

Philippians 1:18b-26

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Philippians. Philippians chapter 1.! This is our fourth week in starting the book of Philippians.

Verse 28 through 31.

It's around 61 A.D. It's the end of his third missionary journey. And we, you know, again a long time ago when we were talking about what to preach on Sunday mornings, we, I think Philippians is just one hands down because it's been a really difficult year for many of us and we really needed to kind of anchor our soul on something that really talked about joy in Christ.

And Philippians is that book. And it's a rarity because it's a letter written to a local church that Paul cares deeply about.

And he's not necessarily calling to, writing them to correct them or rebuke them for anything. He is very, very well pleased with them. And so the mood of this letter is warm and affectionate.

[1 : 23] This type of ancient letter you would call a letter of friendship. And he celebrates this long-standing partnership with them in the gospel and the fellowship they have in Jesus Christ together.

And so last week we talked about how in God's providence, he had been put in prison in Rome, but he said that this didn't slow the advancement of the gospel.

It didn't hinder the gospel going forward, but rather it served to advance the gospel. And that's in verse 12. And so we'll read our text today.

We're picking up in verse 18. Well, the first part of 18, the last part of 18. So Paul just says, Yes, I will rejoice. Verse 19.

For I know that though through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

[2 : 41] For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, this means fruitful labor for me. Yet which shall I choose?

I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

So, around the winter of 2008, I had just sort of graduated from North Georgia around May 2007, and Nathan and Sam, Wes and Liz and myself, we had a college Bible study that we had on Thursday nights from back in the old apartments down past the baseball field, and it's kind of just carried on in many ways.

But at the time, in 2008, my cystic fibrosis, my lung disease was just really hitting me pretty hard, and my health was deteriorating rapidly.

[4 : 09] I think my lung function was around 20, 25%, and I was just really weak, and I was in this phase where I was going in and out of the hospital almost every three weeks and staying for about two weeks at a time for treatments and antibiotics.

I spat up a lot of blood, and the oxygen I just wore off and on throughout the day, and I slept with it. And I was waiting on a lung transplant from UAB Hospital in Birmingham, but at that time, at that Bible study, we actually were studying Philippians, and I just happened to sort of land on this text during that time, the same text.

And I had the opportunity to teach on it, and it's just forever been stuck in my mind surrounding those events and what the Lord was taking me through as I kind of pondered my own death and the

possibility of just going home to be with the Lord.

So I hope that in some similar way I can encourage you today so this text means a lot to me. And so I've tried to think through the best way to walk through it, but we'll do it just in terms of a few questions.

But question number one is what is Paul's dilemma? What is Paul's dilemma? You see this in verse 22. He says, If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet I do not, yet which I shall not choose, I cannot tell.

[5 : 47] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire to depart and be with Christ for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

So that term hard pressed in verse 23, it means like someone who's traveling on a tight, narrow path and all of a sudden they just feel pushed, sandwiched, crushed between two rock faces if you want to think of it that way, and they have nowhere to go except forward.

That's kind of how he feels. He feels caught between these two competing desires. He's torn. But the first desire is that he would remain alive in this world and continue serving, loving, and giving his life away for the sake of gospel ministry and to enable him to help the Philippians and other churches just grow in their faith.

So to remain behind for the sake of gospel ministry. But the second desire, it says he desires to leave this fallen world, leave this awful, broken, sinful world to be reunited with Christ.

And he says that is what his greatest desire really is. And if it wasn't up for the sake of other people, that would win hands down because that's what he says.

[7 : 14] To depart and be with Christ is far better. But he also knows that that choice really isn't his. He knows that God is completely sovereign, in control of his life, whether he lives or dies, and he will joyfully accept whatever God chooses for him.

As it says in James, right, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. So, he's confident of his release, though, however.

He knows that God is the giver and taker of life, but he kind of humbly just says, but I think, I'm pretty sure, that I will be released from this current imprisonment.

You see that in verse 19, right? He says, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus, this will turn out for my deliverance. In verse 25, he says, convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all.

And he hopes that such a joyful reunion with the Philippians will give them cause, right, in verse 26, cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you.

[8 : 26] And upon seeing those prayers answered. So, if Paul is to remain in the flesh, if he is to remain on this earth, like, what is the purpose?

Why? To what end should he continue living? You see in verse 22, if I am in the flesh, this means fruitful, abundant, rich, rewarding labor for me.

Remaining on earth a little longer in this temporal realm and continuing the work of ministry. And in the case of the Philippians, it was joyful, fruitful labor.

And should God allow him to continue living, he is aware, if you look at verse 24, it is not on his own account. He is wanting that for the sake of others.

It is more necessary for him to remain behind for the sake of others. So, there is two parts of that gospel ministry, if you want to think of it that way.

[9 : 26] Like, why would he want to remain behind? But the first one we talked about a lot last week, but he wants to remain behind for the furtherance of the gospel. That God would let him live to advance the cause of the gospel.

gospel. So, if I am to remain behind to continue preaching the gospel, this is what I will do until my last breath.

And I hope that if you have a desire to remain here on this earth, that is one of the foremost things in your mind. How can I advance the gospel of Christ?

Do you have a lot of friends and family that you long to see to come to know Christ? When I first taught on this years ago and in today, I really just want to see so many young college students come to know Christ.

I want my oldest friend, Chris Edwards, since I've known from the cradle, to come to know Christ. Christ. And I want my older brother, Lee, who's my best friend, come to know Jesus as well.

[10 : 37] And I know that one of the reasons that God has left me behind is for the cause of the gospel in those areas. But underneath that, he wants to remain behind for the discipleship or the progress of their joy in the faith.

He wants to see them grow in their faith in Christ for the necessity of helping them know Jesus better and follow him more. That's what he says in verse 24, to remain the flesh and more necessary on your account.

And the verse 25, for your progress in joy and the faith. So the more we progress, more progress we make in the faith, the more joy or happiness we'll have in Christ in this life.

Growing and knowing Christ. And many of us have experienced the great joy of seeing young believers grow up in their faith and in their love and devotion to Christ.

And again, I'm aware that even in this moment, as I was looking back over those old notes that I wrote in 2008, I actually asked people to like put their hand on their chest and just feel their heart beating and just to realize that that's being sustained by the power of God and that in His hand is the life of every living thing in the breath of all mankind.

[12 : 11] And He's allowing us to live. We're not just existing. And if we are to remain behind, I pray that it is for the progression of the gospel and the progression of seeing others come to know Christ in a deeper way through the work of discipleship.

during this time in 2008, I had a huge burden to reach my unbelieving friends that I went to high school with.

Kind of a mixture of athletes and good old boys and football, baseball, basketball players, deer hunters, those kind of guys. That's who I spent a lot of time with in high school.

And I wasn't doing good. I was really sick. And I knew that we were all going to get together, come back from wherever we were to watch the Georgia, Georgia Tech football game.

And I thought, man, I don't know how this is going to happen, but man, I doubt I'll get all these guys together again at the same time. And I really just wanted to share about Christ with them.

[13 : 20] Not the best context. Unless I was just turning the game off and saying, shut up and listen to me. I don't know how it was going to happen. But I kind of left that whole experience pretty discouraged because I just couldn't sit any of them down to talk.

And from that day, later that day, I got so sick that my dad drove me to Birmingham to the hospital. And I was just barely able to sit up straight and breathe.

I was so discouraged that I just didn't get a chance to share with some of my friends. And feeling the weight of this text, but this past week actually was in Birmingham again for some procedures. And while I was there, one of my friends called me to check on me. His name is Michael Sugar. He lives in New Orleans. and he was at that gathering a long time ago.

And he asked me, hey man, I just heard you went to the hospital. Was everything cool? And I thought I was just kind of fighting to keep going. And he goes, well man, I just want you to know I've been praying for you lately.

[14 : 34] And I was just like, you're praying for me? Kind of caught off guard by that phrase. And he goes, yeah, I've just been paying closer attention to my spiritual life lately. And I just told him, man, I've been dying to have that conversation with you.

Like, I really hoped we could have when we were all together. And he goes, well, hey man, like, Birmingham's on the way to New Orleans. I'll see you in a few hours. So he stopped by Birmingham on his way back to New Orleans.

He was wearing scrubs because he worked in the hospital. He does stuff with pacemakers. He's one of the smart guys with the Georgia Tech. So he showed up and they just let him come right in to the hospital and to that place where I was.

And this week he shared with me, like, man, I remember you sitting on that bed wearing oxygen and just sharing the gospel with me. And he said, you went in and out a lot, even like fell asleep in a mid sentence and like came back out and just kept going.

And I don't even remember that. but I was just so encouraged that I do remember him sitting there and saying, wow, this is unbelievable.

[15 : 47] And from that time forward, really Michael gave his life to Christ and still today is walking with Christ. And he shared with me this past week, that's when I marked that time from when Christ really got a hold of me and how God somehow used you in that moment.

So just feeling this, if I'm going to remain behind, I've got to share Christ with my friends and my family. And so I hope that that weighs on you, that if you are indeed a follower of Christ, you would recognize one of your major reasons for your existence today, that God is allowing you to breathe, is for the advancement of the gospel.

And that if you live another day, it's also to help other people grow spiritually. Whether it's your classmate, co-worker, the children in your own household, anybody.

But Paul says in Acts 20, I do not account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, if I only may finish my course in the ministry that I have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

So, that's Paul's dilemma. He's torn. He wants to go, but he remains to do gospel ministry.

Secondly, second question is, what is the chief aim of Paul's existence?

[17:16] We see this in verse 20. He says, it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by my life or by death.

So, Paul's eager, earnest, fervent, persistent expectation and hope is that when this present life is over, when he leaves this world, he will depart from it not ashamed, not carrying any regret, not carrying any disgrace or guilt with him.

if you knew that you were going to pass away between now and next Sunday, would you carry a lot of regret into the next life? Would you carry shame into the next life?

Paul's prayer is that he would not at all carry that into the next life, but that with full courage, now as always, he says, that he would have a clean conscience that he did all he could to honor Christ, magnify Christ, glorify Christ in his body.

So his singular, all-embracing passion was for us, the same for us, is that we would live our whole lives for the purpose, the single purpose of honoring Christ and bringing glory to God.

[18:49] He is worthy of our lives. And so, also in college I read a book called Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper, who's the first person I ever heard to explain this text, so it's impossible to get him out when I think about it.

And we've gone over this many times at Christ's family, but magnify, the word magnify or honor, right, is used in a couple of different ways, but one is a telescope magnifies distant things, right, that are actually big in reality, but we can't really see it because of our naked eye.

So it brings it in closer to make it look more like it actually is. And a telescope, or excuse me, a microscope magnifies tiny things that are tiny and makes them look bigger than they are.

we should be more like a telescope to Christ. He is big in reality, he is huge, but just to many people walking around, you know, all around us, they don't see him for who he actually is, and so when they look through the lens of our life, they can see him, they can see him at work in us.

And so Paul's passion was that in everything, Christ would be honored. Colossians 3 17, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[20:15] Look at our text again. Notice how live and die in verse 21 correspond to life and death in verse 20.

So, there's two parts of this. It's Christ's goal, or excuse me, Paul's goal is to glorify or honor Christ. He says by life or by death.

So, there's two sides of that. This is question number three. How does Paul honor Christ in life?

How does Paul honor Christ in life?

We see in verse 21, for to me, to live is Christ. So, the very purpose for his being, his whole existence, was wrapped up in living for Christ.

Not for the sake, again, of his own personal comfort, for the sake of his own advancement, but for the sake of Christ. He understood that Jesus just isn't up in heaven and physically just separated from his people, but that Christ is living his resurrected life in and through his people.

[21:29] and by faith we are united to him in Christ and that resurrection life. We're all familiar with Galatians 2, verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live, I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

So Paul is saying as long as I live, I belong to Christ. I'm his servant, he is all that I need. If I die a gruesome death, bearing witness to the gospel, I will count it as gain.

But if he allows me to live, I will continue to make my whole life all about him. And in either case, I can lose nothing because I have Christ.

And so his ongoing life and ministry was to make him closer and closer to Christ, especially if you read Philippians 2, 1-11, especially through suffering, especially through experiencing the sufferings of Jesus and his sacrificial servitude.

[22 : 45] And so if you flip over to chapter 3 really quickly, Philippians 3, we get another glimpse of how we can honor Christ in our life. Philippians 3, verse 7, Paul says, so in the context, he's talking about the things he used to take hope in to make him righteous before God.

But we can kind of clean another meaning from that. But he says in verse 7, whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ.

So, so much to take away from that. But he is saying, there's a few parts of this, if we honor Christ in our life, we do it by loving him, treasuring him, and being satisfied in him above all other things in this life.

Alright? And then secondly, under that, we make deliberate and often prayerful choices in this life that display that worth for all people to see.

[24 : 07] Where people go, why did you do that? Where did that come from? And there's no other explanation for it other than Christ. And so he says, all these things that I have, I think that they're like garbage, they're like dung in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus.

And so, example, just a few walkthroughs, again, this is a man who taught on this years ago ringing in my ear, but he says, money is given to you so that you may use money in a way and in a manner that shows that money is not your treasure, but Christ is.

Possessions, the things that we own, we're to use them in such a way that shows everyone around us that those possessions and that stuff is not our treasure, but Christ is.

Relationships and the people that we live with, we're to treat them and live with them in such a way that it would be plain to everyone looking on that they are not our treasure, but Christ is.

And on and on, like we, and that takes intentionality, it takes prayer, how can we display this worth of Christ? So, wherever it is, we want to reflect that greatness, we want to honor him in this life.

[25 : 36] Spurgeon said this, this is our exaltation, this is our joy and triumph. If we can promote his glory, the best place where we can promote it, it shall be our heaven.

The sick bed, the hospital, or the poor house shall be our heaven. If we can there, best serve the Lord Jesus, who is our King of glory.

So, it's how we honor Christ in life, by treasuring him above all other things in life, making much of him. The fourth question, and the last question, so that's the life part, what about the death part? Because most of us may not really think about that, but how does Paul honor Christ in death?

Verse 21, for to me to live as Christ and to die is gain.

Verse 23, my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Have you ever stopped to really think about it?

[26 : 42] Like, how can you make Christ look great in your death? Most of us are scared to even go there in our heads. But, let me give you three metaphors that.

This language, at least in Greek, this word depart, my desire is to depart and be with Christ. One of them is a military term. It means to break camp, to leave where you are, to pull up your tents and move to another encampment.

Paul calls our bodies earthly tents that are taken away at death and the spirit goes home to be with Christ. That's in 2 Corinthians 5, 1-8.

It's also a sailing term, a metaphor of a commander of a ship who's docked in a foreign port on business and he longs to set sail to depart and return back to his own country and his own family. But yet, that desire is counterbalanced with the understanding that to remain behind in the port a little longer would be more beneficial and so he contents himself, he's patient because he hasn't received orders from his superior to depart to go home yet.

[28 : 03] But he's longing for home, but he patiently waits because he hasn't received the order to go home. You see it? Third way is used, freeing of a prisoner.

So believers long to be set free from the limitations and fallenness of our bodies and we long to leave and be set free from this body of death.

Romans 8, 18-23. So Paul says, my desire to depart and to be with Christ because that is far better. One phrase of this means much more better.

It's much more better to depart and be with Christ. He reminds them in chapter 3 that we are citizens of heaven, not citizens of earth.

So seeing how we honor Christ in our death, the simple answer is by looking at your death as gain. We honor him when we die by counting our death as gain.

[29 : 07] Free from all the stuff in this world to leave it gladly behind and go home to be with Christ. Being able to let go of everything, can we do that?

Can we look at our family, our friends, and our loved ones, and gladly say, it's okay, I'm going home to be with Christ, to dwell in his presence forever.

Not holding on to this world, not weeping over the stuff that you're just going to leave here, but to see your death is gain because you know it means going to be with Christ forever.

And as Paul says, that is far better, much more better. It's okay. So, as much as some of the things in this world may hold our affections, do you have a greater desire?

Are you cultivating a greater desire to depart from this world to be with Christ? And in the hour of your death, could you go gladly and confidently to be in the presence of your Savior?

[30 : 17] So, there's one example I will give of this. So, most of you are aware that on December 22nd, my dad passed away to go home to be with the Lord.

And though I miss him dearly, I know that he was ready to depart from this life to go be with Christ. There was a time I talked to him and I remember what he said very clearly as I wrote it down. But he knew his time was close, he knew his days were short, he had been battling this autoimmune disease for almost a decade, and he knew it just didn't look good for getting better, he knew it was close, but he died well, and he made Christ look very good.

This is something that he said in his own simple way, he said, God knows me, and he loves me, and he'll be the one to decide whether I go or stay.

I'm not concerned about that. If I went right now, I know I would be okay because I know where I'm going. I pray that the Lord will give me some more days, but whatever he decides, it'll be okay.

[31 : 45] My concern is for those who don't know him. I believe that he may be calling a lot of people to himself during all these things going on. And I mean, it's like he took it right out of Philippians, not realizing it.

He had a desire to depart and be with Christ, but wanted to remain behind for the sake of others. So he gladly went on the 22nd, in the morning of the 22nd, just peacefully to be home with Christ. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and we'll end with this. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, let's look at verse 6.

Very similar language. Paul says in chapter 5, verse 6, so we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith and not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage.

[32 : 56] And we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim, our goal to please him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

God will be with the Lord. I pray that you would cultivate our desire to depart this world and to be with Christ, a greater desire, but for the only reason you want to remain behind is for the sake of others.

Not for your own pleasure, your own pleasure or contentment, but just for the sake of others. That is the main reason you desire to remain behind. And when that time comes, you will gladly look upon death as gain, which is not a natural thing.

It has to be the work of Christ to actually look at death and say it will be gain because I'm leaving all this behind and going to be with Christ. So that's my prayer for y'all and myself.

[34 : 09] So let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen.