

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

Joy in Spite of Death

Scripture: Philippians 1:19-21

Code: 50-9

As we come to the study of God's Word this morning, I-- before we get into it--want to share with you a wonderful experience I had this week. I met this week a gentleman who will fit into my rather short list of the most unforgettable people I have ever met. I had about three or four days to spend with him off and on because we kept intersecting one another and at some times we spent hours together talking. He's a fascinating man who reminded me again of the power of the Word of God. His name is Ezekiel and that's a great start. Ezekiel is a man in his sixties, a man who for many many years was one of the greatest generals in the Israeli army, who can tell you tale after tale after tale of battles and victories that he won with his troops that have no explanation other than divine intervention. He was one of the master strategists in the history of Israel. He is a true Israelite in the sense of geography and heritage. His family lived in the land of Israel before it was the state of Israel. In fact, his family goes back to the time of the Ottoman Turks before the British occupation. So he is truly a man of the land. He is of genius capacity intellectually, being the chess champion of Israel who has competed internationally and is renown for his ability. He is what is called a Grand Master in Bridge and has won all over the world defeating most of the world's teams with the team which he leads.

When he retired from military service in Israel after being very successful and very eminent as a strategist, he went into business for himself. And in a matter of a few years because of his abilities and his contacts he became a multi-millionaire. And it wasn't very long before he was making so much money that he had plenty of time and plenty of money on his hands and he became a compulsive gambler. And so he traveled all over the world, everywhere from Atlantic City to Las Vegas to Monte Carlo to you name it. Where there was gambling, he was there, gambling huge amounts of money up to the losses of one million dollars in a given year.

Finally he was about ten months ago struck with a heart attack, no I guess a little longer than that, struck with a heart attack and almost died. And while he was in the hospital his wife said to him, "This has got to stop. I'm not going to live with this anymore, this running around wasting money and being gone all the time. And I don't want you to do it and now you've had a heart attack and you've got to stop this and settle down." She said, "If you do it again, I'll leave you." And so in good faith to her he put all of his assets in her name to protect himself from himself. And no sooner was he over his heart attack then his compulsion dictated to him what he would do. So he took off again to gamble at which point she divorced him. And so he came to Atlantic City, his wife divorced him and now had possession of everything which was in her name and all he had was what he had in his pocket which he proceeded to lose in gambling in Atlantic City.

With just a few thousand left in his pocket and destitute now and realizing that he had lost his marriage and that he had lost his dignity and he had no reason to live, he decided to go to the twenty-second floor of Trump Towers and dive out. He planned the whole suicide. And on the way from his hotel room to the top of the building to jump out, he got sick. And he told me, interestingly enough, he got too sick to kill himself, which I thought was pretty curious. And he went back to his room, he was too sick to jump. And he went back to his room and he began to spit up blood and so he called the house doctor and they determined that he had pneumonia, rushed him to the hospital. On the way somebody rolled him and took all his money. And he got to the hospital with no money. They let him stay for about a week until he was cured of pneumonia. And upon his release, all he had in his pocket was a ticket to Israel 17 days later...no wallet, no identification, no money, no nothing. He said, "Where am I going to go?" And they suggested the Atlantic City Rescue Mission.

So this great Israeli general, this great genius, this chess champion, Grand Master Bridge player, wealthy entrepreneur, world jet setter landed at the Atlantic City Rescue Mission. For 15 years of his military life he had studied the Old Testament with a fine tooth comb because he wanted to be the master of all the military strategy of the Old Testament so that he could apply it in the contemporary battles in which Israel fought. So he became a master of Old Testament data. Since the age of six he had systematically memorized the Old Testament so he knew it all from beginning to end.

He went into that rescue mission with nothing but the clothes on his back and a ticket to Israel 17 days later, figuring he would stay there as nothing more than an indigent until he could get on his plane and leave. The first day he was there another person staying there came up to him and said, "You look Jewish." He said, "I am." He said, "Here's a Bible, read Matthew." He said having nothing else to do he sat down and read Matthew twice. At the end of the second reading, he knew Jesus was the Messiah and embraced Him as his Savior.

Two readings of the gospel of Matthew. He said to me, he said, "When I finished the second reading of Matthew, I totally understood the whole Old Testament, I understood every bit of it." And he said, "I want to tell you, Jesus is on every page, every page." And he said to me, "In fact, Jesus is Jehovah. And Jesus is Elohim. And the lights were going on." That was nine months ago. He still hasn't used the ticket. He is still here. He has nowhere to go. He has no home. He is still here studying the Bible eight to ten hours a day. And now he's beginning to understand the New Testament. He said, "I understand the New...I understand everything Paul said, I understand everything Jesus confronted. I know all about the Pharisees. I understand that I was raised in Pharisaic Judaism." He says the whole Bible has come alive to me from cover to cover. And we sat by the hour and discussed the Word of God. And he had a Hebrew Old Testament and a Hebrew New Testament and we were going at it hour after hour after hour. And he said, "All I want to do the rest of my life is study the Bible...study the Bible and tell my people about the Bible." He said, "I'm going back to Israel. I'm going to buy a yamalka because you can't teach the law without a yamalka.

I'm going to put on a yamalka and I'm going to teach the Bible."

Incredible mind. In fact, he is overwhelming with his insight in Scripture because his culture is so totally so Old Testament orientation that everything makes sense to him. And I walked away from that thrilled again at the power of the Word of God. And I thought to myself, "How do you approach a genius Jewish gambling entrepreneurial military general? What approach do you use? How about saying, 'Read Matthew?'" What a powerful simplicity there is in that.

Hezzy(?), as he likes to be called, that's his nickname, Hezzy and I have become friends. He wants to come here and meet you. Some day I think he will, if the Lord gives him life. He has angina. But again I was reminded of the power of the Word of God.

Now having made that justification, I will preach from it, Philippians chapter 1. Let's open our Bibles together with the confidence, the confidence in our hearts that the Word of God is alive and...what?...powerful, alive and powerful.

Now as we come to Philippians 1, we are looking at the paragraph from verses 12 through 26. That is one paragraph that we have entitled "The Joy of Ministry...The Joy of Ministry." Now I doubt frankly whether any servant of God had more sorrow than Paul. In fact, any of us who read the New Testament are struck with the fact that things basically seem to go so badly for Paul. In Acts chapter 9 he's saved. But before you get out of chapter 9 the Jews are already plotting to kill him and he has to escape with his life. He then turns to the church at Jerusalem and they reject him as well. In the very chapter where he is saved, he is rejected by the unsaved and rejected by the church. When he goes on his first missionary tour to preach, jealous Jews publicly contradict him and accuse him of blasphemy. They stir up mobs against him. They stone him and leave him for dead. That's the way it was. That was only the beginning.

In his letter to the Corinthians he recites in that second letter a little of the things that he endured. He said, "I am in far more labors and far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure, apart from such external things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." That's a lot of sorrow. That's a lot of anxiety. And in his ministry he was forsaken by friends. He said, "All in Asia have turned away from me." He said, "Only Timothy understands my heart and he's the only one I can send to represent myself."

The churches he invested a great portion of his life in fell into sin, sometimes gross sin and erroneous theology. He had reason to be sad. To say nothing of the continual sorrow and heaviness of heart that he expressed in Romans 9 over the lostness of his people Israel. He sorrowed and was sad because of his lost nation. He had the sadness of unrequited pastoral love. He had the disappointment of defecting people into whom he had poured his life. He had the hostility of an ungodly world and the threats against him and the pain and the agony of bodily injury. He ended up in prison four times, at least. Once in Jerusalem, once in Caesarea, twice in Rome, and must have been in the habit of going into a city and not asking about the hotel but saying, "What's the jail like? I'll end up there sooner or later." He was also in the Philippian jail which adds another time, though that was a rather brief incarceration.

But in spite of all of that he never lost his joy. And that's the amazing thing. He then becomes to us the classic picture of joy in ministry. And he summed it up in a beautiful little phrase, a comparative phrase among many, in 2 Corinthians 6:10 where he says, "Sorrowing yet always rejoicing...sorrowing yet always rejoicing." He never lost his joy no matter how sorrowful his circumstances might have been. In a sense, and follow this thought, the worst the circumstances, the greater the joy because as your circumstances begin to collapse around you and become sorrowful or negative, it pushes you deeper into your trust, it pushes you deeper into the soil of your faith and you begin to extract your joy out of your relationship. And so what you wind up with is an unmixed joy. When everything is going well, you're happy go lucky, it's all the way you want it circumstantially. You're not pressed to dig deeply for the joy of faith, or the joy of relationship because you have certain happiness in your condition. But when your condition is negative and difficult and burdensome and troublesome and you have anxiety and all of those kinds of things, it presses you in to the joy of faith that is far deeper and more rich than the joy, the frivolous joy of experience.

So, in a very real sense the epitome of joy is reached when the circumstances are ultimately negative, because that throws you totally on the relationship, throws you totally on faith and you extract nothing out of circumstances. You know the pure joy of a living relationship with the living Christ. That's where Paul is. He is chained to a Roman soldier and will be during this imprisonment in Rome for about two years. He will know no privacy. The soldiers will exchange chains through...around the clock, through the weeks and months. And he will always be chained to a soldier. He's lost his freedom. It's an incarceration of...in some sense, very difficult proportions and yet he understands the joy of the Lord. The key to this section, verse 18, the second half of verse 18, "In this I rejoice, yes and I will rejoice." Now there we kind of unlock the issue here. Paul is talking about his joy.

Now what is it, and this is the question we're posing, what is it that produces joy? Or what is it that contributes to joy in ministry even though negative circumstances exist? He gives us insight.

First of all we said, and this is point one in your outline, we covered it several weeks ago, first of all we said that he has joy in spite of trouble as long as the gospel advances...as long as the gospel advances. Back in verse 12, "My circumstances have turned out rather for the progress of the gospel." In what sense? Verse 13, "Evangelistically, the whole Praetorian Guard and everybody else knows the gospel." Not only that, in terms of courage for the church, verse 14, "The brethren have more courage to speak the Word because they've seen what's happened to me and how God has used me even though I am a prisoner." So he's saying, now listen carefully, "I have joy in spite of trouble as long as the gospel advances." Now keep this in mind. If you live for the gospel, then that's what matters to you. And that's what Paul lived for.

Second point that he makes here, he has joy in spite of detractors...in spite of critics, in spite of those who out of jealousy, strife, and selfish ambition want to slander him, abuse him verbally, throw stones at him, add grief to his already grievous imprisonment. But he has joy in spite of detractors, he says, as long as Christ is preached. And down in verse 15 he says, "Some are preaching Christ from jealousy and strife and some are doing it," verse 17, "out of selfish ambition," but verse 18, "So what? Christ is preached and in this I rejoice." And so he says I have joy in ministry in spite of trouble, as long as the gospel advances, and in spite of detractors as long as Christ is preached.

Now we come to the third point for this morning. He has joy in spite of death as long as the Lord is glorified. He has joy in spite of death as long as the Lord is glorified. In fact, it really doesn't matter to him whether he lives or dies. Follow verse 14...verse 19 through 21. Verse 19 says, "For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that I shall not be put to shame in anything but that with all boldness Christ shall even now as always be exalted in my body whether by life or by death, for to me living is Christ and dying is gain."

Now what he is saying here is that in spite of death, as long as the Lord is glorified I rejoice and I will rejoice. You see, his joy was not related to his circumstances. It didn't matter if he was in trouble. It didn't matter if he had his reputation attacked. It didn't even matter if he was killed. All that mattered was the gospel advances, Christ is preached, the Lord is magnified. That's all that mattered. That's what he lived for. His focus was all relative to the kingdom of God.

Now I would have to say at this particular point having read that passage that very few in the church today are so completely and selflessly sold out to Jesus Christ as Paul is, to the point where death is of no consequence, to the point where attacks against their reputation are of absolutely no consequence, to the point where trouble and struggle is of absolutely no consequence, and that is the case with Paul. He is a living illustration of everything embodied in the statement of Christ when he said, "Take up your cross and follow Me, and if you're not willing to do that, you're not worthy to be My disciple." Here was a man who was willing to bear the cross. Here was a man who couldn't care

less honestly what happened to him, what people said about him, or whether he lived or died. That is a tremendous level of spiritual commitment. In some ways I would guess practically unheard of today. We live in a materialistic self-centered day, a self-serving day, not a self-sacrificing day. People today live for a lot of things. They are not focused on one thing like Paul was, and so the message this morning speaks directly to a very deep need in our lives.

Now how is it that in verses 19 and 20 he can face death with joy? How is it that death can be so inconsequential to him? How is it that he can be confident that the Lord will be magnified in his death? What is it that allows him to face death with joy? Let me give you several things that he brings out, all right? I'll give you five of them...five things he is confident of and these five things help him face death without fear.

Number one, he is confident in the precepts of the Lord...the precepts of the Lord, or the Lord's Word, what the Lord has said. Verse 19, "For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance." Stop right there. Great statement. I know...why are you rejoicing? Because I know this, that this shall turn out for my deliverance. Now when he says, "For I know," oida, he is really asserting what to him is an absolute knowledge. I know this, it's unequivocal. I know this, this is the knowledge of satisfied conviction. I know, he says, that this, now what is this? The present circumstance...the present trouble, the chains, the detractors, the imprisonment, all of the difficulties, adversities in his life and ministry, the whole scenario, the whole thing he's going through. He says I know that this present trouble shall turn out, future tense, it's going that direction, shall turn out for my deliverance...for my deliverance. You say, "How do you know that?" Well because that was the promise of God. He had received it first hand, by the way, when he wrote down "All things work together for good to them that...what?...love God and are the called according to His purpose," Romans 8:28. He knew that principle. For I know, absolutely confident, that this, all this trouble, shall future turn out for my deliverance.

Now what does he mean by deliverance? The word here is soteria, which is the word for salvation. And some of your Bibles may say "for my salvation." Well what do you mean by that? Well, that word can be translated salvation, it can be translated deliverance, it can be translated well-being, it can be translated escape. What does it mean? Some say it means ultimate salvation. Some say he is simply saying, "I know that this present trouble is going to turn out for my eternal salvation, ultimately to be in the presence of the Lord, my soul salvation." He is confident that he will endure to the end and be fully finally saved and glorified in the day of Christ, the day he sees Christ. Some say no, it means his health, his well-being, his welfare, his benefit that I'm going to benefit from this that my well-being will be secured. Some say vindication. Some say it means vindication. Some commentators think he's saying that I'll be vindicated in court and that my trial when it reaches its second phase, the first phase had already been held when no one defended him and he's waiting for the second phase, namely the sentence, that he's saying it will all work out for my vindication at my sentencing. Others say it means his release from prison. Since the primary meaning is deliverance

from death that he's saying all of this that's going on is going to ultimately end up in my being released from prison.

Well, which of those is right? I would say that the truth is in all of those, and let me show you what I mean. It is in my judgment fair to include in one way or another the whole of all of those things which I mentioned to you in this sense. Paul believes, and here's the key thought, you need to get it, Paul believes that his current distress is only temporary. That's really what he's saying. It's temporary, that's the point. It isn't going to last. I will be delivered from it. Maybe I'll be vindicated at my second phase of the trial. Maybe I will be released from prison. Maybe I will go to heaven to be with Jesus Christ and therefore be delivered in the sense of ultimate salvation. Maybe my well-being will be at last the issue. I don't think he knows. But what he is saying is, "I do know that that what I'm going through now is temporary and the future holds my deliverance, whether it's vindication in court, release from prison, well-being, or eternal heaven, I'll be delivered out of this."

Why? How can you say I know this? How can you be so sure about this? This is fascinating. This statement that he makes, listen carefully, this statement that he makes "For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance" is a verbatim quote of Job 13:16, a verbatim quote of the Greek Old Testament, Job 13:16...word for word. Paul was a scholar in Scripture. And obviously identified his own problems and his own struggle with that of Job. He knew the story of Job, all the Jews know the story of Job. And he knew that Job was a righteous man and that God put Job the righteous man in a situation of suffering but Job knew because he knew God delivered the righteous that no matter what he went through God would deliver him out of it. Job knew that even to the point of death where he said, "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I...what?...see God." He knew that one way or another either temporally or eternally God would deliver him.

Why? Because God delivers the righteous. That's an Old Testament principle. Job knew it because it was the truth about God even before the Old Testament was written. Paul knew it and Paul is identifying with Job who is a righteous man going through very difficult times who also said "I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance." And Paul quotes Job because he takes security in the precepts of the Lord, the truth of the Word of God. He obviously viewed his present trouble like that of Job and since Job was a faithful righteous man, he was ultimately saved from his situation because God delivers the righteous, so Paul could quote the same thing..."I know that You will deliver me." Because He knew his heart, his conscience was clear. This wasn't the chastening of God or the punishment of God or the condemnation of God, so he is giving expression to the conviction that everything must work together for good to them that love God. And whether he was released from prison in this life, whether he was vindicated at his trial or whether it worked out for his physical well-being or whether he went to glory as a martyr, he would be delivered.

Personally I don't think you can isolate it to his release from prison because he says right here "Whether by life or death," so he didn't know that he was going to live. He wasn't sure whether he

would live or die, so he can't say I know this will turn out for my release from prison or he wouldn't have said, "Whether I live or die." He is simply saying God delivers the righteous, that's a great principle. Confident then in the precepts of the Lord.

You can read through the Psalms, "The Lord delivers the righteous...the Lord protects the righteous...the Lord saves the righteous," it's all over...all over.

And so we can rejoice in the face of death for the same reason, confident that if we face death because of righteousness like Peter said, we can count it joy. We can rejoice because God will deliver us. He may deliver us temporally, He may deliver us eternally, but He will deliver us. That's His Word's promise. And Job is a living illustration of it. And you remember, God did deliver Job temporally from his trouble and blessed him beyond description. So he was confident in the precepts of the Lord and he said, "I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance."

Secondly, he was confident in the prayers of the saints. He was confident in the prayers of the saints. He says, "Through your prayers," what a wonderful statement. Listen, he knew the Word of God would come to pass. He believed in the sovereignty of God. He believed in the eternal purposes of God laid down from before time began but he also knew that God effected His work and brought His purposes to pass in concert with the prayers of the saints. And so he says, "Through your prayers." One of the most wonderful truths of Scripture is that God works His purposes through the prayers of His people. And he says to the Philippians who loved him so dearly and to whom he was bonded in a very unique way, maybe unlike any other congregation as we pointed out earlier. He knew he had their prayers and he knew that the effectual fervent prayer of righteous men produces much fruit and has great effect and he knew that God working out His purpose through the faithful prayers of these people would bring his deliverance. He believed in prayer. He was confident in prayer. And he called people to pray on his behalf, in Romans 15:30, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." He says, "Please pray for me."

In Ephesians chapter 6 as he draws to a conclusion the passion on the armor, he says, "Pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains," Ephesians 6:18 and 19. Pray for me. And there are other places we don't have time to examine, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us." Beloved, he believed that God worked His purpose through the prayers of His people. And so he said this will work out for my deliverance, my joy is fixed, my joy is fixed, my joy is fixed in the face of trouble, in the face of detractors, in the face of death. Why, Paul? Because the Word says God vindicates the righteous and because the prayers of the saints are effective.

When I was back in those rallies this last week and the rally would end and we have thousands of people at those rallies and I would go into the back and I was there about an hour and a half to two

hours after the rally before I could even leave and I would wait until all these people came by and thousands of people that were there and hundreds of them would want to stay and talk to me. And invariably as they went by the common note that they would sound was "We pray for you...we pray for you...we pray for you." I found such great joy in that because I rejoice in the prayers of the saints because I know they shall turn out to be the source of God's working out His plan of my deliverance. I'm so thankful for that. I know the joy of the prayers of the saints. I rejoice when I come home, as I did yesterday, and spent the day here in the office going through notes and things and also studying for preparation for today, to be reading letter after letter that comes across the desk and says, "We're praying for you...we're praying for you...we're praying for you." That is not something I take lightly, that is something that has a profound impact on my joy.

So, Paul could face death as long as Christ was magnified. And he was confident of that because of the precepts of God and the prayers of the saints. Thirdly, he was confident of the provision of the Spirit. In verse 19, "And the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." I know this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and...implied...through the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And these are the three things that always work together...the Word, prayer and the Spirit, right? The Word, prayer and the Spirit. And they always work together for the benefit of the servants of God.

The provision of the Spirit, a wonderful statement, it means the provision given by the Spirit, not the provision which is the Spirit...although that certainly is true, I think the emphasis here is the provision which the Spirit gives. In other words, the Spirit will grant to me whatever is necessary to sustain me. The word "provision" by the way, epikourios(?) means help or supply. It can be translated bountiful supply here. It could be translated full supply. I like full resources, full resources. And the full resources of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that's the Holy Spirit, who is called here the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is called in Romans 8 and 9 the Spirit of Christ, so that's not an unfamiliar designation. The Spirit can either be the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ within the trinity. So he is confident that the Holy Spirit, his indwelling teacher, interceder, guide, source of power, will provide what he needs. Boy, what a tremendous confidence...tremendous confidence. The Spirit is the provider. Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "You'll receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you." In John 14 Jesus said, "I'll send you the helper, the comforter, and He'll give you everything that you need, He'll bring all the resources of God to you." That's right, He'll bring you all the resources of God. And the fruit of the Spirit is even listed in Galatians 5, "Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control," whatever you need He'll bring it to you. If you need power, He brings you power. He is the provider who brings the provision. And every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit and every Christian then has that resource, that provision. He knew what Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord."

So, Paul is confident in the presence of the Spirit. By the way, that's why everything works out together for good. In Romans 8:28 it says, "All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose." But in the verse before it says, "We know not what to pray

for as we ought so the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," and that's why everything works out together for good. That doesn't happen in a vacuum, that happens as a result of the provision of the Spirit of God, the supply of the Spirit of God, the intercession of the Spirit of God in an unutterable language between Himself and the Father.

So Paul says, "Look, I face death confident that the Lord will be magnified and my confidence rests in the Word which says God vindicates the righteous in the prayers of the saints which God promises to answer and in the provision of the Spirit which is resident within me." And that's why Ephesians 3:20 he says, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us," namely the resident Holy Spirit. Hey, he could face death because of these confidences.

Fourthly, he was confident in the promise of Christ...he was confident in the promise of Christ. This is really implicit here rather than explicit. But I think it's really what's in his heart. He says this, verse 20, "According to my earnest expectation and hope that I shall not be put to shame in anything but that with all boldness Christ shall even now as always be exalted in my body." What he is saying there is simply this, I'm confident in the promise of Christ that if I'm faithful to Him, He'll be exalted in me, that if I'm never ashamed of Him He'll never be ashamed of me, Mark 8:38. Jesus said, "If you confess Me before men I'll confess you before My Father, but if you're ashamed of Me before men, I'll be ashamed of you before My Father." And Paul is saying, "I have this earnest expectation and this hope that I will never be put to shame in anything, never. And I just move with all boldness so that Christ as always can be exalted in my body." He had this earnest expectation, this tremendous hope that he would never be shamed. He had no fear of being disappointed by Christ. He trusted His promise. He trusted that Christ would never fail him, that Christ would never forsake him, that Christ would never leave him, that Christ would never abandon him, that Christ would never let go of him. He trusted the words of Christ when he was converted, "You're a chosen vessel, you're a chosen vessel to represent Me." He knew the promise of Christ, to be with him, to strengthen him, to empower him, to serve through him. And so he says in verse 20, "My earnest expectations," a very graphic word, apokaradokia, the word kara means head, doki means to stretch, and the earnest expectation is to stretch your head, that's kind of the literal picture here, concentrated eagerness, intense fixed gaze, straining with the neck as far as you can. And then he adds the word hope and the English Bible translation..."Well my hope- filled eager anticipation." He says, "I live in this eager anticipation that I'll never be put to shame, I'll never be shamed, not before the world, not before the courts of Caesar, not before God because Christ will be exalted in my body, that's His promise to me. So with all boldness I go forward." That's why he's confident facing death. I'll never be ashamed. I'll never be put to shame.

And that is something we find in the Old Testament, too. I wish we had time to look at it. In the Psalms I found about six places in the Psalms where it talks about the fact that the righteous will never be put to shame. Isaiah 1:29, Isaiah 45:17, so many wonderful places, Isaiah 49:23, Isaiah 50

verse 7, Jeremiah 12:31, Zephaniah 3:11, those who belong to the Lord, those who are His own will never be shamed. What does he mean? Never be disappointed, never be disillusioned, never be disgraced, He'll never let it happen. Paul says, "I'll be as bold as I need to be, I don't care about death, I'll never be ashamed, the Lord will never shame me. He'll always uphold my case, He'll always uphold my cause, He'll always uphold my name." So here is a meek saint who trusts God never to let him be disgraced, never to let him be disappointed, never to let him be disillusioned, never to let him be shamed before his enemies, before the church, or before God. And those who trust the Lord will not be ashamed.

And he says, "This is...I know this is the promise of God," and I think he's reaching back to the promise of our Lord that those who are not ashamed of Him will never have Him be ashamed of them. In fact, in Isaiah 49:23 the Lord says this, "Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame," maybe he had that in mind, maybe he had that very verse in mind..."Those who hope or hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame," almost a parallel to that statement. He says, "I've got the Word of the Lord on this thing, I'll never be shamed so I'll preach and preach faithfully and not fear death." He never feared God because He knew God was on His side...never feared Him in the negative sense. He never feared man because what could man do to him? The promise of Christ belonged to him...the promise of Christ was his that he would never be shamed or disappointed or disillusioned. Listen to Romans 9:33, wonderful statement taken out of Isaiah again, "And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." Oh how wonderful and that's what he's saying.

So why do I fear death? I'll never be disappointed even in death. I will boldly go forward so that Christ can be exalted in my life. Nothing could happen to the faithful servant of God that would bring him ultimate shame. So he faces death and he faces death and it never affects his joy. He has joy in spite of death because he knows Christ will be magnified, because he knows the provision of the Spirit is there, because he knows the prayers of the saints are in his behalf and because he knows the Word of God has promised to him that God will deliver him. Christ, he says, even now in this very difficult experience, even now as always will be magnified in my body. That's why I live. No matter what the circumstances, Christ will be exalted in my body. What a tremendous commitment.

And then he adds this one phrase at the end of verse 20, "Whether by life or by death," and he introduces us to the fifth aspect of confidence. He is confident in the plan of God. He doesn't know what it is, it might be life, it might be death, but he's confident in it...whether by life or by death, I will boldly move on for God's plan is God's plan and I rejoice in it. Confident in the plan of God.

He's resigned to God's plan. He didn't know whether he was going to live, he didn't know whether he was going to die. In fact, if he had a choice he'd die, verse 23, he says, "I'm hard pressed, I really have a desire to depart and be with Christ for that's very much better. So if you really want to know what I'd like to do, I'd like to die." But, he says verse 24, "To remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake, so I know that I shall remain and continue with you for your progress and joy in the faith."

He says, "My feeling is the Lord's going to let me live cause you need me. But for the time being," he says, "I'd rather die if I had my choice, but whatever the plan is I leave it with Him."

By life, if I'm freed, he means, that's God's plan, I'll preach, I'll be bold, I'll build the church and I'll magnify Him in the process. And He'll be exalted in my body, in my person is what he means there. And if I die, if I'm killed, He'll still be exalted in my body for I will have died for His name, I will have died as a testimony to my unwavering faith, I will have died as a trophy of His grace and I will die to go and in glory forever and ever and ever exalt His name, so His name will be exalted every way you look at it, either way. So what he's saying is, "I don't really care if I live or die, I don't care at all. The issue with me is not my trouble, not my detractors, not my death, the issue with me is is the gospel advancing? Is Christ being preached? Is the Lord being magnified?" Tremendous, tremendous man with a tremendous spiritual commitment.

And he sums it up in this great statement in verse 21. This is the capstone, "For to me living is Christ and dying is gain." That's it. That is the *summa bonum* of his life, living is Christ, dying is gain. There aren't even any verbs in the Greek, living Christ, dying gain. I live only to serve Him, only to commune with Him, only to love Him. I have no concept of life other than that. Now follow this thought. He is saying I am totally wrapped up in Christ, loving Him, knowing Him, preaching Him, serving Him. Christ is the *raison d'être*, the reason for my being, the reason for my existence. He doesn't mean Christ is the source of his life, though He is. He doesn't mean Christ lives in him, though He does. He doesn't mean Christ controls him, though He does. He doesn't mean that Christ wants him to submit to Him, though He does. He simply means living is Christ. Life is summed up as Christ. I'm filled with Christ. I am occupied with Christ. I trust Christ, love Christ, hope in Christ, obey Christ, preach Christ, follow Christ, fellowship with Christ, Christ is the center circumference of my life, it's all Christ. Christ and Christ alone is my inspiration, my direction, my meaning, my purpose...consumed, dominated by Christ.

So if the gospel advances, I'm happy. If Christ is proclaimed, I'm happy. If the Lord is magnified in my body, I'm happy. Whether I live or die doesn't matter to me. In fact, give me the choice, I'd rather die. Dying is gain. What do you mean? Well, it relieves me from the burdens of this life and frees me to really glorify Him, which is what I live for and to fellowship with Him, which is what I long for. Living is Christ, dying is gain. His life is dominated by his love for Christ. His life is dominated by his devotion to Christ. This is a one-track man, folks. This is a focused man. It's an incredible thing that we see in the testimony of this man.

You see, it's why it didn't matter to him. Didn't matter to him whether he had trouble, didn't matter to him whether he had detractors, it didn't matter to him whether he died, the only thing that mattered to him was Christ. And if the gospel went forward and if Christ was preached, that's all that mattered. And if the Lord was magnified in his body in life, fine. If the Lord was magnified in his body in death, fine. If the Lord was served in life, fine. If the Lord was served in glory, fine. It didn't matter to him

because he was not an issue. He says in Acts 20, "None of these things move me." They were saying you're going to get in prison, you're going to have chains, "None of those things move me, they do not motivate me, they are not a consideration, I could care less, they are not a part of my thinking." The man has stripped out of his life every single thing but Christ, incredible, absolutely incredible. And yet that's where every Christian ought to be.

And he says, dying-gain...gain. Hamlet wanders around weighing the sorrow of life from which suicide would release him and in his soliloquy he says, "To be or not to be, that is the question." Paul's in the same position, to live or die that is the question, only Paul knows the answer, it doesn't matter. That's right, it doesn't matter. People say sometimes to me, "You know, be very careful, you know, so forth, what would happen..." Listen, if I live I live, if I die I die, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. All that matters is that Christ is honored, Christ is glorified, Christ is proclaimed, His kingdom advances, it doesn't matter. It's inconsequential. It has no bearing on anything, because if you live for Christ then whatever the plan is you're going to do the plan and if you really live for Christ, what you'd like most of all is to be with Him, right? To glorify Him. Nothing matters but that, absolutely nothing matters. And yet we fill our life with trivia, don't we? Just absolute trivia. Not Paul.

Let's personalize, okay? Look at the verse, verse 21, take out the word "Christ" and put a blank there. Now fill in the blank. "For to me living is blank..." Wealth? If living is wealth, then dying is what? Not gain but loss. If living is prestige then dying is loss. If living is fame, then dying is loss. If living is power, then dying is loss. If living is possessions, then dying is loss. If you're looking for prestige in the world, you lose it when you die, you're gone. If you're looking for fame, you lose it when you die, you're forgotten. If you're looking for power, you lose it when you die, you're lifeless in this world. If you're looking for possessions, they're all gone when you're dying, it's all over. The only thing you can put in there to make the last part make sense is Christ. If you put in that blank anything but Christ, the last word has to be loss. Okay? Only Christ makes dying gain...only Christ, otherwise it's loss.

Now you say, "Well, I...boy, I have Christ on my blank." But if you look carefully you probably have Christ plus wealth, Christ plus power, Christ plus possessions. For to me living is Christ, not plus anything else. If it's living is Christ plus possessions, then death is gain and loss. But if living is Christ then death is all gain. That's where Paul was. That's exactly where we ought to be. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, our hearts are rejoicing today as we are reminded by the Spirit of God of the testimony of this servant who knew how to live in the power of the Spirit in the way all of us long to live. Lord, we all long to be able to say, "For to me, emphatically, living is Christ, the center and the circumference and dying is gain." O Lord, we get so many things in the blank...education, knowledge, wisdom, power, possessions, fame, fun, entertainment...we sometimes crowd them in as if Christ could accommodate all of them. Help us to get where Paul was when he said living is Christ, dying is gain. Only one

reason to live, only one relationship that counts, everything else doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether we live, it doesn't matter whether we die, it only matters that Christ is exalted, Christ is magnified, that Christ's gospel is preached, that the kingdom advances, that's all that matters. And for us it would be better to be in His presence, but we..we are willing to be wherever You want us to be. Help us, Lord, to be able to say as emphatically as Paul said, "To me living is Christ, dying is gain."

And, Lord, to realize that the greatest fear in life with which most people continually deal is the fear of death. Lord, I remember the words of the general I met this week who said, "The strongest fear in a man is death, and he fears death far more than he fears his commander. And so if he has the fear of death no matter how the commander tells him to do things, he will run because he is compelled by the fear of death." Help us to know, Lord, that there is no reason to fear death for a Christian cause it's gain. Paul saw it as gain because it meant release from the pain of this life into the presence of the one who was his life. Help us, Lord, to live with that perspective. Father, help us in each heart and life today to apply the truth, may the Spirit of God work it into us that we might be different in Christ's name. Amen.

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