

Joyful Security

Partakers of Grace

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Two of the delightful members of Faith Church are Bob and Leona Smith. One of the privileges for me of serving in the same place for 28 years is just to see the Lord use all sorts of faithful men and women to accomplish his purposes in and through us in our community and around the world. I love watching those stories develop long term but without a doubt, Doc and Leona are two special ones for sure. Our former pastor, Bill Goode and his dear wife, Mildred, came to this town with the hope of building strong lives and families and then, in turn, reaching and impacting our community in part through starting a biblical counseling ministry. Now, Pastor Goode came to that conclusion while he was pastoring up in Gary and became increasingly concerned that while the word of God was being taught on Sunday, believers didn't have the tools or maybe even the willingness to apply God's word to specific, practical life situations throughout the week so in his words he said, "I want to pastor seven days a week." What he meant by that is he wanted to help Christians live in a way that was unique, it's supposed to be, right? And powerful and characteristic of the new life and the abundant life that is promised to his children in Christ. However, Pastor Goode realized early on that he needed a medical doctor to be part of that team because so many of these practical life issues involved at least potentially the human body and there was the perpetual question and still is: in a particular situation, is that mind or body or is that nature or nurture? Or even more fundamentally: can human beings really change and should we and to what degree should we be held accountable for our actions? So having a medical doctor on the team was just crucial so Pastor Goode invited his friend, Bob Smith and their family, think about this, to leave his established medical practice up in Lowell and to come to Lafayette and take a position as an emergency room doctor in a local hospital so he could co-found what is now Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries and the Smiths, they accepted that invitation. Think about that: they accepted that invitation.

Now, you might say, "Well, I get why Pastor Goode wanted to do that but why would Doc Smith do that?" His testimony was that what Pastor Goode was seeing in the context of his pastoral work in Gary, he was seeing as a medical doctor in the context of his medical work in Lowell and that is that his patients, even who said they were Christians, didn't seem to handle their illnesses or the news of possible terminal diseases much differently than patients who didn't say they had any spiritual foundation in their life. It was almost like their Christianity was kept in a Tupperware container and the lid popped

off on Sunday but then right after church, it was put back on and sealed tight for the rest of the week and I suppose the only problem with that analogy is that instead of keeping their Christianity fresh, that's what Tupperware is supposed to do I suppose, it made their faith dead. Lifeless. Irrelevant.

Now, that important part of our church's history, I think, raises an important question: should Christians have a different way of thinking about life? And should Christians have a different way of thinking about death? And I know, we're in the church house, right, so we would all say, "Well, yes. Yes. Yes. No question about that." Well, then that would lead to this: what practical evidences there from your last week or your last month that that really is the case? Or to put it even a different way: how would you fill in these two blanks? "For to me to live is, blank. For to me to die is, blank." Now, don't give us the, "Well, I'm in the church house. The pastor probably wants me to say whatever answer." But think about that from the perspective of what happened last week for you or what happened last month. Here's what's really the case: you realize that will say a lot about your security about what you know, even when times are really hard.

With that in mind, open your Bible, please, to Philippians 1. That's on page 154 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our church's theme all year long is "Finding Grace" and so we've been chasing that concept around the Bible all year and this fall has brought us to a verse-by-verse study of the epistle of Philippians. If you're new, what that is is a letter written from the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome to a faithful church in the city of Philippi which was also known as the region of Macedonia in the Bible. One of the reasons we selected this particular book to study along with this theme is because it explains that followers of Jesus Christ are partakers of grace.

Who are we? Well, that's part of our identify for sure. You read about that right at the beginning of the book in Philippians 1:7 where Paul says, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all." Now again, remember he's in prison. He's writing to a church family in Philippi. "It's only right for me to feel this way about you all because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are," what? There it is, "Partakers of grace with me." I really believe that's a delightful way to think about what it means to be part of a church family. We're partakers of grace. Suck on that, would you, for a minute? Like you would a delicious piece of hard candy.

One of the things I've been trying to do the last couple of weeks is I just navigate my way around our two campuses and just observe all the things that are going on each and every day. It's just to look at all of the evidence of that particular metaphor happening like people coming up and down the hallways of our biblical counseling centers on Monday afternoon and evening seeking to help one another through the challenges and the hardships of life. Who are those people? Partakers of grace. Or like our youth leaders serving teens and young adults at the skate park. Really? Partakers of grace. Or like young ladies from Vision of Hope mowing the grass around our community pond at Faith

East so that our neighbors, many times even before the sun comes up or while it's going down, are just enjoying God's creation. Well, what are those young ladies doing? They're partakers of grace. You can mow the grass even in that way. Like church members comforting a grieving family. Do you see it? Do you feel it? Partakers of grace. Like nursery workers holding little babies so mom and dad can go and study the word of God. Well, what are those nursery workers doing? They're holding a little bundle of grace, huh? Partakers of grace. And they're asking God for grace to respond well to whatever that little bundle chooses to do over the next hour or so. Not that I know anything about any of that but I'm saying when you start looking at the church family through that grid, you just see it everywhere. You see it everywhere and I'm going to tell you, when you do, you'll fall more in love with the church family and you'll fall more in love with the concept of grace.

Now, this morning in our verses, we're going to see plainly. Do you like it when it's plain? And we're going to see plainly. We're going to see simply. We're going to see powerfully how Paul thinks about life and how Paul thinks about death and, you know, considering that he's writing as a prisoner in chains awaiting his trial, he has plenty of reasons to think about such matters and what's marvelous is: even in that condition of uncertainty. Have you got any uncertainty going on in your life? Even in that condition of uncertainty, he explains and then he illustrates how we can be partakers of grace in joyful security. How would you like a big double helping of that this morning? Some joyful security? Where do you get that? Right here from a passage of Scripture like this.

Just to get a running start at this, let's start in chapter 1, verse 12. We've looked at these verses but that will help us set the context for what we're going to study this morning. So I'm in Philippians 1, beginning in verse 12 where Paul says, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." Well, what circumstances? Here you go, "so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 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." Now listen to this, "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife." Can you imagine that? In the church house? Envious people. "But some also from good will," he says at the end of verse 15, "but the latter." I think it's interesting that he goes to the latter first. "The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition." Isn't that shameful? "Rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress." People wanting to cause Paul distress. "Cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice." That's what we studied last week.

Now keep going now at the end of verse 18, "Yes, and I will rejoice." Why? Now, here's what I want to ask you to do: lock onto the argument, okay? This is the word of God. We say every word is inspired, every word is important. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand this and then apply it to what's going on in your life. "Yes, I will rejoice." Verse 19, "for I know," oida, settled knowledge, "I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

according to my earnest expectation and hope, that," what? That you will be released from prison? No. That, what? That the critics will knock it off? No. Here, follow the logic, "my earnest expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in anything." What does that mean? Keep reading, " but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 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. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." Do you agree with that, by the way? I hope you do. That's where you get the "for me to die is gain." Verse 24, "yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

We're talking this morning about partakers of grace and in joyful, we need that, joyful security. With the time we have remaining, let's look for three reasons to rejoice even when your circumstances are uncertain. Have you got any uncertainty going on? Right here in this text, three reasons to rejoice even when that's the case. 1. Be joyfully secure in the effectiveness of your testimony. Now, think about that. Don't try to find joyful security in the wrong place. Be joyfully secure in the effectiveness of your testimony and I've tried to help us do this as we were reading through the text but it's really important, really important that we understand, "Now, exactly what is Paul trying to communicate?" or else we'll misapply it for sure. So I think you could say it like this: believe the Lord will help you boldly live, boom, and boldly speak for Christ when the time comes.

You say, "How did we get there?" Let's go back and try to explain that. Look at this part of verse 19, Paul says, "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance." Well, what does this mean? Back up for a second. One of the important principles of Bible study whether you're reading the Bible on your own, whether we're studying it in a context like this, is to always be on the lookout for non-routine terms which is why you have to concentrate when you're reading the word of God. Put the smartphone way away, okay? When you're reading the Bible, don't have a bunch of social media tomfoolery at your hands or else you'll be checking your tweets before long. Lock onto the word of God when you're studying it in your chair or wherever and what you're look for in part is non-routine terms. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, much of what we read whether it's the Bible or anywhere, it's either words with very obvious meanings or words we see all the time so those would be routine terms. Well, what about this phrase? Just a short phrase. I would suggest there are two at least non-routine terms here. Here's what they are: what's the "this"? "This will turn out." I mean, I know what the word "this" generally means but in this context, what does the "this" mean? And then the second non-routine term there is "deliverance." What kind of deliverance is Paul talking about?

Well, let's take them in that order this morning. "This" obviously in verse 19 has to refer to what Paul has already been talking about which is what? That's why I read verses 12 and following. Why? Well, his imprisonment, this, his imprisonment but also, secondly, the fact that some of his enemies inside the church are using the occasion of his

imprisonment to criticize him out of envy and strife. You see, it's one thing to be in jail for your faith and to wonder whether when the time comes will you have the strength at your trial to speak clearly for Christ but it's something entirely different to wonder if you can endure this kind of baseless but harmless criticism from people who are also calling themselves followers of Jesus and Paul says, "for I know that this will turn out," meaning in this context, "both my being in prison along with the harsh, unfair treatment by others even in the name of Christ."

So that's what "this" is but what about "deliverance"? Now, think about that. He knows he's going to be delivered from what? Is he saying, "I know that those critics are going to knock it off"? Is that where he's finding his joy? Is that where he's finding his security? Or even this, "I know I'm going to be released." I would suggest to you that neither of those answers is correct. In fact, he says at the end of verse 20 and in several places throughout this book, "It might happen through my life but it might happen through my death." Now, you saw as the text unfolded, Paul is fairly sure he will be released from prison this time but we're in verse 19. We're not talking about fairly sure so what is the deliverance? This is true many times when you're studying the Bible: keep reading. Keep reading. Verse 20, "according to my earnest expectation," now listen, "earnest expectation and hope, that I will," what? Again, not be able to silence the critics or figure out a way to coerce the authorities into letting me out of this place but 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."

I'll not be put to shame. Think about that. How could Paul have potentially been put to shame in this setting? 1. If the trial comes and he worried more about how to say whatever the authorities wanted to hear so he could be released and blow it from the opportunity of speaking the Gospel. That would have put him to shame. Or if these critics continued, it would have put him to shame if he started lashing out at his attackers or been consumed by trying to silence them instead of just letting the joy of Christ motivate him to continue boldly leaving their judgment in God's hands. So here's Paul's point, here's why I can rejoice in this setting: I know that God is going to give me the focus. I know that God is going to give me the wisdom. I know that God is going to give me the boldness to speak for Christ and to live for Christ so that whatever happens, whether the critics keep it up, whether I stay in prison and am even martyred, whether by life or by death, I will continue to live for and speak for Christ so that he will be exalted in my body.

It's like we read in the book of Revelation about the tribulation saints. Do you remember this? Revelation 12:10, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down.'" Totally off the subject for a second but do you recognize that who is the originator, the source of the people who are criticizing Paul out of envy and strife? It's right there: the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, "he who accuses them before our God day and night." Now more to the point, "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of," what? The power, the efficacy of "the word of their testimony, and they did not love their

life even when faced with death." Now, here's the point: one of the reasons that you can rejoice even in a time of uncertainty is because of the security and the resulting joy. Because of the security that comes by recognizing the power of your own life and the power of your own testimony. You see, you can't control what other people are going to say about you. Do you realize that? You can't control who is going to criticize you on social media, behind your back or blah, blah, blah. You can't control it just like Paul couldn't control whether he was going to be let out of jail or not. You can't control what other people might do and if you're finding your security and joy in either of those things, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. But you can live for Christ. You can stay focused on speaking for Christ and use whatever platform God gives you as an opportunity to live for and proclaim him.

Now, you might ask if you're trying to follow this through logically, "Well, how did Paul know that?" because I pointed out as we were reading that the word for "know" in verse 19 is the Greek word "oida, to know with certainty." So here's my question for you logically: how would Paul know he would be delivered? Again, not delivered by the critics being silenced. Not delivered knowing for sure he was going to get out of jail. Delivered from the shame that would come if he blew it when the time came, that's the point. Well, how did he know that he would be delivered from that? I want to suggest there are two crucial answers to that in our text that can really help us. Follow the logic, "for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through," what two things? "Through your prayers." Have you got anybody praying for you right now during your time of uncertainty? Or have you been too busy grumping about it to even enlist a prayer team? "Through your prayers and through the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

Let's take them in that order. What that's telling us is: be convinced about the power of prayer and think about this last part, enlist a prayer team as your personalized partakers of grace. Again, think right now about your situation of uncertainty, in this case, here's a missionary who knew his church family was praying for him and he actually believed in the efficacy of their prayers. Does the Bible tell us anything about this? Can you think about any place else in the Bible that would say, "I need to be praying and asking you to ask God to help me not to miss the ministry opportunity when it comes." Wow, lots of places in the Bible like this, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much," which is why you shouldn't surround your life with fools. Why in the world are you spending so much time with those folks for? And I'm not saying none but if you surround yourself with fools, what are you going to do when you need somebody to pray? You need to be surrounding yourself with people who love God and instead of fussing, whining, trying to get out of the uncertainty, asking them to pray on your behalf because the effective prayer of a righteous man it can accomplish much.

Now, here's what it sounds like: this text is a little bit longer but follows this one for a second, "For just as," Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1, "just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance," do you know anything about that? "So also our comfort is abundant through Christ. For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we

would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope." Now follow this, listen, "And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in," what? "Helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many."

You see, Paul was depending on that and he found his joyful security in having enlisted a prayer team of partakers of grace which is why you find him saying things like this in Romans 15:30, "I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." That's why I'm not going to waste my time trashing my accusers on Facebook even if they trash me on Facebook. I haven't got any time for Facebook because I'm too busy enlisting my prayer team that is going to help go before the throne of grace and be sure that I don't blow this opportunity to live for Christ even when everybody else is not. "To strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

Or this, you know this text, don't you? "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints," there it is. "Pray on my behalf," Paul says, "that utterance," not that I'll get out of here but that utterance "may be given to me in the opening of my mouth." You see, that's what I'm doing during a time of uncertainty and that's why I have the joy. I'm going to be delivered from blowing this ministry opportunity because I've got so many people that I have asked, not pray that they'll stop it or pray that I'll have ease. No, pray that I won't miss this opportunity to live for the Gospel. Pray for the Gospel and listen, if Paul had to ask for that, pray for me, "that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness." If Paul had to pray for that, where does that leave us? We need it big time.

You even see little vignettes. That verse is way too long. Here's a short one. 1 Thessalonians 5:21, "Brethren, pray for us." How's that? You see. You see, you were just fussing at me a moment ago, weren't you? In fact, you were about to tweet it. 1 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of our Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified just as it did also with you."

Hey, the takeaways here are pretty obvious, aren't they? Instead of fretting and stewing and strategizing about how to get even or change your circumstances, how about enlisting a prayer team to ask the Lord to give you wisdom and power and clarity as you look for opportunities to live and speak for Jesus? And how about when somebody talks to you about an area of uncertainty, instead of just spinning out the whole gossip wheel about how bad that other person is, how about saying, "Hey, let's pray together," but let's not pray that that other person, "Lord, send a tornado over that person's head so they'll stop what they're doing to me." That's not exactly the prayer we're talking about here, okay? "Hey, Lord, would you help Suzie Q. here because she's really facing a tough time. Help her not to blow it. Help her not to miss the opportunity that you have sovereignly given her to live for you even when it's hard. Lord, give her the help to do that."

I'll tell you, by the way, if you tend to be a person that people like to call to gossip to, if you start handling it well, you'll stop getting those calls. Do you know that? And you'll start getting some of, "Hey, could you pray for me about this right now?" Those are the kinds of calls you want to receive and what you're doing in that act, go back to our annual theme, we're drawing near with confidence. "Suzie, let's go to the throne of grace together to be sure that God is going to give you all you need not to miss this ministry opportunity. John, let's not spend our time worrying about that other thing. Let's not spend time fretting. Let's not spend our time stewing. Let's not spend our time trying to get that person back. We're going to beat the tar out of him! Just relax, John. Let's go to the throne of grace where we can receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."

You know, we've seen that happen as a church family in some amazing ways. Some amazing ways. Just an example, faculty members at Purdue who are facing the death of a spouse or a loved one or others who were involved in some sort of a tragedy on campus and in that moment, because they had enlisted brothers and sisters to pray for them, in that moment they had the wisdom, they had the courage, they had the winsomeness to speak for Christ in a way that was powerful, in a way that was life-giving and what was happening? They were being delivered. They were being delivered from the fear of man that would cause them to shut up at an opportunity to speak. They were being delivered for the temptation to just lash out at the circumstances and miss an opportunity to live for Christ. Their brothers and sisters were praying for them.

It's like we saw last week. The word of God wasn't in prison and so that person had the security, they had the boldness because they knew their church family, their fellow partakers of grace, were gathered on their knees around the throne of grace. By the way, that's why it's so important for you to get involved in some kind of a friendship, some kind of a small group where you've got some people who know what's going on in your life and you can open up with them and you can ask them to be praying for you. So getting involved in a point man group, getting involved in a ladies' Bible study, a small group in ABF. Some kind of a relationship so you've got some people who know what's going on in your life.

I had a fellow tell me last Sunday, "Do you know what? There are three of us in our little point man group who have loved ones who are being directly affected by cancer right now." He said, "We're having such a great time praying for one another," and it's not just, hear this, it's not just praying that the person would be delivered from the disease, although there is nothing wrong with that, but do you know what they're doing? They're locking arms and saying, "Lord, please help us not miss the ministry opportunities that come from this particular platform on which we've been placed." And as they lock arms and pray for one another in that way, do you know what they end up finding? Joy. Joy. It's not happy trite joy, it's a deep joy and security.

Now, what else can you see in verse 19 that would result in this? Also by relying on the peace and the assurance and the wisdom that comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. "For I know," Paul says just to back up and get it all, "For I know that this will

turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and through the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." You see, Paul's not shaking in his chains hoping that he won't blow it on the day of the trial or fretting about what his critics might say or do next. Why? Because he's got the Holy Spirit of God inside of him and he would agree with what John would later say, "You're from God, little children, and you have overcome them because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world if you benefit from he who is in you." Or Zechariah, the Old Testament prophet said, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power.'" You see, all of that, "I'm going to get even with them" stuff, that's just human wisdom. "I'm going to try to figure out how to get my way out of this as fast..." That's human wisdom. You don't need that or want that. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord."

Think now, that's Paul, let's talk about you and me. Think about your current hardship. Have you got any of those going on? And if you say, "No, I don't. I really don't." Really? Just ask the person sitting next to you and they'll probably share some. Think about your current hardship, your current change, your current prison, whatever is going on in your life that you wish was different. I just want to ask you honestly: is there joy there for you right now? Is there security there? And I wonder if it's possible that there needs to be less concern for and confidence in you finding a way to get out and get even and instead careful and prayerful and Spirit-led and confident and joyful focus on when and how and where you can live for and speak for Christ. You see, maybe a little less worry and a little more enlisting the partakers of grace prayer team. Maybe a little less fretting and a little more relying on the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, let's push the text further. What do we see next? Be joyfully secure in the power of your identity. I mentioned when we started this series that there are just certain verses in the book of Philippians, I mean, they are some of our favorite memory verses, right? We've come up on one of them for sure, it's Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Now, could you memorize that? Seriously? You say, "It's so hard to memorize." You can memorize that while your frozen dinner is heating up in the microwave.

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." What does that mean? Well partially, to find your life through the beauty of the Gospel. You see, it's not for me live is having a big house and nice cars. No joyful security there. It's not for to me to live is having a perfect job. Do you realize nobody has one of those? Or a perfect spouse. Nobody has one of those. Or perfect kids. I tell you, nobody has any of those. You just fill in the blank. It's not for to me to live is applause, is it? For to me to live is approval of man or comfort. No, no, for to me to live, Paul says, is Christ.

John MacArthur said in his commentary on this book, interesting I think, "The Greek phrase rendered 'to live is Christ and to die is gain' contains no verb. It literally reads 'to live Christ and to die gain.'" I know some of you are saying, "I'm going to memorize it in that version then." You don't have to bother with those "is." "To live Christ, to die gain." Then he went on to say, "Paul knew that living is Christ because he would continue to serve him while he lived. Paul fully understood that wealth and power and influence and

possessions, prestige, social standing, good health, business or profession success and all other such things are transitory." Do you believe that? You put your joy, you try to find your security in that, that's trouble. Many acknowledge that truth but not many live as it is true. Could I get, "That may be the case"? Many of us acknowledge that truth but not many live as it is true.

"For to me, to live is Christ." That's why followers of Jesus Christ are so thankful for the gift of life, right? Thread this up: we believe God is the giver of life. Genesis 2:7, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the," what? "The breath of life." We believe that life begins at conception and that our Father God even knows us and shepherds our development in the womb. Is that right? Or do you think life begins after birth? No, here we go, "For you formed my inward parts," the Psalmist said. "You wove me," where? "In my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance and in your book were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them."

You see, "for to me," followers of Christ, "for to me, to live is Christ." We value, we love life and we understand that our adversary, the devil, is the promoter and champion of death. Do you realize that? As the father of lies, he told Adam and Eve that they could rebel and they would not surely die. Why did he tell them that? Because he wanted them to die and they rebelled and you see because you understand in the Bible death is always separation from something. You see immediate death in the relationship as a result of sin, right? He did it. She did it. You see, separation from their holy God because of sin, they are covering themselves up because of guilt. Physical death because of sin. Two chapters later, an entire genealogy of people who physically die and even the possibility of what the Bible horrifyingly labels as the second death, separation from God forever. Paul said, "The wages of sin is death," and I hope we understand our adversary loves to kill and he loves to ruin and he loves to destroy. That's what he wants to do to your life. That's what he wants to do to your family. That's what he wants to do to this town. That's what he wants to do to this church. Death brings him great pleasure, especially the death of the innocent. That's why the Gospel is so delicious, because it's focused on the work of someone who died in our place so you read in Romans 5:17, "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life," for to me, to live is Christ, "through the One, Jesus Christ." You see, through his shed blood he offers new life, does he not? We love life around here. He offers abundant life. He offers eternal life.

Paul ended that chapter by saying, "So that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life." Isn't that who you want to live for, the giver of life? Isn't that who you want to live through, the giver of life? "For to me, to live, why, it's Christ." Paul concluded that section of the book by saying, "for from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." You see, "for to me, to live is Christ."

That's why, by the way, Bible believing Christians are unapologetically pro-life and these eight Planned Parenthood videos that have now been released and it's not a matter of they were incorrectly edited. The full length videos were simultaneously released so just get off of that one if you're on it and don't listen to anybody who says that without knowing the facts. Those eight Planned Parent videos along with the Supreme Court's decision that has now legalized the murder of an estimated 55 million babies in their mother's wombs is one of the greatest blights on our culture imaginable and I have chosen not to show portions of those videos today or the pictures that would come off of those videos although I could, but let me be clear about this: Planned Parenthood is an evil, wicked organization that profits from the sale of aborted babies and I hope that I was very clear on that statement. And it doesn't matter if, well, that kind of activity doesn't occur in every state or in every Planned Parenthood site, they are associated with it by brand and it doesn't matter if they do some things right. Any service they offer anywhere can be attained by other organizations that do not profit from killing babies. And also, it doesn't matter, well, they do some good things. I suppose John Wayne Gacy didn't kill people every day.

Pastor Matt Chandler recently quoted a liberal...you say, "Well, where does this come from?" From people like this: Mary Elizabeth Williams who wrote an article entitled "So What if Abortion Ends Life." Here's what she said, "Here's the complicated reality in which we live," at least apparently in her brain. "All life is not equal." Really? "That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers." Yeah, it does. She said, now listen to this: "Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health," and by the way, her convenience, "should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always." Now, let's be absolutely clear about this: that position finds its origin in the father of lies. It is wicked. It is evil. And if you believe anything like that, as a pastor I would call upon you to immediately repent. Followers of Christ ought to be the champions of the sanctity of human life because of the new life that we have been given in Christ.

That's why I'm so glad, by the way, for our Vision of Hope ministry. With integrity we can say it's not just something we're against, it's something we're for. We can take the position and have that for any woman in our community facing an unplanned pregnancy, you don't have to kill your baby. We'll provide a place for you to live. We'll provide all the counseling services you need. We'll help you get the appropriate medical care. We'll help you decide if it's best in your particular situation for you to keep your baby after he or she is born or place them for adoption but we absolutely believe in the sanctity of human life.

Now, one other issue. I don't talk about this very often so when I do I want to talk about it clearly and thoroughly: we'll never instruct a person from our pulpit who to vote for but I'm going to tell you this morning I've been participating in elections since I was old enough to vote and I'm very happy to say to you that I never have and I never will vote

for a pro-abortion candidate period and if you want to call that being a one-issue voter, then that's fine. But I want to say to you this morning: if you cannot stand up for the sanctity of human life in a mother's womb, then you can't stand up for anything.

By the way, people send me emails all the time and I welcome them. You ought to read some of the emails that I receive and I understand some of you right now are crafting an email and I'm being serious about this: send it. Send it. Honestly, I love it when people communicate with me as long as they're prepared for me to pastor them back. You say, "What kind of an email am I going to get back?" Have you ever read Harry Potter? Do you know what the term "screamer" means? That's what you're going to get back because there are some things that I'm just absolutely certain of and this is one of them and I have no intent of changing my mind ever on that topic.

Now, back to the text: define your death through the beauty of the Gospel. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." If you have not done so, you might want to consider reading Randy Alcorn's book on heaven. A number of people in small groups have gone through this book, found it to be very, very profitable. Listen, I understand we're human beings. Nobody is going to say, "Well, you know, I'd like to die today. Thank you very much." No, but listen, when we're thinking in a way that is careful and biblical and theological and Gospel-centered, we believe in the depths of our heart that the day of our death will be a net gain and that conviction brings joyful security for those who know Christ. Friend, if you don't have that, God stands ready to forgive you today. He stands ready to give you new life today. If you would acknowledge your need and place your faith and trust in the shed blood of Christ, you could find yourself in the middle of Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

This part of the text ends by this: be joyfully secure in the certainty of your future. Paul says, "You know, it looks like I'm going to be released from prison but I'm glad that even if I don't, whatever happens I'm going to be thankful." He said this, "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." In other words, "I can find joy in whatever God chooses to allow in my life." Can you say that? All those options are potentially delicious. It's like ordering pizza at Literato. I've ordered them all. I've eaten them all. I like them all. I could blindfold myself, whatever you give me, I'm going to be happy about that. Or better, whatever you buy me, I'd be more than happy. The same thing, by the way, is true.

My dear wife and son are out of town. They're up in Minneapolis with our grandson right now so I know a little bit more about this but when I go to Chipotle, I drive the people at Chipotle nuts because I cannot make up my mind because I like it all. So do you know how it works? "Do you want brown rice or white rice?" Do you know what I say? "Could I have a little of both?" So they put that on there. Then they say, "Do you want brown beans or black beans?" "Could I have a little of those?" Then, "What kind of protein?" Of course, the first time I went there, I was like, "What? Okay, you're talking about meat." "What kind of meat do you want?" I say, "Could I have some chicken and some steak?" They'll actually do it. They'll put it all on there and then they start, they don't even ask

about the sauce. It's like, "Okay, we just get your deal." And that's the whole thing. Anything on this table that you put on there, I'm going to like.

Do you realize that you could say that about anything a sovereign God would allow in your life if you're thinking about it through this particular grid? It doesn't matter. Whatever God provides for me, I can rejoice. Do you realize that kind of secure, joyful, Gospel-centered focus frees us up? You see, if you're not spending all your time fretting about who is posting this, if you're not spending all your time fretting about how can I change that, it frees this church family up if we do that as a body to get a lot done for God. And I talked to you last week about just the projects that we're going to be working on together. It's amazing how God blesses that. I think I mentioned that when we even talked about the ministry for victims of human trafficking, someone gave us a check for \$30,000 just to get that going. I was having a conversation with a fellow this week and when we were done with the conversation he said, "Hey, have you got one more minute?" I said, "Yeah. I have to get to something else but yeah, I've got another minute." He said, "My wife and I heard what you had to say last week about that ministry for men out at Bethany Farms. We just think God would be pleased if we give the church \$100,000 in order to get that started." I thought, "You know, I'm really glad I took this extra minute." But here's the thing: you can get a whole lot done for God if we say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for being the giver of life and we praise you for the death that had to occur in order to make that possible and so I pray that we would learn what it means to organize our life around that so, Father, would you help us in Christ's name. Amen.