's living in the joy of assurance of salvation and eternal life in Jesus. From where does this assurance come? It comes from the help of the Holy Spirit through the prayers of other believers. You begin to see the importance of gathering to pray as a body. How do you expect to endure the trial with joy if your brothers and sisters aren't praying for you? More importantly, how do you expect your brothers and sisters to endure the trials and pains of this life if you don't pray for them?

Eager Hope and Expectation

Paul explains how this joyful faith looks so we can identify its presence or absence in ourselves. He gives us the phrase "eager expectation and hope." **Apokaradokia kai elpida**. This is a visualization of straining the neck to see. It's like when you stick your head out the window to see what's happening in front of the semi you're stuck behind.

What is he anticipating? That **he will not be ashamed**. This shame is not a personal, private feeling of embarrassment. **This shame is public. It is being defeated before your enemy**. David expresses the same idea in *Psalms 23:5* - "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*" Even though David walks through the valley of the shadow of death, he will not fear. Why because God is with him? God shames his enemies. The rod and the staff are for protection and correction, bringing comfort to the child of God.

Paul trusts that this situation, as dire as it may look, will turn out for the salvation of his soul and the glory of God. God is his protector, and he cannot leave this world until the day fixed for his home going. **Rather than worrying about what will happen to his body, he chooses to focus on how to glorify Christ in his suffering.**

Full Courage

How will he glorify Christ in his suffering? By speaking. "With full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or death." **Full courage – Paresia: the frankness of speech**. In other words, Paul's courage is not the inner virtue of strength but the ability to speak freely. Paul is awaiting trial in a day when the Roman soldiers would execute Christians for not calling Cesar Lord because their conviction is that Jesus alone is Lord. What's his plan? Nothing less than to tell Cesar in front of his court that there is a king who is greater than he, and his name is Jesus. He died for the sins of his people and rose from the dead to give them eternal life.

If your biggest concern is staying alive, that's probably not a good idea, but Paul has already died, and Christ is his life. When this passing world is over, he will find rest safely in the arms of Jesus. He's fearless.

We all have faced, are facing, or will face a trial. We lose jobs, lose people we love, and receive bad news from the doctor. When we enter into a time of testing, we have two options. We can fight to preserve our lives as we knew them to buck against the sovereignty of God, or we can seek to use our trial to make the glory of the risen Christ shine brightly and pierce through the darkness of a dying world. We speak words of life: "Don't weep for me. I'm going home. Turn to Christ and meet me there!" "This wheelchair is not all there is. Jesus is making all things new!" "I forgive you because Christ forgave me!"

For Me to Live is Christ

Verses 21-24 are a literary structure called a sugkasis. This standard literary device in Ancient Greek literature is for making a comparison between two good options and inviting the reader to contemplate them. **The Apostle is clear on the best option: to be with Christ.** He's inviting the church to use his experience as an object lesson so that they will have already prepared when they face their moment of trial.

These are the **elements of a Sugkasis: 1) choice (v21), 2) comparatives (v22), 3) constructing the order of the option where the 2nd is preferable (v21), 4) contemplating the options (v22-24).**

As far as the Apostle Paul is concerned, to depart and go to Christ is the best option. He wants the church to believe that truth with firm conviction.

Yet, he is so focused on the glory of Christ, not his preference, that he chooses the less desirable option. So that Christ is glorified, Paul chooses contemplatively to continue his life in ministerial service to the king. He decides to continue to experience beatings, imprisonments, people saying bad things about him, dangerous journeys, and living every day in a broken, pain-filled body, all so that others may know Christ and grow up into spiritual maturity.

The Experience of Dying

Verse 23 has something very important to tell us about the experience of dying. Depart is used a couple of ways in antiquity. It could be a ship leaving one harbor to journey to another port, and it could also be taking down a tent to go somewhere else.

To die is to leave, not to cease. Though our spirit departs from our body, the act of dying is simply moving from one home to another.

Let that be a comfort to you when you grieve a graduated saint. Hold on to that when you're on the cusp of eternity. Recognize that when you die, your spirit continues to live.

People say, "I don't know about heaven and hell. All I know is that when I die, I'm going in the ground." That's just not true. Your body is buried, but that's not you. You will enter into a new realm where you will be in the arms of Christ saved by grace through faith, or you will be under his heel as a conquered enemy forever. The difference is whether or not you believe that he rose from the dead and are following Him.

Many today believe in the facts, but they do not follow him. If only they would see their soul's grave danger because though they confess Him, they do not love Him.

Our soul will depart from our body, and we will stand before the king in judgment. If we are united with Christ in his death, we will hear the blessed words "well done, good and faithful servant." But be careful because not everyone who simply professes to believe will be found faithful." *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:21.* You must follow him. Turn from your sin and to Christ. Confess your need to be made new by God's grace and walk in the new life which begins long before your body dies.

Paul's life was no longer about him. **He believed that he died with Christ, and by putting off the old man and putting on Christ, he joyfully endured all things for the glory of God.**

The Church's Edification

Paul's concern was not only the glory of God in his personal life but also that Christ is glorified in the life of the church. He deemed it better to remain and continue ministry work for the time being rather than going to Christ right now.

To Remain and Continue

This fruitful labor is **Karpos Ergon - The presence of Ergon is often used to signal pastoral or missionary work (Phil (2:30; 1 Cor 16:10; 1 Thess 5:13; Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 10:11).**

To remain is to stay alive, and **to continue (paramenow) carries the connotation of service in occupation or office.** Why would Paul choose to continue suffering over departing to be with Christ? Answer: the glory of Christ in the local church.

How is Christ glorified in the local church? Through the growth of the saints qualitatively and quantitatively. That is to say, through their growth towards spiritual maturity and converting new believers.

This progress refers to growing into their identity as a child of God. Again, this is putting off the old man and putting on Christ. This growth is spending a lifetime cleaning out the idol factory,

which is our hearts. It begins with the obvious. Repent of deceit, theft, and sexual immorality. As we mature in Christ, God brings conviction over the sins lodged firmly in our hearts, like pride and lust. By his grace in the power of the Holy Spirit, he uses the trials and pains of this life to shape us into the image of Christ while preparing us for departure James 1:2-4. He is making us a bride adorned for her husband Revelation 21:2. By sanctifying our lives, He is drawing others to himself through the purity of our testimony and our hope in the resurrection of Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter because Christ is glorified by building up the church through his suffering. When Christians determine to live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Timothy 1:2), even in the middle of the trial, it's contagious. Because our fear of death has been dealt with, we are free to tell others that Jesus is king. We should embrace the call to be the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. **Sometimes God gives us trials so that others would glorify him because of our testimony of faithfulness.**

Of course, we don't seek suffering, but we need to understand that suffering is the means that God has appointed to grow His church qualitatively and quantitatively, and in that growth, Christ is glorified.

Does that give you joy? Does it bring peace to know that you are being used as a worthy vessel in the hands of the excellent redeemer? Does it comfort your weary soul to know that if you belong to God, He shapes you into the image of his Son, the suffering servant?

Conclusion

May we live our lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ by being faithful and sharing the good news of what God has done for us! That's what it means to glorify God.

There is a temptation to think that we must be radical for Christ if we are to glorify Him. Doing radical things for Jesus has become so popular that living the ordinary Christian life is almost radical. Yet, Americans' lives are much more like the members of the church of Philippi's than the Apostle Paul's. Even so, he wants them to contemplate his response to the suffering in his life, but he doesn't expect the entire church to travel to Rome and testify before Cesar.

The Apostle calls us to embrace our death in Christ by putting off the old man and putting on Christ so that we can have genuine, spirit-wrought joy amid suffering when we enter the fiery trial. As we enjoy life as dead men, we no longer live for ourselves, but rather that in every circumstance, Christ is exalted, and His church is edified.

Understand me. I pray that the Spirit of God would move in this church to raise up faithful men and their families to be living sacrifices and dedicate their lives to ministry and missionary work. It needs to be done for the glory of God! We will not accomplish the mission if comfort is our focus. If God calls you to stop climbing the ladder and shred your five-year plan, embrace your death in Christ and live for his glory, even in retirement. That call is identified not just by desire

but by the sufficient word and confirmed by the church. You don't need to try to cram yourself into a calling that God has not given you simply because it's what spiritual people are supposed to do.

Be faithful and endure joyfully in whatever circumstance God places you. The kind of faithfulness that endures to the end is the kind that works hard for the glory of God, thanks Him for His provision, leads your family in family worship daily and doesn't look at porn or entertain lustful thoughts. It's the kind of faithfulness that opens your home and cares for the widow and the orphan and the women at the pregnancy care center. It's the kind of faithfulness that uses the gifts that God has given you to serve in the church, as every Christian should, and loves to gather for worship on the Lord's day and prayer with your brothers and sisters. It's the kind of ordinary faithfulness that resolves that Christ be glorified in our bodies, in our minds, with our possessions, with our time, and in our relationships.

The Apostle Paul's motivation for Spirit-wrought joy was his dedication to the glory of Christ in himself and the church.

“It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”

To Christ be the glory.