

Philippians 1:18-26 (The Christ-centered Life)

The sermon

Intro

Different people live for different things. Some live for recognition and fame, others for money and financial security. Some live for pleasure and entertainment, others for the absence of pain. Some live for relationships, others for things. Some live for retirement, others for the moment. Some live for busyness, others for leisure and rest.

What do you live for? If you were to take note all of the things you spend time doing, what would these things speak to the purpose to which you direct your life? Have you really sat down and analyzed your life and said, these are the things I am truly living for?

This morning we turn to Philippians to hear Paul's take on life.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Paul shares his confidence in God and his passion for God's glory.

Point 1: Be confident of divine enablement in times of trial (1:18-20)

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

Paul rejoices because he's confident of future deliverance. Paul believes that two things will help him in his present predicament (Roman imprisonment and ongoing trial):

- 1) The Philippians' prayers for Paul.
- 2) The Holy Spirit Jesus sent to the church at Pentecost.

But what will prayer and the indwelling Spirit deliver Paul from?

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.

When we think deliverance, we probably think delivered from prison. Set free. Not put to death. Acquitted. Or miraculously rescued from prison by angels like Peter in Acts 12:6-17. So deliverance might mean rescued from an undesirable situation.

The word translated "deliverance" is a common word for salvation. It's translated "salvation" in Philippians 1:28 and 2:12 ("work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"). So deliverance might mean I will be saved in the end. Whether I'm executed or not, I'll wind up in the kingdom of God with an imperishable, immortal body.

What do Paul's surrounding comments indicate? It's not deliverance from prison. Because Paul expects deliverance whether he lives or dies. Paul could die yet be delivered.

And Paul's comments on confidence and shame indicate something other than final salvation. What's Paul confident of? He won't be ashamed. Ashamed of what? Failure to honor Jesus. Paul is saying he's confident he won't fail Jesus under intense trial! Whether he lives or dies.

Sounds arrogant right? Sounds like it, but no. It isn't arrogance. Paul's confidence isn't in self. Paul's confidence is in the prayers of God's people. As they pray for God to strengthen Paul in intense trial, God will answer affirmatively by empowering Paul to endure by the Spirit of Christ that indwells Paul. That's confidence in God's ability, not confidence in Paul.

What's the difference between Peter who failed under pressure and Paul who did not? Peter was confident in his own strength, his own resolve, his own willpower. Paul was not. Paul knew that he was in deep need of divine empowerment! Paul knew something Peter hadn't realized yet.

What is mature Christianity? Coming to the end of our own strength. Seeing our own weakness if left to ourselves. Seeing the need for divine empowerment. Then through faith being confident in divine empowerment. **Trusting that God is able where we are unable.**

Paul depends on the prayers his partners provide. That's why missionaries court your prayers. It isn't lip service. Pray for myself and my fellow elders. That we'll be empowered to honor Christ, whatever the trial. Pray for one another. That you'll be empowered to honor Christ, whatever the trial.

Application

So what do we have here? Confidence that through the prayers of God's people and the indwelling Spirit that we can honor Jesus in each and every situation. Even the most unbearable situations.

- 1) Children dealing with a difficult sibling.
- 2) Children with learning difficulties that make math, reading, etc. hard.
- 3) Parents with challenging children in the home.
- 4) Parents with troubled, sinful adult children.
- 5) Those married to a person who still sins.
- 6) Those grieving the loss of a spouse.
- 7) Those dealing with bodily decline.
- 8) Those dealing with hard relationships.
- 9) Those struggling with selfishness, personal preference.

Was Paul tempted with self-preservation here?

Whatever your challenge, Philippians 1:18-20 says you can endure joyfully in a way that honors Jesus. Because of divine strengthening.

So there's three ways to live.

- 1) I can in my own strength. I don't need the Spirit.
- 2) I can't. The Spirit isn't able.
- 3) I can't in my own strength, but the Spirit is able.

The issue is our confidence in our salvation in Christ. Do I know what I have in Christ?

I know you aren't able. I know I'm not able. But is Jesus able? Is the Spirit able?

Point 2: To live is Christ (1:21-22, 24-25)

Paul says, *"For to me to live is Christ."* What does he mean? "For" explains 1:19-20. I want to honor Jesus because he is my life. Jesus is what matters to me.

- 1) *"Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death"* – 1:20

“to live is Christ” involves living intentionally to honor Jesus in whatever we think, feel, say, and do.

2) “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.” – 1:22

“to live is Christ” involves doing things that are fruitful. That’s intentionally choosing to spend our time and energy on things that are of spiritual value.

3) “But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.” – 1:24

“to live is Christ” involves working for the good of others.

4) “I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith” – 1:25

“to live is Christ” involves working for the spiritual progress of others.

So the picture here is a life that’s Christ-centered (his honor), others-centered (their spiritual well-being, progress), and spiritually-focused (things that are of spiritual value). Whatever we do, the highest end/goal is Jesus’ glory.

Application

Let me note one more thing. Paul is imprisoned and facing a death sentence. But he’s really positive about this life. Why? **Because he sees opportunity to honor Jesus as long as he lives. What’s this life for?** To honor Jesus is Paul’s answer. We can always be positive if we see our days as opportunity to honor Jesus. “To live is Christ” is a mindset: being alive is opportunity to honor Jesus. That’s what life is all about!

What does this look like? We exist to honor Jesus in every single aspect of our lives. Yes we do personal devotions to strengthen our spirits for service. Yes we can enjoy God’s creation and rest through leisure. Yes we are finite beings with service limits. But we all have various callings in life: child, parent, grandparent, spouse, friend, church member, employee, neighbor, etc. whereby we have opportunity to honor Jesus. Every trial, every relationship is an opportunity to honor Jesus. That’s how to view life.

We ask ourselves, how can I honor Jesus as a friend to this person? How can I honor Jesus in the way I minister to my grandchild? How can I honor Jesus in this local church? How can I honor Jesus in physical affliction? But there is a problem. **We need to know our Bibles well enough to know what to do.** To honor Jesus we need to be learners! We need to make progress.

Point 3: To die is gain (1:21, 23)

Paul says, “to die is gain.” Well, how is death gain? Paul gives two reasons here. First, the obvious.

1) Opportunity to suffer for Christ and bring Jesus honor.

It’s Paul’s “eager expectation and hope that... Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.” Death by Roman execution is gain because it’s occasion to honor Jesus.

Assuming we won’t be facing execution for our faith, when this body’s winding down we have final opportunity to honor Jesus in this life. That’s how Paul views life. That’s application. Paul’s focus isn’t escape. Paul’s focus is final opportunity to honor Jesus!

2) For the Christian death is the gateway to being in Jesus’ presence.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. – 1:23

Death is the pathway to blessing.

Intermediate State

What we have here is the doctrine of the intermediate state. When the believer dies our body stays in the ground but our soul/spirit goes to the presence of God in heaven. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, it's described as being "*away from the body and at home with the Lord.*" That's location.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lazarus experiences comfort in the intermediate state (Luke 16:25). That's experiencing God's comfort. Presumably we're comforted because of the pain we've experienced in this life.

In Revelation 6:10 "*the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne*" (6:9) cried out, "*O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*" That's conscious existence.

The intermediate state is conscious existence in the presence of God where we experience comfort as a disembodied soul.

Non-Christian

Death is comfort for God's people, but not for everyone. Paul's confident the people he's writing to have come into right relationship with God. They're people who've become aware of their sins, grasped the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death on the cross, and turned to God for pardon in Jesus' merits, not their own. Christians are people who see life as opportunity to honor Jesus.

Death is loss for those not in Christ. The intermediate state is described as torment and anguish for the non-Christian (Luke 16:6:23-25, 28).

Friend, consider your sin against God. Consider God's mercy in Christ.

Point 4: Live for one another's progress and joy in Christ (1:25-26)

Paul sees two positives: life and death. In both he can honor Jesus. In life he can serve the interests of the local church. In death he can be where Jesus is.

Paul shares his internal wrestling with competing desires. Sharing how he really wants to be with Jesus. Yet he desires the spiritual good of the Philippians.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, – 1:25

If Paul remains, he can continue to stir the Philippians to "*progress and joy in the faith.*" "The faith" is the gospel and all the doctrines attached to it (e.g., the intermediate state). We make progress in the gospel in that gospel characteristics become more true of our lives (e.g., humility, mercy to other sinners, passion for Jesus' glory, confidence in the Spirit's work not our own). We grow in joy in the gospel in that we delight more and more in God's mercy, Jesus' glory, and the Spirit's work of renewal in our hearts.

so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. – 1:26

If Paul remains alive, the Philippians will have opportunity to boast in Christ. Again, seems quite arrogant on first reading. It means something like if they see Paul in person again, it will be because the Jesus who will build his church without fail (Matt 16:18) and possesses "*all authority in heaven and on earth*" (Matt 28:18) has decided to rescue Paul. In which case Jesus would get the glory for the rescue, not Paul.

Paul expected this to be the case, but it wasn't to happen. Later in **2 Timothy 4:6**, Paul was resigned to death:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

Application

The thing I want you to see is that Paul believes it is better for the Philippians that he remain alive. Paul concludes, it's better for the church that I remain alive. I'd rather remain alive so that I can do you good. Not I want to escape hard relationships, financial struggles, joint pain, failing strength, less energy, a nation saddled with debt, and a culture increasingly opposed to biblical morality. Escape isn't in his thinking. **It's glorifying Jesus in whatever circumstance God provides. Yes this is radically counter-cultural, radically against our intuitive selfish interests!**

Do you want to remain alive for others?

Do you live for the spiritual progress of each one in this room?

Do you live so that others will have joy in Christ?

Confidence

Becoming Christ-centered is something we progress in. And confidence plays a part in progress. The degree to which we make progress in the Christian life is in some way dependent on the level of confidence we have in God's ability to change us. If we don't think change is possible, we won't work for progress. If we do think change is possible, we'll expect progress and work for it. Paul is confident prayers and the Spirit bring enablement.

Illustration

If you believe your medication is going to improve your quality of life, you might start to improve your diet and exercise and do physical therapy. Confidence in the medication leads to altered habits.

So it is with spiritual progress. Confident in the Spirit's renewal you increase your Bible reading, prayer, time with one another, use of edification opportunities in the church. You have reason to believe progress and joy is possible so you work for it.

Yes you can't root out every hint of selfishness or pride or ignorance much like a 70 year old can't root out every hint of joint pain, but you can make radical progress. A 70 year old through medication, surgery, diet, physical therapy, etc. can improve their quality of life. Same with a 30 or 50 year old.

Conclusion

As a local church we want to be increasingly conformed to Scripture and increasingly submissive to Jesus authority because we want to see Jesus honored in our midst and in the local community. That's "to live is Christ."

Be confident of divine enablement in times of trial.

To live is Christ. That's living for Jesus' glory.

To die is gain. For the believer death leads to comfort in Jesus' presence.

Live for one another's progress and joy in Christ. Glorify Jesus by living for the spiritual progress of others.