Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Joy in Spite of the Flesh
Scripture: Philippians 1:22-26
Code: 50-10

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 1, Philippians chapter 1, we're looking at verses 12 through 26, this wonderful paragraph that we've entitled, "The Joy of Ministry." It has taken us now four messages to get through the four main points of this passage and it has been a tremendous, tremendous enrichment to all of our hearts as we have looked deeply into the joy of ministry that Paul the Apostle experienced.

This morning we come to the last message in this section. We'll be looking at verses 22 through 26. Before I read that, let me just make some opening comments to you. Over a period of mornings at our house, we as a family at the breakfast table read through the biography of Adonirum(?) Judson(?). The title of that biography is Toward a Golden Shore. He was the first American missionary sent over seas, an unusual godly man. And though we never finished the biography we read enough to get the flavor and the heart of that man's life. Adonirum Judson was a brave ambassador of Jesus Christ who went to a very hostile primitive and threatening country known then as Burma. Fourteen years after he had left Massachusetts as the first missionary sent from America, 14 years after he left and went to that treacherous land, all he had to show for it, 14 years of ministry, was the grave of his wife and the graves of all of his children. He was absolutely alone. He experienced imprisonments that were wretched, conditions that were very severe and life threatening. He contracted diseases of very dangerous nature. And yet he was faithful to remain. He never left, he never quit, he never checked out. He said, quote: "If I had not felt certain that every trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings," end quote.

In other words, he saw it as part of the sovereign plan of God. It would have been easy for him to have wanted to check out and go to heaven, to go to be with Christ, to go to be with all the people he loved who had gone on to be with the Lord, namely his wife and children. But that wasn't him. Although he longed to be with Christ and he longed for the fellowship of his beloved family, at the same time he longed to meet the needs of the Burmese people who were in pagan darkness. And so he prayed, prayed not that God would take his life but that God would make him live and not die until he had translated the entire Bible into the native language and until he had presided over a native church of at least 100 Christians. He pleaded with the Lord to let him live at least that long.

That great man had the spirit of Paul. That's the heart of Paul. On the one hand he longed to be with Christ. On the other hand, he longed to be useful to the church. On the one hand he wanted to be free from the pain of life and ministry and difficulty and suffering. On the other hand, he wanted to

advance the kingdom in this world. I would submit to you that all the great servants of God are caught at one point or another in that same dilemma. Because it is part of spiritual greatness to know Christ intimately, it is therefore part of spiritual greatness to long to be with Christ. Because it is part of spiritual greatness to be totally committed to the advancement of the kingdom, it is also part of spiritual greatness to want to stay here and see people won to the Savior and the church built up. So the great men and women of God live in that tension, in that dilemma.

It is intensified in the later years of ministry. When you're young and your ministry is ahead of you, the tension isn't very strong. You really...really don't feel fulfilled, you don't feel like you've filled out your purpose for existence, and so you have one compelling longing and that is to have a fulfilling ministry to glorify Christ, to build His church, to win the lost. And the dilemma is not that strong at the peak of your ministry because you can see the value of it. But when you come to the later years and most of the fulfillment of your ministry is in the past, and you have lived so long with Christ that you love Him more than you ever loved Him, and you have already so much of the heart of heaven within your heart that you feel its pull stronger and stronger and stronger, and you know that most of your life work here is done, then the dilemma becomes very real. On the one hand, you long to be with Christ whom you love more than ever. But on the other hand, you realize that you are more than ever qualified and skilled and experienced to assist the church and to build the kingdom and so you're caught in that tension.

That's where Paul is and that's where Adonirum Judson was. Paul is at the point here where he knows he's coming close to the end of his life. He realizes that most of his life work is in the past. The love of Christ is greater than it's ever been. The longing for heaven more intense. And yet he feels tremendously responsible for the church. It is in that tension that he writes in verse 22 these words, "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ for that is very much better. Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And convinced of this I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

Now Paul you recognize in those few verses is...is in the real strait, having a high wall on one side and a high wall on the other side and not knowing really how to relieve the pressure. He's waiting on the Lord to show him.

The key part of this passage that I want you to note goes back to verse 18. And this has been the theme of the whole section. He says, "In this I rejoice, yes and I will rejoice." Remember now, the Philippian church whom he loves deeply and who love him greatly, maybe they had a love bond greater than any other of the churches, they're concerned because they heard he was a prisoner. They're concerned about his welfare. They're concerned about his safety. They're concerned about

his ministry. He writes this letter back to them in effect to say, "Don't be concerned, I have joy." And he mentions his joy repeatedly in this epistle, over and over he mentions his joy. Chapter 1 verse 4, chapter 1 verse 18, chapter 2 verse 2, chapter 2 verse 17, chapter 2 verse 18, chapter 2 verse 28, verse 29, chapter 3 verse 1, chapter 4 verse 4, chapter 4 verse 10, all those references to joy as if to say, "Don't be concerned about me, I am rejoicing, I have joy and my joy is related to my ministry." Even though the circumstances were difficult, even though the trials were great, even though the circumstances were difficult, the trials were severe, he knew joy. He says, "I rejoice," verse 18, "and I will continue to rejoice. Don't worry about me."

And so, we capture in this paragraph from verse 12 to 26 the joy of ministry. And I pointed out to you that it is a joy in spite of, not a joy because of...a joy in spite of, not a joy because of.

Now first of all, remember our first point that we said he had joy in spite of trouble as long as the gospel advanced, back to verse 12 to 14. He says, "It doesn't matter to me," verse 12, "as long as my circumstances have turned out rather for the progress of the gospel. The circumstances are irrelevant, the progress of the gospel is the issue. And since my imprisonment has caused conversions in the Praetorian Guard and the testimony of Christ going everywhere else, and since it has emboldened the preachers of the church, it has therefore turned out for the progress of the gospel. Therefore my chains, my trouble do not steal my joy. They are irrelevant as long as the gospel progresses."

Secondly he said in verses 15 to 18, he rejoices in spite of detractors as long as Christ is preached. Some in verse 15 were jealous of him, envious of him, contentious. Verse 18 says they were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition. They didn't have pure motives. They wanted to add pain to Paul's already afflicted state. And what was his reaction to these jealous, envious preachers? Verse 18, "I rejoice, Christ is preached." So he said it is irrelevant to me what the critics say, it is irrelevant to me what men say about me, it is irrelevant to me that they are jealous and make false accusation, all I care about is Christ is preached. I have joy in the fact that he is preached in spite of detractors.

Thirdly, in spite of death as long as Christ is glorified. He says at the end of verse 20 that Christ shall be exalted in my body, is the issue, whether by life or by death. In fact, since living is Christ, dying is gain.

So the point he's making is this, my joy comes not in my circumstances, whether I have trouble, whether I have detractors, whether I die is of no consequence to me. What is of consequence is is the gospel advancing, is Christ being preached, is His name being glorified?

Now we come to the last of the four points. Paul rejoices in spite of being in the flesh as long as the church is helped or benefited. This is a tremendous statement. He rejoices in spite of being in the flesh, as long as the church is helped. He just said in verse 21, "Living is Christ and dying is gain."

He has confessed there that the best thing would be to die and go to be with the Lord. But he is willing nonetheless to remain in the flesh if it will benefit the church, if it will benefit the church. For now if that is what God wants, that's fine with him because...follow this thought...that's what he wants. It is not the desire of Paul against the desire of the Lord. It is not Paul's desire for heaven against the Lord's desire for him to stay, it is Paul's desire for both equally. There is no disparity here. The text is saying he has a tremendous desire to be with Christ, he has a tremendous desire to build the kingdom, advance the gospel, assist the church. So he himself has two strong desires. And I want to suggest to you this morning on several occasions as we go through the passage that those ought to be the two compelling desires of every believer: one, to be with Christ; two, to be fruitful in strengthening, building and advancing the church.

Now let's look at verse 22. "In spite of the fact that dying is gain," he says, "but if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me and I do not know which to choose." Now that phrase "if I am to live on in the flesh" simply means if I'm to say in this world. Sometimes when Paul refers to being in the flesh he has being sinful in mind...such as Romans 8:5, where being in the flesh is contrasted with being in the Spirit in the sense that one represents righteousness and one represents unrighteousness, one represents holiness, one represents sin. There are times when his reference to the flesh means sin. But there are also occasions when the phrase "in the flesh" means simply in your humanness, in this physical world. For example, in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 it is so used in verse 3, he says, "Though we walk in the flesh," well he doesn't mean walk in the flesh in the sense of sin, such as in Galatians 5, he means walk in the flesh in terms of human existence. "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh." In other words, you can't fight spiritual battles with physical weapons. So he's using "in the flesh" strictly in the sense of a physical life. We are living in the physical world, we are living physical life but our spiritual warfare is conducted with spiritual weapons.

Galatians 2:20 uses it in the same way. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh," he doesn't mean in sin, but in his humanness, "I live by faith in the Son of God." So he must mean there that he means...he must mean there human life, my human life I live by faith in the Son of God.

You have the same use of that phrase in 1 Peter chapter 4 where Peter says in verse 2, "Live the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for the lusts of men but the will of God." So you can live in the flesh to the will of God if you see the flesh as simply synonymous with your living in this human world.

So, Paul is saying, "If I am to live on in my humanness, if I'm to stay in this condition I'm in now, being human in the world, this will mean...I love that...this will mean fruitful labor for me." Now follow the thought. Being alive in this world was synonymous with fruitful labor. Fruitful work for Christ was synonymous with being alive in this world. He said it in verse 21, "For me to live is Christ." He is the center and circumference of my existence, nothing else matters to me but Christ...nothing else

matters to me but Christ. "Therefore, for me to be alive in this world is to be engaged in fruitful work for Christ." There's nothing else. So, if I am to stay in this world, he says, then all it means is that I will be given the privilege of work which produces fruit.

By the way, the word "work" here, or the word "labor...fruitful labor," ergonis used often by Paul to describe his ministry, to describe his missionary effort. It is used Epaphroditus in chapter 2 verse 30 and it speaks of the fact that he came close to death for the work of Christ. That word then does have a very...a very sacred sense when used in that way, it refers to spiritual work, work for the kingdom, work for the Lord. And he says, "If I live in this life, I'll work and it will be fruitful work." What is fruit? Spiritual results. He says to the Romans in chapter 1, "I want to come and have some fruit among you." What does he mean? Some converts. He talks about the first fruits of Achaia, the first people saved in Achaia. He talks about the fruit of righteousness in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 11. He talks about the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5, love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. The writer of Hebrews talks about the fruit of your lips which is praise to God. Righteous deeds, righteous acts, righteous words, righteous ministry, that's what he has in mind, winning people to Christ, bearing fruit, producing something that lasts that is in fact eternal. That's his heart's desire. He wants to bear fruit. And he says, "If I stay in the world, I'll work and bear fruit." He recognizes, now note this, that fruit comes from work, it comes from work. And if he is to stay, it is to produce.

Now listen, that's a strong desire. It is not desire over against duty, it is two strong desires. He wants to bear fruit for the Lord's glory, he wants to do that, that's what he says in verse 26, that your boasting may abound to Christ Jesus. He wants to bear fruit. He wants to see people saved who can then give glory to God. He wants to see the church strengthened so its evangelistic effort is more effective. That's a strong desire. It's reminiscent of Psalm 71, I don't know if you remember reading this in your readings through the Psalms but in Psalm 71, this is the testimony of an old man. And it says, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth," verse 17, "and I still declare Thy wondrous deeds and even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me until I declare Thy strength to this generation, Thy power to all who are to come." That's an old man saying, "Lord, I'm old but let me please stay long enough to declare Your strength and to declare Your power to all who are to come."

I think of the prayer of Hezekiah in Isaiah chapter 38, Hezekiah, king of Judah, prays to the Lord after his illness and his recovery, "I said in the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol, I am to be deprived of the rest of my years." In other words, am I going to die in the middle of my life? Then over in verse 18 he says, "Sheol can't thank you, death can't praise you, those who go down to the pit can't hope for your faithfulness, it is the living who gives thanks to Thee as I do today. A father tells his sons about Thy faithfulness."

In other words, "Lord, they can't hear me if I'm dead, they can't hear me if I'm in the grave, they can't hear me if I'm in the pit. My children won't know of Your faithfulness, leave me here until I have

preached the message. Leave me here until I have communicated who You are."

It's the same attitude that you find in Paul here. And he is simply saying, "Lord, I want to stay and I want to build Your church and I want to win people to Christ." That's a strong compelling desire for fruitful labor. So strong was that that he says at the end of verse 22, "I do not know which to choose. Living is Christ, dying is gain. And although dying is gain because I go into the presence of Christ whom I long to know personally, intimately, in an unhindered relationship, although that is gain to me, if I stay here I have fruitful labor and that is so much gain to me that I don't know what to choose." When he says "I do not know," gnorizo, he uses a word that is particularly Pauline, it's used 26 times in the New Testament, 18 times by Paul. It always means to reveal or make known, I can't reveal, I can't make known, "I cannot tell" would be a way to translate it. "I can't declare it...I don't know what to say about what I shall choose," future indicative. "I don't know what I will choose, I can't say what I will choose."

Why? Because it's in the Lord's hands...it's in the Lord's hands. But given the choice now, I can't make a choice, I can't choose. I can't choose heaven over earth. Do you ever feel that dilemma? There's something in me that longs to be in heaven, there's something in me that longs to be with Christ. That's a very strong desire. But there's something in me that longs to be here, to build the church, and win the lost, and bear fruit. And if the Lord said, "You have five minutes to choose," I would have a very difficult time choosing. But I would want to be sure that I was choosing for the right reasons. And the only reason that makes the choice hard is whether it's better to be in the presence of Christ and glorify Him there, or to be here and glorify Him here. That's an impossible choice. Most people can't make the choice based on those two things. Most people would say, "I want to stay." Why? "Well, we're getting a new house, we're going on a trip...I don't want to leave my kids," those are worthy thoughts but those are not the things that were in the heart of Paul, nor are they the real issue. Paul is saying, "Look, nothing really matters to me except to glorify Christ. And if I can glorify Him in glory, I shall be thrilled. And if I can glorify Him by fruitful labor, I shall be thrilled. And given the choice, I can't choose." But the dilemma is just those two issues...just those two issues. I don't know which, he says, I would choose.

He's like a...he's like a loving, devoted wife and mother whose husband has been away for a long time, many months and who sends for her and says, "Come and be with me," and he is the love of her life. She adores him. She is lonely. She has missed him. She has thrived on his letters. And she longs to be with him. And yet when she receives the invitation that she can come and be by his side, she is torn because she must leave her little children who need her so desperately and for whom she has such strong affection. A mother understands that. And that was something of the dilemma of Paul. To be with Christ the one he loved consummately and yet on the one hand, to be with the little children who needed him so desperately in the church, and he says I can't tell which I would choose, I don't know, I can't make a choice, I can't reveal to you what I shall take of these two options. If he was released from prison, his life on earth extended, he would work night and day to

glorify the Lord through the advancement of the kingdom and the church. And if he went to glory, he would spend forever and ever and ever celebrating the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he says in verse 23, "I'm hard pressed from both directions, I am hard pressed from both directions."

The verb is very vivid, sunechomai, it basically means to be hemmed in on both sides. I feel pressured on both sides. I don't know which way to move. The imagery is of a narrow road between two walls and you're trapped, and you can't move. There's no way, you're immobilized. On the one hand you want to help the church, you want to have fruitful labor to the glory of God, to the advancement of His name. And yet, verse 23, having the desire to depart. Stop at that point.

I have the desire to depart. It's not...it's not a good desire and a bad desire. It's two good ones. It's not a strong desire and a weak desire overruled by God, it's two equally strong desires and if you ask him which one he's choose, he'd say, "I don't know. I can't choose one over the other." What a wonderful dilemma, a man so in love with Jesus Christ and yet so committed to the loving of the church of Christ and the advancement of that church in the world that he can't even choose which way to go. That's a devoted man. That is a tension that every true great saint of God should experience...the longing to be with Christ because you love Him so much and the longing to serve His church because you love it so much. That's the tension. It isn't a bad choice and a good choice. It isn't like the situation back in 2 Samuel 24:14 where David says, "I'm in great distress, let's now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but don't let us fall into the hand of man." It's not a good choice against a bad choice, it's not that distress, it's two equally strong desires.

So he says in verse 23, "Having the desire to depart," epithumia, often used of a lustful desire for sin, most often. But sometimes like here for a strong unfulfilled desire for something that is right. I have this compelling and unfulfilled desire to depart...to depart.

Now that word "depart" is a fascinating word, analusi. Let me tell you where that word comes from. Depart is a good translation. Paul uses it of his death in 2 Timothy 4:6, the time of my departure is at hand. He uses it in 2 Corinthians 5:8 where he says essentially the same thing, he wants to know...the reader to know that absence from the body is to be at home with the Lord, and that's what he prefers...to depart the body to be in the Lord's presence.

So it is a term that is used to refer to death. But let me give you a little background of this term analusi. It had some fascinating usages. It was used, for example, of taking down a tent, breaking camp. And there's a sense in which Paul is saying, "I'd like to break camp and move on to the eternal house, I'm tired of living in a tent." He says that in 2 Corinthians 5, "I'll be so glad when I get out of the tent of this body, I want to leave this tent." He wants to break camp and move to a new place, leave the tent that he's been in and live in the Father's house. It was used by sailors of putting a ship in the water that had been up in dry dock and letting it set sail on the sea. And he's saying, in effect, "I'm tired of being in the dock, I want to sail to the golden shore that God has prepared for me." It's

reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's great poem, some of you may remember it, about the ship that's sitting up in the dock, was nothing but a lump of rivets and iron, but and after it was loosed, it glided into the ocean and it put up its sails and the wind began to scream through the sails and carry it smoothly gliding across the breakers out into the open sea. Then, says Kipling, its potential was maximized and then it realized what it was to be, a ship. And I know in the heart of the believer, we will never realize what we really are for it doth not yet appear what we shall be until we set sail from this world and glide into the shores of eternity. Then we'll know what we really were recreated in Christ to be. Paul longed for that departure.

The word was used of freeing a prisoner from chains and bars. The word was used of unloading an animal of its heavy burden. The word was used of solving a problem. And there's some of all of that bound up in that word. He could take down his temporary tent in the world and live in the permanent room in the Father's house. He could be loosed from the moorings of earth to set sail on the sea of a glorious eternity and be the ship he was made to be. He could be freed from the prison of the flesh, death would be the exodus of the imprisoned spirit into the freedom of eternal perfection, the true excellence of the soul. He could unload all his burdens, carried so nobly but painfully through life, and he could instantly have solved all problems in the fullness of a perfect knowledge in a problem-free eternity. For all of those reasons, he could see his departure as a welcome thing.

But the surpassing issue is none of those. Look at verse 23, "Having the desire to depart and be with Christ." That's it. Small considerations were his place in the Father's house, his potential being reached, his freedom from earth's chains, his unloading of burdens, his solving problems forever, small considerations. The major issue was he wanted to go and be with Christ because he loved Him so deeply, so profoundly. His desire was not like the Greeks, he didn't have this ephemeral desire for immortality of the soul, he just wanted to be with Jesus Christ. That's the issue...personal, intimate, complete, unhindered, conscious fellowship with Christ. That shows you the maturity of his heart. No question, mature man.

Now there's a tremendous lesson here that I need to give you very briefly. This is one of the great verses in the Scripture that teaches that when you leave this world you are immediately in the presence of Christ. There is no such thing as soul sleep. There is no such thing as a waiting place. The Bible nowhere refers to anything remotely related to purgatory. Paul says, look at it verse 23, "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ." And that is what happens when you depart. You depart to be with Christ. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen being crushed beneath the bloody stones of those who were killing him for his faith in Christ and his preaching, it says they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord, and this is what he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my...what?...spirit." Now follow, "And falling on his knees he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And having said this he fell asleep."

You say, "Well now wait a minute. Is that contradictory? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit and he fell asleep? Did he fall into a state of unconsciousness?" Listen very carefully. His spirit was alive and Jesus received it into His intimate presence. His body went into sleep. From a human viewpoint, his body went to sleep.

You say, "Well why doesn't the Bible just say it was dead?" Because some day it will be...what?...raised again. And so the state in the present is temporary, and the writers of the New Testament frequently choose to call it sleep. His body slept until the day of resurrection, his spirit was instantaneously in the presence of Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit while my body sleeps. And that's what the eternal resurrection will be when Jesus comes and raises our bodies to join our already rejoicing spirits in His presence.

Second Corinthians, same thing, chapter 5 verse 6, "Now therefore be of good courage, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord," in one sense. And so he says, verse 8, "We prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." We are absent from the body, we leave the body, the body sleeps, the spirit is with the Lord at home. That is what the Bible teaches. That when a saint dies, a believer dies, the spirit immediately is received by Jesus Christ, immediately at home with the Lord, immediately with Christ, the body sleeps until the resurrection.

First Thessalonians 5:10 sums it up beautifully. Paul here says, "The Lord Jesus Christ died for us...listen to this...that whether we are awake or asleep," that is whether we are physically in the body alive, that's what awake means, or physically our body is dead, asleep, "We may live together with Him." The point is this, whether you are alive in this world or whether you are not alive in this world, you are living together with him. You are in His presence now, you will be in His presence the moment you die...whether you are awake in this life, or asleep from this life viewpoint, your body is dead, you live together with Him. There is no time...mark it...no time in the life of a believer when he will ever or she will ever be out of the conscious presence of Jesus Christ...never. We're in His presence now when we're awake, we'll be in His presence then when our body is asleep, because the soul shall never die and always in the conscious presence of Christ. Oh what a great, great reality.

Job said it and Job lived in the patriarchal period before even the law was given and Job said, "The worms consume my body, yet in my flesh I will see God." I will see God. I'm not going into oblivion, I'm going to see God. He did not yet have the fullness of revelation that we have.

So Paul says, back to our verse, in verse 23 he says, "I'm hard pressed. I have this strong compelling and unfulfilled desire to be loosed, to be with Christ." Then he says, "For that is very much better." And he does something very unusual in the New Testament, he gives us a triple comparative. It would have been enough for him to say, "that is better." It would have been enough for him to say, "that is much better." It is more than enough to say, "that is very much better." A triple

comparative. It is so far beyond anything in this life. It is far better. It is very far better for me to be with Him.

Yet, verse 24, "Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." Now you want to see a spiritual man, where your needs and his needs create equal desires. Did you get that? The desire personally on his part is to be with Christ, that's far better, that's much better, that's very much better for him. But for you, it's better that he stay. And his desire for you is as great as his desire for him, so he can't choose. Now that is a godly man whose personal desire does not surpass his desire for you. And that's why he can say in chapter 4, "Look not each man on his own things but on the things of others, and consider others better than yourselves." See. "Do nothing from selfishness," chapter 2 verse 3. Here is an utterly selfless man, consumed with a driving passion personally to be with Christ, consumed with a driving passion to meet the needs of the church, no more moved to a decision by his own desire than he is...his own desire for himself than he is for his desire for someone else. What a man...what a godly model. That's true humility. That is a servant's heart. He is compelled by both equally to the degree that he says in verse 22, "I cannot tell you what I will choose. I don't know. I can't make a choice."

So, verse 24, "To remain on the flesh is more necessary for your sake...more necessary for your sake." The church needed him. It needed him. The Philippians needed him. They had problems. There aren't a lot of problems identified specifically in this letter, obviously they had some problems. Chapter 2, the first few verses, they needed to learn humility. Chapter 3, they needed to be in verse 2, beware of the dogs and the evil workers and the false circumcision. Chapter 4, there were some women, verses 1 and 2, who needed to learn how to live in harmony. They needed to learn to rejoice. They needed to learn to be content in whatever state they were in. They had some things they needed to learn. If they were going to have an impact on the world, if they were going to win people to Christ, they needed some strengthening. They needed some instruction. They needed some leadership. And they were one of many churches that Paul felt needed him. So he is saying it's more necessary for you that I stay. And there are only two things in my life, only two, Christ and His church, that's all...Christ and His church. Given my choice, I'd rather be with Him for my sake. Given my choice, I'd rather be with you for your sake. That is the dilemma of a godly servant and that was Paul's dilemma.

May I say again to you, that ought to be our dilemma? We should be caught in a dilemma, not in the infantile immaturity of the dilemma between Christ and career, Christ and money, Christ and prestige, Christ and power, Christ and fame, Christ and success, Christ and the world, Christ and our vacation, Christ and whatever. But the dilemma that we ought to be caught in is the one Paul was caught in, Christ and the church. Are we so consumed with love for Christ that the deepest longing of our heart is to be with Him? But on the other hand, so consumed with the love of His church and the need of His church that the heart's desire is also to be with them? And do we live in that tension and no other tension? I daresay few Christians do. Most Christians are caught between Christ and this and Christ

and that and Christ and the other thing or the church and this and the church and that. And the decision is whether I give my money to the church or to some non-spiritual enterprise, activity or whatever. We don't really understand this tremendous spiritual depth being illustrated by this man...profound spiritual commitment in his life. It's little wonder that the Spirit of God used him to write as much of the New Testament as he did, there's nothing like this man, remarkable...remarkable. He is caught between two things, this tremendous love for Christ which is stronger than it's ever been in his life because he's walked with Christ so long, and this passionate love for the church. And those two things are the things that control his life, nothing else matters...nothing else matters, nothing matters but those two things. And he can't choose one over the other. So he leaves it with the Lord.

Verse 25, he shows us that he has a strong feeling about what's going to happen. "And convinced of this" could be translated, "Being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith." Now I think this expresses a personal conviction. Some think he may have received a revelation that he was going to be able to stay. I don't see that because he doesn't say that. I don't want to assume that having been given a revelation from God about something this important, he wouldn't have brought it up because it would have solved the dilemma in the minds of everybody about whether he was going to lose his life. Because after all, he was a prisoner waiting for sentence. He could have alleviated everybody's pain if he'd have said, "You know, the Lord told me I'm not going to die, so don't worry about it." The fact that he doesn't say that and that he just says, "I am convinced of this...I know that I shall remain and continue," seems to me to have been a Holy Spirit generated strong compulsion, something inside, he just felt a strong personal conviction, rather than a supernatural revelation such as he got in Acts 27:21 to 26 when he was told by an angel of the Lord that the ship wouldn't sink and all their lives would be saved. I don't think it's that. I think it's this strong absolute assurance based upon his calling, based upon his assessment of the needs of the church and based upon what he feels the Spirit of God is prompting in his heart.

So he says, "I'm convinced, I know that I shall menoand parameno." A little play on words. I will remain, and the second verb means remain alongside you. I will remain for the purpose of coming alongside you all. Why? "For your progress, your spiritual growth, and joy in the faith." It's so wonderful. He throws that word "joy" in there. It's really on his heart, that word. He says it's your progress, prokopeis a word that means to sort of blaze a trail for an army. He says I know I'm going to remain to blaze the trail so that you as the Christian army can march to victory. I know God's going to let me do that. And also, for your progress and also for your joy...for your progress and also for your joy. Isn't that wonderful? That joy goes along as a partner with spiritual growth, advancing faith is accompanied by increasing joy. The more you grow in Christ, the more joy you experience.

And so, Paul says, "Look, my personal conviction and assurance is that I will remain and remain alongside you all for your spiritual progress and accompanying joy in the faith, that is in your

Christianity." The faith, simply a reference to their Christian faith, their relationship to God, the substance of the fact that they were God's children and they belonged to His church. I know I'm going to stay, he says, for your progress and joy.

And then he gives a purpose in verse 26, the reason. "So that," this is hinawith a subjunctive, means a purpose clause, "So that your rejoicing or your boasting or your exalting or your glorying or your...as the NAS says...proud confidence in a good sense, your proud confidence." And the Greek reads this way, "In order that your proud confidence may abound, first of all, in Christ Jesus in me." You will notice the NAS puts "in me" before "in Christ Jesus." The Greek does not do that. And I think that order is very important. It would sound like, "So your proud confidence in me may abound." Paul would never say that, that he wanted them to boast in him. The Greek says, "That your proud confidence may abound in Christ Jesus in me." It's not a bounding in me, and it's not a bounding in Christ Jesus detached, when I come and minister to you and I come alongside you and you grow and your joy increases, your proud confidence will abound in Christ Jesus who is working in me. That's the point. Through my coming to you again...through my coming to you again, you will glorify Christ, your proud confidence in Christ will abound. The word means overflow. When I come to you and you grow spiritually and your joy increases, your proud confidence will overflow to Christ who is working in me in my coming to you. He gives all the credit to Christ, all the glory to Christ. Their boasting is in Christ Jesus who dwells in and ministers through Paul...not in Paul, not in Paul.

Philippians 3:3, he says, "We are the true circumcision to worship the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." No confidence in the...then Paul says, "I don't have any confidence in my flesh, I could," he says in chapter 3, "I was circumcised the eighth day the nation of Israel," so forth and so forth and so on. "I count all that manure. I don't want any confidence in me, it's in Christ Jesus in me, working through me in my ministry to you."

So what is he saying in verses 22 to 26? He's saying simply this. "Look, I'm not concerned about staying on in the flesh, I want to do that. Sure I want to be with Christ, but equally I want to be here. And I will be rejoicing in spite of being in the flesh as long as the church is helped and through strengthening the church," he says, verse 26, "you will glorify Christ Jesus." That's the real reason he lived. It's fine to go to heaven and glorify Christ, but I can stay here and strengthen the church so the church glorifies Christ, I've accomplished the same thing either way. That's why I can't choose. What a man...what a man.

"I rejoice, I don't really care whether I'm in chains. I don't care whether I have detractors. I don't really care whether I die. I don't really care whether I live. All I care about is that the gospel advances, that Christ is preached, that His name is glorified and His church is helped. That's all I care about. And I can't even make a choice. I long to be with Christ because I love Him so much and I long to be with His church because I love it so much." That's his dilemma.

What happened? The fact is, he was released so his...his assurance was justified. He was released. He was probably released around 63 A.D., probably before the burning of Rome in 64 or he would not have been released. So we assume about 63 A.D. He was imprisoned again and beheaded in either 65, 66 or 67. Which means he lived two, three or four years before his final death. And in those two, three, and four years, he helped the church...he helped the church.

A possible sequence follows him in this little pattern. This will kind of fill in the blanks a little bit. Immediately after his release, it appears that he was to send Timothy to Philippi with the news, according to chapter 2 verses 19 to 23. His desire after his release was to send Timothy to Philippi and tell them, "I've been released." Immediately after that apparently he started on a journey to Asia Minor and on the way to Asia Minor he left Titus on the island of Crete to establish the churches and their leaders, according to Titus 1:5. He then arrived at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Traveled through Ephesus on to Colossae as he had referred to in Philemon 22 and then returned back to Ephesus.

Coming back to Ephesus he met Timothy there who had brought him news from Philippi, where Timothy had been. When Timothy and Paul met at Ephesus, Paul cleaned out the two worst leaders in the church, Hymenaeus and Alexander, and then left Timothy there to set the rest of the church in order and gave him instruction regarding that in the first epistle to Timothy. He went on to Macedonia as he had planned, according to Philippians 2:24 and 1 Timothy 1:3, and hoped to return back to Ephesus, but in the mean time wanted Timothy to strengthen things out as he said in 1 Timothy 3:14 and 15. So it was from Macedonia that he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. And in the letter to Titus he asked that dear servant to meet him at Nicopolis.

So he traveled to Nicopolis, which is on the east coast of the Ionian Sea, and spent the winter there with Titus, according to Titus 3:12. He then left for Asia Minor, left Trophimus sick at Miletus, according to 2 Timothy 4:20, perhaps had a meeting with and tearful separation from Timothy for the last time, 2 Timothy 1:4. He went to Troas to visit Carpus at whose house he must have left his cloak, as indicated in 2 Timothy 4:13. Some say he was arrested there and taken to Rome again, we don't know but he was arrested, taken to Rome, second imprisonment, very brief, very severe, only Luke was with him. Demas forsook him. So did all the rest of his friends, according to 2 Timothy 4. He urged Timothy to come to him, 2 Timothy 4. He was staring death in the face. He was soon beheaded, we don't know whether Timothy and Mark ever got there before he died.

So God gave him a few more years and a fruitful ministry. The man lived for Christ...consummately lived for Christ. The only dilemma of his life, whether to live or die. To die was to be with Christ, to live was to serve Christ. That's all that matters. It doesn't matter what trouble we're in. It doesn't matter what detractors we have. It doesn't matter whether we are faced with death. Doesn't matter whether we stay in the flesh and live on. It only matters that Christ is preached, that Christ is exalted, that Christ is honored, that the church is built. Paul sets that pattern for us. And may his example be

our goal as we grow in Christ. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, this morning again for speaking to us out of Your precious Word. And may the example of this great man of God become our standard. And may we so live to be in the same dilemma where nothing matters but that we love You deeply and we love Your church and we live for both, so deeply longing to be with You that it affects our life here in the fact that we walk according to what we know would be Your will and what would demonstrate that love. And on the other hand, so committed to loving Your church that we give our lives in service to it. Help us not to look on the physical areas of life but only to see Christ exalted, Christ proclaimed, Christ honored, His gospel preached, His kingdom advanced. May we live for that. Confirm to our hearts this word and may Your Spirit force it through us until it changes the way we live. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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