

True Joy – The Wisdom of Philippians

To Live is Christ to Die is Gain (Philippians 1:21-26)

12-13-09

Scripture Reading – Philippians 1:18b-26

Intro – 3 important questions

3 very important questions that when answered honestly will,

- give us great insight into where we are *truly at* in our relationship with the Lord.
- be excellent predictors of
 - how much joy and contentment we can expect in life,
 - how well or how poorly we will handle stress, hardship, and adversity in life when it comes our way.

- 1) What do you look forward to the most about going to Heaven?
- 2) Would you still want to spend eternity in Heaven if Jesus wasn't there?
- 3) For me, to live is _____?

Paul answers all three of these questions for us in our text today. *His answer to these questions is what allowed him to not only to honor God in ANY situation but also to REJOICE in any situation, no matter how bad it might have been.*

Paul's missionary report (1:12-26). Even though he was in prison, awaiting trial and possibly death, *he was rejoicing* because...

- What had happened had really served to advance the Gospel (12)
- It had become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that he was in chains for Christ (13).
- Most of the Roman brothers in the Lord had been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously (14).
- Even though some of those Roman brothers were preaching Christ insincerely, out of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition in hopes of stirring up trouble for him while he is in prison, *they were still preaching Christ* (15-18).
- And, because he knew that through the prayers of the Philippians and the resulting help of the HS, he would be delivered from prison (either by release or by execution), he would not be ashamed (meaning he

would be vindicated and in no way disappointed), and Christ would be exalted in his body whether by life or by death (19-20).

What was it that allowed Paul to not only to honor God in the midst of the trials he faced but to rejoice in the midst of them as well? It was the mindset he reveals to us in verse 21 and goes on to further explain in verses 22-26. For Paul, *to live was Christ and to die was gain*, and THAT made all the difference.

Question 1 - Why was dying gain for Paul?

Philippians 1:21-23 (NIV)

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*;

Most people (including most Christians) don't feel the way Paul CLEARLY felt about dying. In order for someone to feel the way Paul did about death, one of two things must be true...

- 1) You must so whole heartedly believe in the reward your belief system offers that you can't wait to attain it.
 - a. Scary: the reward offered by all belief systems other than Christianity are false
- 2) You must be so despairing of life that you will do anything to escape it.
 - a. Scary: unless you've put your faith in Christ, what awaits you after death is FAR worse

Which of these was true of Paul?

Not the second.

Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV)

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...

Thus the first. What was the reward that Paul's belief system offered that he was so eager to attain that he longed to die?

We all know the answer is Heaven. People look forward to Heaven for all sorts of reasons some of which are soundly biblical and others which are far more hypothetical.

But what was it about Heaven that Paul looked forward to the most? The answer is CHRIST.

Philippians 1:23 (NIV)

²³ ...I desire to depart and *be with Christ*, which is better by far;

Of all the benefits of Heaven, for Paul one far outweighed them all, and that was that he would be with Christ.

Though some would question whether you enter immediately into Christ's presence upon dying, the Biblical evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of this indeed being the case. (mention "soul sleep" – a state on unconsciousness until the second coming of Christ)

Luke 23:43 (NIV)

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, *today* you will *be with me* in paradise."

Revelation 6:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were

holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Philippians 1:23 (NIV)

²³ ...I desire to depart and *be with Christ*, which is better by far.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

Why did Paul feel this way? Why did he look forward to being with Christ more than all the other perks of Heaven? Because he had gotten to know Jesus during his 30 or so years as a Christian on earth and he valued his relationship with Him far more than anything else.

After Jesus first introduced Himself to Paul on the Damascus Rd. I believe he spent three years really getting to know Him.

Galatians 1:13-18 (NIV)

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, *I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.*

¹⁸ *Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days.*

I can remember doing the same, and man was it GREAT! It during this time that Philippians 3:7-8 became my life verse.

Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing

greatness of *knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

What did Paul look forward to the most about Heaven? Christ. Why did he long to be with Christ? Because He'd gotten to know Him while on earth. If you think about this, it makes all the sense in the world.

- We value relationships more than anything else.
- The relationships we value (long for) the most are lasting ones (Johns 17:3) with great and interesting people who love us (the cross), treat us kindly (better than we deserve), and are always there for us (Todd for Jeff).
- Is there any doubt why Paul considered everything else rubbish compared to knowing Jesus? It just makes sense.
- What doesn't make sense if putting anything else above Him.

On that note, would Paul still want to spend eternity in Heaven if Jesus wasn't there? The answer has to be a resounding NO! In fact, in light Phil 3:7-8 I think it is safe to say that apart from Christ, *Paul would consider even Heaven to be rubbish.*

Question 2 - What did Paul mean when he said "to live is Christ"?

He most certainly meant that life for him was about *one thing and one thing only, CHRIST*. Knowing Him, honoring Him, glorifying Him, following Him etc. For Paul, to live was CHRIST. Period. End of story. Nothing else. Not...

I came to realize early on in my walk with the Lord that this was the mindset that He wanted all Christians to have.

Matthew 22:36-38 (NIV)

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

What I didn't immediately realize was...

- 1) What exactly it looked like to live this way.

2) How much joy would come from it.

Paul sheds much light on both of these in this passage.

What exactly does “to live is Christ” look like, practically speaking?

- At first I thought it must look like one of two things...
 - Selling everything you have and becoming a missionary
 - Selling everything you have and becoming a monk.
- I know longer see it this way. I believe that our lives can be all about Christ, while doing just about anything.
- The key to being all about Christ like Paul was lies not in what we do, but in how we *think*. Pay attention to Paul’s Christ-centered others-centered thinking as we read this passage again...

Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV)

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.

To “live is Christ” means you think about Christ and others before you think about yourself.

Though it was out of his control, Paul set his own desires aside for the sake of Christ and the Philippians. Explain.

Paul did this not only while in prison but throughout his lifetime as a believer, in whatever situation God placed him in. We can do the same.

The surprising joy of living for Christ

When I realized that God was calling me to live for Christ I thought my joy in life was over. I couldn’t have been more wrong.

Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV)

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There is great joy in knowing Jesus, and there is no greater joy than being used by God to pass your joy in Jesus onto others.

Philippians 4:1 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, *my joy* and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Nothing brings me greater joy in life than seeing someone's joy in Jesus Christ overflow on account of me.

Ex. One TWE couple said "Your passion for Christ (joy in Christ) is one of the big reasons why we keep coming and want to get more involved." Over the past few months I've seen their passion for and joy in Christ steadily increase. There's nothing better than that!

Conclusion – Get to know Jesus.

How did you answer the three questions we posed at the beginning?

- 1) What do you look forward to the most about going to Heaven?
- 2) Would you still want to spend eternity in Heaven if Jesus wasn't there?
- 3) For me, to live is _____?

If your answers didn't match up with Paul's I don't want to condemn you, I want to encourage you, *get to know Jesus*. If your answers to the three questions weren't the same as Paul's it's not because you are a worse person than he was, it's because you don't know Jesus like he did. *Take the time to get to know Him*.

Life is full of good things that distract us from the best thing, getting to know the Lord.

My story from yesterday morning.

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*