

Philippians 1:18b-26. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Whether by life or death Christ is exalted.

- 1. A Christian glorifies Christ by their view of death**
- 2. A Christian glorifies Christ by their view of life**

Last week we were instructed by the apostle James to ***consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds because the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*** We walked through those verses explaining how trials and difficulties in our life build character in us and bring us closer to God. God can use such difficulties to deepen our relationship with him. And therefore we can rejoice even in our sufferings and hardships.

But does this apply to the ultimate suffering and the final hardship; what about death? What about when a loved one dies or when we have to face our own mortality? Certainly that has to be left off the list of things to rejoice in? What joy could be found in death?

Today, however, God teaches us through the apostle Paul that there is joy for the Christian even in the face of death. Paul teaches us through his example that a Christian glorifies Christ by their view of death and by their view of life. Paul also sums it all up in these familiar words that we are to store away in our hearts and minds, ***²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. His life was threatened by those who wished he would just stop preaching and teaching about Christ. Yet because of this faith in Jesus, as Paul sat in prison unfairly imprisoned and patiently waiting for a trial that was purposely delayed, he still knew he had so many reasons to rejoice.

Even though he was not able to preach the message was being shared by others. The news of his trial had shed positive light on the Christian movement in Rome. Others had been moved to preach because of Paul's efforts. Even though some were preaching for their own selfish gain at least the message of Christ was going out into the world. Paul gladly reported all of this with joy to a congregation in Philippi that was very concerned about his

well being and the effect his imprisonment would have on the spread of the gospel. In a time of uncertainty, Paul rejoiced, because even though he was locked up the gospel was not.

God had given Paul a faith that helped him see beyond his own misery. He rejoiced that his fellow believers were praying for him. He rejoiced that his fellow believers were working together and stepping up and filling in to spread the good news of Jesus. And Paul was confident that whatever happened to him it would work out for his deliverance.

Paul viewed this as a win-win situation. If he was executed, if he died, he would be able to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. Far removed from the troubles that he saw in this world; far removed from the shipwrecks, the sickness, the illness, the dungeons, the rejections, the terror, the cruelties, the violence, the immorality, far removed from all of this there was the perfection of heaven; and it was ready and waiting for him. Christ had prepared it all in advance. There he would be able to praise and glorify Christ with all the angels and all the saints in heaven pouring out their perfect praise before the throne of God. This was the confident knowledge and unique joy that he had been given through faith in Christ Jesus and nothing could take that away from him. Death - even in some dark lonely prison - would not simply be a sad end, but a joyous beginning. This was Paul's confidence, his sure hope, his source of joy.

Paul also trusted that if he continued to live God would bless that as well. Paul would be able to continue to produce fruits of faith and fruits of labor for the Lord. He would be able to teach and preach and instruct those in Philippi and the other established congregations, plus he would be able to continue to reach out to the Gentile nations. He would be able to reach new hearts. The kingdom of God would grow. Souls would be saved and Christ would be glorified.

By both word and example Paul teaches us an important lesson. As a Christian facing death, he is noticeably calm and collected in his thoughts and words. As a Christian facing death he is confident in the power of Christ to bring him to his eternal home or to guide him through this troubles and trials of life. In these verses we see how Paul put his life into the Lord's hands and was content in God's care.

On most Sundays I try to teach as I preach. I strive to point out what the Scriptures are saying and help you to pattern your life after the examples of faith given. This week I must confess that this congregation has taught me much more than I could ever teach you about this type of situation. Throughout my nearly six years here I have mourned with you. I have held the hands of members when they knew they were dying. I have visited members of this congregation when surgeries and illnesses forced them to think about the possibility of life's end. And so many times I have seen the peace and the special joy that Christ gives to those who are his. God has given us a faith that is able to see beyond our misery. Even when the darkness of death casts its heavy shadow the light of Jesus remains. A certain expectancy of heaven and a simple trust in the Lord brings a noticeable peace to the lives of God's children. There is a unique Christian joy and peace that I have had the privilege to witness time and again. The members of this congregation have taught me so much about the words, ***21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

But of course we are not perfect. Our confidence is tested, our peace is shaken, our joy is battered and bruised by the reality of death, and that becomes noticeable in the way we

think and act as well. Death has a tendency to bring out our worst. There have been times that anger has clouded our view of the eternal. There have been times that sorrow has been such an overwhelming emotion that we lose our spiritual moorings and for a time drift out to a sea of despair. We may have even blamed God, became angry at him, and questioned his love and care. Perhaps we have had thoughts and have expressed our anger over the death of someone close to us much like the widow of Zarephath. Remember how in our first lesson for today she was so quick to blame God and his prophet Elijah when her son died, saying, ***“What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” (1 Kings 17:18)***

Death does indeed remind us of our sin, but what the widow did not remember in her intense sorrow was how good and merciful God had been? In her pain and weakness she forgot to trust in the God who took care of her and so graciously supplied her with life and breath and daily bread. In her despair she forgot to remember that God was the one who made sure that her ***“jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry.” (1 Kings 17:14)***

When death and sorrow come we must remember who our God is. We must remember that the Lord is good and the Lord is faithful. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but he treats us with grace. Each day is a gift from his hand and in his almighty wisdom he decides when each of us will be taken from this world of sorrow. He decides. He sees the whole picture. He oversees the events of this entire world, the lifespan of every living thing in under his watch, and he rules according to his good purpose. He governs our years and he has the final say when we will leave this world. Our times are truly in his hands. (Psalm 31:15).

When the Lord decides it is time for death to touch our lives he does not do this out of cruelty as he coldly turns his back on us. But rather he remains faithful. He turns to us his heart of compassion. He holds out to us his precious promises and he rescues us from our sorrow. In love he forgives us for our outbursts of anger. He forgives us when we despair of his love. He attends to us with his words of comfort. He touches our hearts and sorrow suddenly becomes joy; our wailing is turned to dancing as death is defeated by life. For the gospel clearly shows us that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. Jesus has defeated sin and death for us that those who die in faith sleep in peace and will wake up to eternal life. He has rescued us from sin. He has spared us from judgment, so that finally when our last hour comes we know that he will grant us a blessed end and bring us to our eternal home in heaven. This promise of eternal life is our sure hope. This is our certain expectancy that we look forward to, that we anticipate with unparalleled joy. This hope is the anchor that holds us fast.

This is the Christian joy and peace of which Paul preached and we can see from this section he clearly lived. This is the Christian joy and peace through which he viewed death and through which he also viewed life. He knew it was better by far to depart and be with Christ, but the life he lived would bring glory to Jesus as well. If he lived, the prayers of the Philippians would be answered. He could continue his preaching and teaching and Christ would be exalted, lifted up, and glorified.

That is the purpose of any Christian, isn't it? To exalt Christ, to lift him up, and give him glory; that is what Christians have been called to do. Whether we live or we die our purpose is to bring glory to God. To depart and be with Christ and glorify him perfectly in heaven is better by far, but it is entirely up to our God when he will call us home. And so as we go on living this life we live our lives for Christ. God has a purpose for all of us and while it may not be specifically laid out in the pages of Scripture like it was for Paul, we are called by God to serve him in the specific time and place that God has placed us in this life.

We can all serve God and bring glory to Christ Jesus whatever our lot in life. He has called some of you to be Christian employers. He has given you the gifts and the talents and the opportunity to run a business, to run and operate a farm in a way that is honest and upright and brings glory to God. God has called some of us to be parents. He has called some of us to be sons and daughters. He has called some of you to be grandparents. He has called us all to be good friends and neighbors. God has placed opportunities before all of us to serve him, to serve family and neighbor and community. God has called us to serve him well. This is our purpose as his children. Let us serve him the best we can to his glory. Each day is a gift from his hand. Each day we live in the undeserved kindness of Christ Jesus who has graciously saved us. Let us bring glory to Christ in the way that we live.

A person can really struggle with this idea at any time in their life. "What is my purpose here God?" is a common question throughout our years, but especially later in life. A member might ask his or her pastor, "How on earth can I serve God when I am unable to do so much of what I was able to do before." They may be concerned because they are now limited in some way, perhaps their age and health keep them from being as active as they once were, perhaps they are in a nursing home or confined to the house, or a walker or a wheelchair. But God reminds us that wherever we are in life we can serve him. Paul was confined to a prison cell and yet by his faithful example and by his confident confession Christ Jesus was glorified. So too we can all remain faithful to our Lord, trust in him, and carry out the act of worship that is prayer. In doing this we lift Christ up, we exalt him, and we bring glory to Christ Jesus.

Like the Philippians prayed for their beloved Pastor Paul, pray for your pastor, pray for the church, pray for your local Christian schools. Wherever you are in life, pray for your fellow believers; pray for your children and your grandchildren, your nieces and your nephews. By doing so you are serving a wonderful purpose and setting a wonderful example for those around you. Young and old alike can also faithfully praise your God in the way that you conduct your life and in the way that you receive each day from the Lord's hand. Young and old alike can serve and praise God in the way that you deal with death. Content in his care you confess with your life a message that echoes the words of Paul, "***For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.***"

God is our powerful and compassionate Lord. He has put you in your particular place in his world. Serve him with gladness whatever your lot in life; and as you faithfully do so, you are able to lift up Christ so that others may see him in everything that you do. Dear friends this is the fruitful labor that God has called you to: let Christ be exalted in both the way that you live and in the way that you deal with death. Amen.