

KEEPING YOUR JOY - The Heartfelt Theology of an Isolated Prisoner - Part six
Sunday, August 2nd, 2020, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2042
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SHOWING CHRIST TO BE GREAT - THE MEANING OF LIFE (AND DEATH)

Philippians 1:19-26 - "...for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. [24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."

We all, no doubt, have our moments when we feel our spirituality shines a little more brightly. We have our times when we don't blow it, when we allow Christ to be all in all. What marks Paul's passion for Christ in this letter to the Philippian Christians is the **consistency** with which **all** of his life was painted with such a dominating Christ-centeredness.

Paul was wonderfully **obsessive** about magnifying the greatness of Christ. He would never be intimidated by the less dedicated. He would never cave in to embarrassment about His Lord. If Christ as right, the opposing vote of culture was wrong - always. He would never allow the spiritual numbness of the crowd silence his devotion. There is only one **axis** around which his life orbits. In the verses immediately preceding our text Paul responded to the questionable motives of some of the preachers in Rome. They were preaching the gospel while trying to do him personal harm - **Philippians 1:17 - "...the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment."**

Paul didn't even bother to keep tabs of all the ways these preachers were out to make life miserable for him personally. Paul's Christ-centered heart had no time for such calculations. His life revolved around the glory of Christ and he rejoiced in the fact that Christ was being proclaimed. And as long as Christ was front and center Paul simply had no interest in how these preachers were treating **him**.

Many church goes await the discovery that joy abounds where dedication to Christ triumphs over the casual religious tone of the crowd. When Paul says **"for me to live is Christ"**(21) he means there is no **"me"** - no **Paul** - to be hurt or to carry a grudge. Christ lives where that part of Paul used to dominate. This is the incredible joy and unsinkable freedom that rules the heart where everything gets traced back to Christ and His glory alone.

In our text today we see the same principle - the same single **axis** of his life - only under different circumstances. The issue here isn't the mean, competitive preachers in Rome, but Paul's future court appearance, trial, and the life or death that hangs in the balance.

He hints that he may be spared under God's sovereign providence (25), but he is by no means certain. And none of those personal details is the point anyway. All that matters is that ***"Christ is honored in my body, whether by life or by death"***(20).

I see three examples of a ***Christ exalting*** witness in this text:

1) **TO MAGNIFY CHRIST IS TO LOSE THE DOMINANCE OF ALL PERSONAL CONCERNS IN THE PURSUIT OF HIS GLORY**

Philippians 1:19-20 - "...for I know that ***through your prayers*** and the ***help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*** this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage ***now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.***"

The striking feature of these words is the way Paul simply assumes that the result of ***their prayers***(19) and the ***work of the Holy Spirit***(19) will be, not his healing or blessing or necessarily even deliverance, but the magnifying and honoring of Christ - whether that be by Paul's life or his death.

I'm struck and humbled at the way the actual ***process*** of Paul's circumstances doesn't seem that crucial to him at all. He sees only the ultimate ***goal*** of the events of his life - that ***"Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death"***(20).

These are powerful, marvellous words. Paul reflects carefully on how his circumstances effect the ***demonstration of the glory and greatness of Christ***. Later on in this very chapter he will also reflect on how his circumstances will be fruitful for the Christians at Philippi (24-25). But he seems to take no count at all of how his circumstances effect ***him***.

Because Paul has found such a treasuring of joy and purpose in Christ he has found the concerns of self ***small*** and somewhat ***boring***. Life has been so enlarged through Christ that he finds no motivation at all if Christ were removed from the center. There would be nothing ***important*** of Paul's life left.

When Paul says ***“for me to live is Christ”***(21) he means the nerve endings that used to feel personal hurt and anger and loss of comfort, or the things that used to credit his life with pride and pleasure, are now more sensitized to ***Christ*** rather than ***himself***. For Paul personal anger, revenge, and pride only reveal the parts of life that ***aren’t yet*** crucified with Christ Jesus.

Let me restate this first point - ***to magnify Christ is to lose the dominance of all personal concerns in the pursuit of His glory.*** And ***verse 19*** makes it very clear that this is not a weak position in Paul’s mind. Quite the opposite, it is because Paul has so submitted all of his life to Christ that he is confident he will never be ***“ashamed”*** - ***“...for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”***

Again, these are amazing words. Paul says a ***Christ-obsessed life cannot ultimately be mocked.*** It can’t lose in life or in death. It can never come up empty. It will be left standing when all pursuits motivated by pride or revenge or personal ambition or greed will have crumbled at the feet of Christ the Lord. Paul’s hope is settled and granite-like - ***“Yes, and I will rejoice”***(18b).

There bubbles up a glorious ***certainty*** in those words. ***“I know I am not mistaken about this eternal hope of mine.”*** Eternal certainty is a beautiful thing.

2) **TO MAGNIFY CHRIST IS TO FACE WITH EQUAL CONFIDENCE EITHER LIFE OR DEATH, BECAUSE BOTH ARE INEVITABLE AND BOTH COME UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS**

Philippians 1:21-26 - ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. [24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”***

When Christ is the genuine center of existence death and life can be honestly stood side by side as equals in the sense that neither one can cancel out the power of devotion to Christ the Lord.

Ultimately, Paul will let the Lord decide whether he lives or dies. But if it were up to ***him*** it would not be an

easy choice to make. He has strong motives that pull him in both directions at once. But they aren't really **different** motives. They're the **same** motive expressed in **two directions**.

a) ***His first inclination is to depart and be with Christ***

"I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better"(23).

I think we frequently miss the full freight of these familiar words. It was certainly Paul's desire to be with Jesus. That's beyond doubt. But I don't think that's the **only** motive behind Paul's wanting to depart (be executed) and be with Jesus.

He hinted at an additional motive in - **verse 20** - **"...as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death."**

"...that Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." Those aren't light words. They are begging readers to **think** deeply about them. We can all see how Christ would be honored in Paul's physical body if his life were spared. Paul would continue to devote his life to serve Jesus just as he had before. But how would Christ be honored in Paul's body if that body were beheaded? How does a dead apostle's broken body bring honor to Christ?

It would bring honor by proving the greatness and, above all, the **desirability** of Christ. It would prove to all who saw Paul's decapitated body that Christ was **better** than life. It would show Paul's courageous confidence that nothing - not even death itself - could separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The result - that Paul would never see if executed) would be others would be emboldened to **live** for Christ by seeing Paul **die** for Christ. That's the frequently overlooked reason Paul was actually anxious to **depart** and be with Christ rather than just die peacefully of old age.

b) ***Paul's second choice was to remain alive and minister to the saints***

Philippians 1:22, 24-26 - "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell....[24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Here again we see the **seamless focus** of Paul's obsession with magnifying Christ. If he wants to live on physically it isn't for **himself**. And, if you read his words carefully, it isn't even for the **Philippian believers** who would benefit from his ministry. That's only Paul's **secondary** goal.

His bottom line is found in **verse 26** - **"....so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."**

Paul's bottom line never changes. Everything is always and only about Christ. If he lives it's all about Christ. If he dies it's all about Christ. If the saints are strengthened it's still all about Christ. He has seen something in Christ that simply won't let him look anywhere else.

Here is the truest picture of the meaning of Jesus' words to the woman at the well - **John 4:13-14** - **"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"**

This was Paul's discovery. A Christ-obsessed life doesn't thirst for anything else. Christ is the one place to dig deep and drink long. The self-help books - **all** of them - are going to leave you dry and empty without Christ. Only He can give you a hope and a future and a present that will never leave you hungry or thirsty for anything else.

There is one more closing point:

3) **CHRIST IS MAGNIFIED NOW AS HE ALONE FILLS THE MOMENTS OF YOUR DAY WITH KINGDOM PURPOSE**

Look quickly with me at three verses we've already studied - **Philippians 1:24-26** - **"But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."**

I don't suppose any of us is absolutely crazy about the idea of dying. None of us **rushes** toward death. But if we **don't** rush to our own deaths - if we want to continue on with our physical lives - there is another

question that needs to be honestly faced. ***Why do you want another fifteen or twenty years?***

This is the Christ-centred issue. ***To what end is more life?*** Is it to see your children grow up and get married? Do you long to have time with your grandchildren? Are you looking forward to retiring from the rat-race and moving somewhere warm - where you will never need a snow-blower?

Christ-centered people will see a problem here. ***Atheists*** long for all these things. We are not marked in any distinct way if the world sees these longings growing in our hearts. How do my goals and aspirations for the next fifteen years ***magnify Christ?*** How do they point to the ultimate joy and supremacy of Jesus as Creator and Lord of all. How do these goals light up my life with testimony to eternity?

Paul was happy to live. He was no kill-joy martyr. But his longing for life was inseparable from his longing for Christ. ***"Fruitful labor"*** was the way he saw his life as it was spent for Christ (22). If Christ gives you or me another fifteen years ***how will His kingdom be vastly improved and extended by my living? How will people see Christ is great by the way I spend the next fifteen years of my life?***

That's the big issue. If He prospers your business for another fifteen years you could raise two million dollars for missions. If Christ gives you another fifteen years and you lead one person to the Lord every six months that would be thirty new disciples. If Christ gives you another fifteen years and you teach twenty kids or adults each Sunday that could be 300 people to train to love Christ passionately.

Here is the life lesson issue in our text today. ***Paul has no other way to measure the passing of his time on earth but increasing the desire for Christ in all people.***

And when you ***live*** like that every day you not only find great joy in life that can't be removed, but you also will look at the fast approaching time of physical death as it races toward us all, and you will face it with the very ***same*** joy, knowing that to ***die*** is gain.