



The Supreme Goal

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 1:18b-26

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Remember where we left off last week. Paul had been falsely accused and put in prison and chained to guards. And Paul knew that what had happened to him was serving for the advance of the gospel. Paul rested in this because he knew and trusted in the sovereignty of God. And the gospel was advancing because what was happening to Paul was actually giving others boldness to speak the word and without fear which is a supernatural response---that's just not normal. And some were preaching Christ from good will and with love for Christ and love for Paul. But some were preaching the truth out of rivalry and with the wrong heart and with the intention of afflicting Paul even more. This could be a cause for discouragement for Paul. It could have been a reason to cause Paul to despair but Paul's response is amazing. Paul actually rejoiced in this--- why? Paul rejoiced because ultimately, Christ is being proclaimed. The love of Christ controlled Paul and Paul understood the grace of God in Christ to him personally and for the truth of grace in Christ to be preached, whether in pretense or in truth, was a cause for Paul to rejoice no matter what it meant for him personally.

-And Paul's rejoicing doesn't stop. As Paul now transitions from the present to the imminent future and beyond we see continued rejoicing. Let's look at why?

1 – Deliverance: A Cause for Rejoicing (18b-19)

-"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance," (Philippians 1:18–19, ESV)

A – Joy in suffering (18b)

-Paul begins this passage by saying that he will continue to rejoice. Paul is transitioning from his present circumstances and taking us into the future to his imminent trial where he will be either vindicated and released or he will be condemned and put to death. And Paul's response---I will rejoice. Paul doesn't know what the verdict will be but it

doesn't matter to him. Paul is going to rejoice no matter what his circumstances and no matter what his sufferings. And I have to be honest and just say that I have to ask myself how he can do that.

-How is it that Paul can rejoice like this in the midst of suffering as he is? We know the answer to this in our heads right? We know that the love of Christ controlled Paul and that Paul remained in awe of what Christ had done for him. Christ had saved Paul from the wrath of God for his sins and united him to Himself in love. That's why Paul would write later in this book in chapter 3 that he was glad to count everything as loss and suffer the loss of everything and count them as rubbish for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. Paul could rejoice in suffering because he was united to Christ and one with Him and knew Him intimately and Christ was Paul's hope and passion and joy. Being found in Christ was Paul's hope and righteousness and no circumstances of this world could change that.

-And if Christ is our joy and we are growing in our intimate knowledge of Christ then we will be growing in our joy also no matter what our circumstances. Our experience of joy will not be based on my suffering or my lot in life but on my communion with my Savior. My joy in Christ and in serving Him will not be lost unless my communion with Him breaks down. So let's ask ourselves the question---how is my joy right now in life? Can I honestly say that I am joyful in my life and in my service to Christ? If not, why not? Am I pursuing Christ to commune with Him? Am I seeking my joy and finding it in Him? Is Christ really my passion and my desire or am I seeking these things in other places or in this world that can never satisfy? It's easy to know what to answer but we need to be honest with ourselves. It's easy for us to say the right things but are they true of us. Honestly, there are times when I really have to fight for joy. Am I really finding Christ to be my treasure and desire and source of all of life right now? Paul did and it led him to rejoice even in the midst of horrific circumstances. And Paul rejoiced because he trusted in God and knew that he would be delivered. Paul rejoiced in deliverance.

B – Deliverance (19)

-“for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,” (Philippians 1:19, ESV)

-How can Paul say this? He doesn't know what the court will say---he doesn't know what the verdict and outcome will be so how can he say that this will turn out for his deliverance? To understand this better we must look at the meaning of the word for deliverance.

-Deliverance: The Greek word for deliverance here is *soteria* which means salvation. It carries the meaning to rescue from danger or to restore to a state of safety and well-being---to make safe.

-So let's think about how Paul could be using this word. He is in prison and will face a trial soon. One thought is that Paul is rejoicing that God will, in His sovereignty, deliver Paul in this trial. In this sense Paul could be rejoicing because he would be delivered from his physical suffering in prison. This word is used in Scripture to refer to the Israelites being freed from slavery in Egypt and thus used in terms of being rescued and brought to safety from physical threats and harm. But Paul doesn't know what the outcome will be does he? and yet he rejoices. Still, how can Paul rejoice in this when he doesn't know the outcome?

-The answer to this lies in the deeper meaning of this word. Paul is probably referring to a salvation that goes beyond just the escape of the Roman chains and sword. When Paul uses this word he means the salvation from the power of sin and salvation from the wrath of God that sin deserves. And ultimately this salvation saves from eternal death because this salvation in Christ vindicates the believer before God in the final judgment. This phrase "will turn out for my deliverance" that Paul uses is an echo from Job. Job's friends are telling him that his horrible circumstances are a direct result of some sin of Job's. And Job proclaims in 13:15-16 that even though God slay him he would hope in Him and that this would be his salvation or his deliverance. Job's confidence here and the vindication that he refers to is not before some human court or tribunal but the salvation that he will have as he stands before the throne of God.

-Paul is probably referring to both meanings. Paul is confident that he will be delivered by God in his trial and that his ultimate deliverance is secure eternally because of Christ's work. There is no doubt in Paul's mind that this is true and his confidence is not based on whether he lives or dies. If the Romans find Paul guilty and put him to death Paul is still delivered because his eternal deliverance is secure in Christ. Paul can have such confidence because he knows that his destiny is not determined by human opinions and especially not by the verdict of the Roman emperor. Paul's confidence and joy is not colored by his circumstances but by his relationship and intimate

knowledge of Christ and His work on the cross in Paul's place. What better basis for confidence and joy in suffering. What better basis do we have to rejoice? None!!

-I have to confess that this confidence that we see in Paul is amazing and convicting. What faith and what strength! But this is not Paul's strength that we see displayed. Paul knew he was weak and he knew that total dependence on the Lord was needed. Paul was confident but he wasn't self-confident. That's why we see Paul describe the means that God would use to bring this confidence of deliverance.

-Paul says that he rejoices because he knows that through the Philippians prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ he will be delivered. Paul is not in this alone and he knows he needs help. Paul often asked the church to pray for him. He asked for prayers for boldness and for opportunities to speak the truth. Paul is not a lone ranger Christian here but knows he needs his brothers and sisters in Christ and knows that he is dependent upon the strength of the Holy Spirit. Paul knows that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective and they lead to an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit.

-That word for help of the Spirit is translated supply. We all have the Spirit dwelling in us but Paul is filled with the Spirit so that in his circumstances and especially before the emperor, he is confident that he will stand firmly on the truth of Christ and the gospel and so glorify and honor God, which is Paul's supreme goal in life.

2 – The Supreme Goal (20-21)

- "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. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
(Philippians 1:20–21, ESV)

-Here we get to the heart of Paul and really, to the heart of why we were created. Paul has an expectation and hope that he will not at all be ashamed of Christ but that Christ will be honored or enlarged or exalted in him whether he lives or dies. Paul expects

this because this is his goal in life. To not be ashamed but to glorify Christ is Paul's expectation and hope. Now we can't allow the world's definition of hope, which includes uncertainty to creep into what Paul is saying here. The biblical definition of the word Paul uses here contains no uncertainty but a certainty that he will not be ashamed but honor Christ whether he lives or dies. This certainty is based on who God is and His sovereign rule over the present and the future. It doesn't matter what the verdict will be or whether he will be vindicated or put to death, Paul's goal is to honor Christ and magnify him.

-Can we say that? Can I truly say that my desire and passion in this life is to honor and magnify Christ in everything? That is what Paul is saying here. Paul understands that glorifying Christ is why he was created and especially why he was saved! Paul had staked his life on the Lord's faithfulness and power and glory and the Lord never fails. The love of Christ controlled Paul and it created in him a deep love for Christ and a desire to see Christ magnified with no concern for himself personally. Paul counted everything as loss for the worth of knowing Christ. He didn't count his life of any value nor as precious to himself but he wanted to finish his course or ministry to testify to the gospel of Christ and Christ be magnified. When we count Christ greater than ourselves then He is honored and glorified! Christ was Paul's life, which is why Paul would continue on and say...

-To live is Christ and to die is gain:

-What did Paul mean when he said **to live is Christ?** How could he say that and really mean it? At the deepest level it was because Christ was in him and he was in Christ. Paul realized that he was united in Christ and that his life was hidden in Christ. For Paul there was no thought of life apart from Christ. Paul said that if anyone was in Christ then he was a new creation. Paul said that he had been crucified with Christ and that it was no longer he that lived but Christ that lived in him. This miracle of being in Christ and being one with Him was the root of Paul's confidence. Christ was the centrality of his life.

-What we must understand is that "to live is Christ" is not some sentimentality wish for a trouble free life with no suffering but a joyous embracing of picking up our cross daily

and following Christ. I'm sure Paul looked forward to the day when the suffering and trials came to an end but his joy was in Christ. His life was Christ because Christ was at the conscious center of everything for Paul. Yes, any believer is going to look forward to the day when we no longer have to fight this spiritual battle in faith because we will be walking by sight in the presence of Christ but our supreme desire should be for Christ to be glorified in me now with an eager anticipation to see HIM face to face. That's why Paul's confidence in this life extended into death and he could also say that **"to die is gain."**

-Paul's death would mean that he would be ushered into the presence of the One who was life to him. Paul wrote that if away from the body then at home with the Lord. Paul's goal in life was to glorify Christ and his desire was to be with the Lord and the way that this comes to fruition is through death and Paul considered that to be gain. To be in the presence of his Savior and to behold the glory of Christ that he strived for in his life was the ultimate desire of his heart. He wanted to be with Christ and so death was ultimate gain. For Paul, death would usher in the ultimate oneness with Christ and so be in His presence for all of eternity. What more gain could there be?

-So for Paul to live is Christ and to die is gain. Because Christ was everything to Paul and his life was centered on the glory of Christ, Paul was faced with a tough choice--- continued life in ministry or departure into the presence of his Savior.

3 – A Tough Choice (22-26)

- "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again." (Philippians 1:22–26, ESV)

-Paul's life was Christ centered and his ministry was Christ centered. Paul's life was spent proclaiming Christ and it had born fruit. And Paul expected that to continue if he

lived. "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me." In Paul's mind, if he is living then he is serving the Lord and he trusts in the power of the Lord to bring fruit to the teaching of His Word. Christ lived in him and the life he now lived was lived in faith and he was confident that would bring about fruitful labor in the gospel.

-But Paul didn't know which he would choose---life or death. Think about that. If we were faced with that question surely most of us would not even think about it but say that we wanted to live. But Paul was hard pressed between the two, which means that he was really torn and pulled in two directions. And Paul lets us in on his thinking here. What's Paul's desire here? His personal desire is to depart and be with Christ---why?---because he knows that alternative is far better. If Paul really got to choose and he could choose what is best for him then Paul says he would choose death because he would see Jesus face to face! That's the better alternative here. Paul is not looking for a quick escape from his suffering in prison or from the threats that may face him in the near future. What makes death a gain is not the earthly miseries that we leave behind but the heavenly delight of Christ's presence that it ushers us into. Paul longed for Christ in the deepest way and wanted to be as near to Him as possible. Again, Paul never forgot the grace of God in Christ to him and Paul loved Christ. And his love for Christ was rooted in Christ's death in his place and the eternal life that Paul now had. Paul never forgot what he had been and what he was now in his union and oneness with Christ. Paul would write:

- "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*" (Romans 8:16–17, ESV)

-What we see is that Paul's life and death are defined by his union with Christ. So if Paul was to choose according to his best interest then he definitely chooses death so that he would be with Christ. But Paul was not a self-centered man and he loved the church because it had been purchased by the blood of Christ and Paul would spend and be spent for their sake. Paul was not only a gospel first man but he was also an others first man. And he knows that his life being spared is what is needed now for the sake of the church.

- *"But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,"* (Philippians 1:24–25, ESV)

-Paul realizes that for him to remain in this life is more necessary for the brothers and sisters in the church at Philippi. He is convinced of it. And being convinced of it he is confident that he will be delivered so that he can minister to the church for the sake of their progress and joy in the faith. Paul wanted the church to grow in their knowledge of Christ which would mean that they would also grow in their joy since joy is found in Christ. Paul knew that if the church would grow in Christ then their supreme goal would be to glory in Christ and as they strived side by side for the gospel together they would have ample cause to do so.

What a message for us as the church as we live in a me-first culture that makes self-fulfillment a pathway to entitlement! -So let's ask ourselves a few questions. Are we always concerned with our interests or are we willing to sacrifice what is best for us for the sake of the church? Think about the church---who is the church? Look around and you see the church. So let's rephrase the question. Are we willing to sacrifice what we think is best for us for the sake of those who are sitting beside and around you. Are you willing to choose what is best for your brothers and sisters in Christ without your best interest at heart? How often in our choices is our first principle to ask, what is best for the church?

-What would we choose? What do we choose right now as we live---life or death? Really, that's the wrong question. The question we should ask is why we would choose what we choose. There are some that may choose death because life here is miserable and they see death as an anesthesia for life's agonies. There are some that would choose life over death because despite life's inconveniences it keeps them entertained and comfortable and maybe filled with pleasures. But do you hear in these possibilities the slavery of being bent on self. Paul, the prisoner, was so much freer! Because he had been saved by Christ, he would joyfully follow whichever path Christ chose for him knowing that that in either case the Lord would grant him his heart's chief desire---to

honor and glorify Christ whether in life or death. That was Paul's supreme goal and it should be ours.

4 – Application

-So what do we take away from this passage? Paul has given us a glimpse into his thought process in the midst of suffering. Paul has shown us how being Christ-centered and focused on His glory colors our decision making process in the midst of the horrific circumstances that life sometimes throws at us and I am thankful for it and so needed this for myself. I asked myself some questions after studying this passage and so now I will share those with you so that you can answer them for yourself.

1 - **Paul was confident**, not self-confident but confident in Christ because of his union with Christ and therefore, his intimate and personal knowledge of Him. Speaking of confidence in Christ---**how is yours?** Do you live with the same kind of eternal perspective as Paul even in the midst of life's circumstances? Are we confident that God is in sovereign and in control or is that just buzz words that we use but we don't always believe it? Do I really claim the promises of God's word for myself or does some of those just apply to others in the body of Christ? Do I really believe the promises of God? I am here to testify and to tell you that we can and we must fight to do so. God says in Jeremiah 32:17 that he created the heavens and the earth and nothing is too hard for Him. He promises us in Isaiah 46 that He is God and there is no other and what He has spoken He will bring to pass. And God has promised that all things happen for our good and He will use it to conform us to Christ, which is what we were predestined for. If you have doubted these promises of God then repent and believe in Him and trust Him even when you don't understand His ways! There is freedom in His wings!

2 - One thing we **see Paul doing in this passage is rejoicing**. He is having people preach to afflict him while in prison and he is facing a life and death situation and he is rejoicing. Let me ask you this---how is your joy? Have you lost it? Is it a fight or struggle to have joy in the midst of suffering or in the midst of serving our Lord. If so then let me ask you this? How is your communion with Christ? Has it broken down? Are you abiding in Him and His word? Are you growing in Him? Our joy in serving the

Lord will not be lost unless our communion with Him has broken down? And if our communion with the Lord breaks down then we focus on self and self interests and start looking for life and joy in things other than Christ where true life and joy cannot be found. Yes there may be instant gratification but it doesn't last and we come back around to the same point and have to look for the next gratification and that is a miserable existence. Abide in Christ and count everything as loss for the worth of knowing Christ Jesus your Lord and you will find joy because He is joy everlasting!

3 - What is your supreme goal in life? Paul's goal was to promote the glory of Jesus whatever the cost to himself and to promote others to the same goal. Is that your goal? This privilege of magnifying Christ and nothing less is what you and I were created for. We were made to do it. We are most joyful in Christ when He is glorified in and through us. What passion fills your thoughts in your waking hours and in your sleepless nights? Are you pursuing academic achievement, career success, health and fitness, a fulfilling marriage, respectful and accomplished children, or financial stability? These can be good goals but none is big enough to be your supreme goal, the goal for which your Creator designed you. They might be consistent with God's all-wise design for you but if your sights are set no higher than these earthly accomplishments then sooner or later your hope and joy will come crashing down. God in Christ has brought complete deliverance for this life now and the one to come. Christ is coming back for us and on that day He will deliver us to an eternity with Him and make us like Him and every nerve ending that we have will beat for His glory. In the meantime, the deliverance that God gives us in Christ delivers us from fear and self-centeredness and focuses us on Christ and joy in Him. God's grace frees us from self and enables us to embrace the supreme goal of glorifying Christ and gives us joy in doing so. So whether through life or death, plenty or need, health or disease, acceptance or rejection, let your eager expectation and hope that gives confident joy be the supreme goal of seeing Christ glorified through you. Don't settle for anything less than the best!

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