

A Brilliant Philosophy

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to spend a short time this evening looking at Philippians chapter one as we're going to go through on a Sunday evening the four chapters of this book, a short sprint through Philippians. And I'm going to take one verse from each chapter as a kind of focus for the chapter. I'm not sure if that's what Paul intended. It probably wasn't because he didn't split his letter into chapters for a start. But the chapters are usually divided thematically at least to a degree. And I'm going to use verse 21 of very famous words for us as Christians of chapter one verse 21, for me to live as Christ and to die as gain.

That's kind of the anthem for this chapter and the theme of this evening as his philosophy or a great Christian philosophy for us to have for me to live as Christ and to die as gain. It's quite a challenging one, I think, if we're honest with each other. And I hope that we will be challenged by these words and that philosophy for our lives. I'm not sure if you have a philosophy for your own life. And I don't know if you have a philosophy for your Christian life, but it's good to have this clear thinking. It's a brilliant for me to live as Christ to die as gain.

In Acts chapter 16, there is a cry to Paul from a man in a dream come over to Macedonia and help us. So the cry of the Macedonian cry. Paul was given this vision to go and plant the gospel ministry in Macedonia and gateway towards Europe. And Philippi was the leading city in Macedonia. And so he planted a church there. And we know about planting church it. Well, we don't know very much about planting churches, but we try and work at planting churches because we believe that is a New Testament reality for us and a New Testament calling for us to do that. And Paul also planted a church and he planted a church in Philippi. And this is a personal letter of thanks to the church that had been founded in Philippi because they had brought him gifts.

He's in prison by this point when he writes this, probably in Rome, although we're not absolutely clear. And someone from Philippi called the Paphroditus brings gifts from the church to Paul who's in Rome. And this is his return letter giving thanks to them for being committed to doing this.

And he also gives them some spiritual teaching and advice and learning under the Holy Spirit that has become part of Scripture for us. And it's a great book and it's an encouraging letter for us.

[2 : 58] It's very personal, it's really very personal in many ways and it shows how quickly a true bond of Christian love can develop within a Christian community, both between leader and people, but also just between the congregation and the importance of that. And also the attitude of joy that Christians can have even when things aren't going terribly easily or well for us. And I think that's great. It's great to have a spiritual joy in our lives, great for other people to know and to see the joy that you have and the joy that you have in Jesus Christ. So Paul's simple Christian philosophy as it's expounded here is for me to live as Christ to die again. So we're going to look at that in two sections, for me to live as Christ and then to die as gain. For me to live, that's very simple, isn't it? You can all grasp it. I know it's hot and sweaty tonight and you're all tired, but so I'm keeping it simple and we can walk away with simple, simple which is for me to live as

Christ. We don't want to come to the Word of God or to Christian teaching, to have a PhD thesis on how to live our Christian lives. We don't really want complex life strategies for being Christians. We want something profound, yes, but simple and this is profound and simple.

Paul was able to say, for me to live as Christ and that's a great philosophy of life. What did that look as we unpack this chapter a little bit, what did it look like for Paul to live for Christ?

How did it reveal itself? Because we can make these statements and leave them there or we can begin to see what it meant for Paul to live for Christ. And it meant in the first place that he had, I'll just go through one or two things, he had significant spiritual relationships.

For him to live for Christ meant that he was involved in an engaged in significant spiritual relationships with people and with Jesus Christ. Okay, that's obvious he had with Christ because he

said to live as Christ. But he also had significant spiritual relationships with people and we see that in the first eleven verses of the chapter. He speaks and gives thanks for them because he loves them and because he remembers them. He's the founding pastor of this urban church plant. And we have the privilege of knowing, sometimes when these letters were written biblically, we don't know anything really about the church other than what is in the actual letter, but we know one or two of the members of this church. So we have a little bit of an insight into the kind of church that Paul was writing. We know Lydia and her family, we know that she became a Christian through Paul's preaching, we know the Philippian jailer, we don't know his name, but he was there and his family were in the church. We know that there was a slave girl in the church who came to [6:10] Christ because of Paul's testimony and miracle, miraculous removal of evil spirits from her in her life. We know that it was elders and deacons, we know Epaphroditus was there, we know that it was full of people who had come to know Christ and who were called saints in this chapter, just as we are called saints. And Paul has this relationship with them, he holds them in partnership.

So maybe this morning we were looking at ordinary Christians and we maybe even pushed aside ourselves to be comparable with Peter and John and certainly not Paul because he was an apostle, he's a founder of the church. But Paul recognizes the partnership that he has with these Christians. He doesn't lord it over them, he recognizes the great partnership that he's had from the first until this day, until now with them. And this is part of what it means for him to live for Christ, he has this spiritual, significant spiritual relationships with other Christians. The church of Christ is important to him and so it should be for us, there's a joyful, prayerful thanksgiving.

He speaks very personally, he says, I hold you in my heart. He's not a kind of distant, famous preacher who comes and stands in a grand gallery, a pulpit and delivers his aeration, apostolic aeration to the people and then leaves by a back door in a black limousine, not to be seen by anyone. He's not that kind of important, separate person, but he recognizes that he holds them in his heart, the apostle Paul, he holds the people, he yearns for them, he longs for them. If you see these early verses, I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus and it's my prayer that you'll love me about more and more knowledge and discernment.

So he has a specific prayer for the people. Oh, what was this, flash, preachers coming, lights going on and off. Okay, we'll carry on preaching. I'll just work my way through it in the dark. Well, I can see, it's good, I can see. So the message, you guys are right in the gallery, can't see very much up there, don't fall asleep. Anyway, so he was, he had a specific, he had a desire for them and a love for them, and he prayed for them, specifically had specific prayers about them and for their love growing, and that they might grow knowledge and discernment and approving what is excellent and good. It was worked through, it was specific, it was caring, as he had this powerful relationship with people. So living for Christ can't be for us a monastic experience, a solitary experience. We're looking for, living for Christ to be something that involves ourselves with lots of fellow Christians being encouragers and being encouraged and praying for one another and sacrificially serving one another. It involves chasing grace until it's overflowing, not just for ourselves, but for others in their Christian lives, loving the local church in partnership with the local body of believers, the family of God. So they had significant spiritual relationships with people, but also of course with Christ, and verses 9 to 11 he speaks about just that knowledge of Christ that he has and that longing that what he knows he wants to share with others in liaison with Christ, he is praying for himself and for others. And his love for Jesus

[10:10] Christ, as it's spoken of here, is linked to, what's it linked to? It's linked to knowledge and discernment. It's linked to wisdom. His love for Christ is linked to knowing Christ and discerning Christ and being wise. It involved for him that deliberate conscious choice, for him to live for Christ was a deliberate conscious choice pursuing, approving and pursuing. What's excellent?

We looked at, no we didn't, look this morning at excellence. On Friday night in our broth, we looked at excellence. I was speaking up there and talking about Daniel, I have spoken about it here. Daniel who lived in Babylon and who pursued excellence even though he was in exile. Okay, and these two paradoxical truths that we balance out in our Christian lives, we pursue excellence in culture, in the world, in work, in all that we do, but we also recognize ourselves as exiles.

Well, Paul was someone who pursued excellence and looked for excellence in his relationship with Christ. He made these choices. He isn't, we saw this morning, he's not in a rut of unbelief or a rut of self-centeredness. He's in a routine of pursuing excellence, choosing righteousness.

Now you may argue, we don't choose righteousness as an everyday way of life. It's a gift. We become righteous because of what, it's a declaration. Of course, we know and recognize that. We are declared righteous because of Jesus, but we choose, we need to choose righteousness as a daily pursuit in our lives, independence and Christ. And so Paul has this great interest in Christ and in people. He's not interested in his, the congregation being acolytes of Paul.

Paul, he's pushing them towards Jesus as he follows Jesus Christ for him and Christ for us is the key. So we're looking as a congregation, you're looking in your Christian life, not to be dependent on church or on preaching or the minister or even your parents as Christians are. You're not dependent, they're important, but you're not depending on them. We're looking to depend on Jesus, you're looking to take responsibility to depend on Jesus Christ. So it's that old adage, give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime. And we need to recognize the importance of teaching and being taught one another to go after Jesus Christ in our lives. To live for Christ is a pursuit and it's a choice and a discipline that we make.

[13:05] So that's one way, that's one way it looks for him to live for Christ, but also it also looks for him to live for Christ is to be self-forgetful. Okay? He's not a proud person, he's not a self-centered person, he's not even that concerned about his own circumstances. And that maybe sets him apart. I am and I'm sure you are very concerned about your circumstances. They often are the gauge of how spiritual we feel otherwise. And yet Paul is very self-forgetful. It's an upbeat letter, but he's not in great circumstances, he's in prison and he's speaking into his reality.

Not only is he in prison, but the church that he helped found has been kind of wrecked by false teachers who are coming in and who are jealous of Paul and who want to, who don't like Paul and who want to preach much better than him and who want to give him a hard time because he's in prison.

He speaks about that in the passage that we read particularly from verses 12 to 18, you know, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, others out of goodwill and so on. And he's in prison here, but he's self-forgetful. Not everyone liked him. He was disappointed by what was happening in the church. There had been fallouts, ministerial jealousy, false teaching and of course his own inability to be there because he was in prison. How would we react to that? We would possibly be more defensive. We would write a big long letter defending the way we preach or the way we live or the way we have our lives. We want to be popular and so we would court popularity. We would maybe be bitter. How could they possibly give me such a hard time? I'm not even there to defend myself, I'm in prison. Let's consider briefly Paul's responses. Paul's responses, yes, 18, second bit of 18, yes, and I will rejoice. I will rejoice. So for him to live for Christ meant he was a Christian who was rejoicing even when the circumstances didn't really dictate rejoicing for him. The verb is such, so it's in the continue. It's I will continue to rejoice because he could see a bigger picture in his circumstances. And the great thing is, for example, although he's in prison, he can't preach, he's not in Philippi, he can't, he's not an itinerant anymore, he's in prison, but he can see that the gospel has been advanced. If it was in Rome at the very heart of imperial power, the gospel is being known in the palace and other prisoners to the soldiers, they are hearing about it. It means that people in the churches where he is not able to be have been released to serve. Now sometimes it's a nightmare having a minister or a full-time worker because subconsciously we sit back and think, well, they can do the work, they can serve, they can run everything in the Christian community. And yet sometimes churches flourish most when that particular office is removed from them because others are given the opportunity to serve.

Now that's not the ideal, of course the ideal is both and because that's God's pattern for us. But people in responsibility can hold on to responsibility, they cannot delegate, they can be power mad, maybe in any of the particular ways you serve in the church, you don't want to share it, you want to keep doing it yourself. No one does it like me, I'm the best person at doing it. It can't be that I pass on to someone else, that they'll make a mess, they'll do it wrong. And yet Paul was someone who says, it's great that I'm in prison because it's freed up people to serve and they're taking that responsibility great as they do so. And they have become much more bold and speak the word without fear. And the preaching rivals, what does he say? He says, who cares? I don't care, I don't care what they say about me, I don't care their motive, actually I don't even care about their motives as long as Christ is preached. Now that's a remarkable statement, if I made that statement, you would have me out of this place as being theologically unsound for saying that it didn't matter about their motives. Their motives did matter, of course, but Paul isn't justifying their motives, he's saying,

look, Christ is preached. And the truth of Christ transcends even the motives of those who preached it. Maybe people were converted under the preaching of

[18 : 08] Judas Iscariot because it's the gospel and the truth that is effective. So that even the enemy who seeks to turn the gospel upside down by putting false teachers there is sometimes defeated because the power is in the word often. And at every point he can be defeated so that we can rejoice.

It doesn't defend that kind of action, it doesn't mean that we don't need to care about our motives, but Paul is saying, God is judge, God is sovereign. It is God's reputation, not mine, that matters. And he knows and he can rejoice because he is soon to be passing on from the scene of time. So in personal suffering and in disappointments in the church when we're let down or when we're discouraged or when you feel you're ignored or unappreciated or you've been a victim of jealousy, God forbid, in the church or you see selfishness in the behavior of others and people wanting to take your place and consider what Paul is saying. Consider the joy that he had because of who he was in Christ and because of who Christ is. A reputation doesn't matter, a response does. So that a response to opposition and difficulty and disappointment and let down is so important that we are to live for Christ. Whatever else everyone else is doing, our responsibility is to live for Christ and that enables us to rejoice in him because we are not that important.

So there's self-forgetfulness and he's also Holy Spirit dependent verse 19, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. It's a bit like what we were saying this morning, he's dependent. That's the simple message for me to live as Christ. He was dependent and interestingly not just on the Holy Spirit but also the prayers of other Christians, prayers of other Christians.

She said, I don't know what to pray for. I've got nothing to, I don't know how to pray, pray for other Christians because they need your prayers and I need your prayers and you need their prayers and we need the Holy Spirit. And the insight and the joy and the courage he had was because of the prayers of other people and his dependence on the Holy Spirit. This philosophy of life enabled him to live this way, that routine of being dependent on the Holy Spirit, that's the impossibility of this life on his own.

[21 : 05] And I have said to you before, how precious are the prayers of other people for you.

I'll say it again, it's really precious when people come up and say to you, I've been praying for you today. I have prayed for you this morning. You text them and say, I'm praying for you. It's a great thing, it's an encouragement. It reminds us we're in this work together and we're all struggling and we pray and encourage one another and pray for the Holy Spirit. So for me to live as Christ, and very briefly in conclusion, to die is gain. What a statement. To die is gain.

Why could he say that? The nihilist occasionally says that. Well, to die maybe is not gain but it's just kind of neutral and he goes, but Paul is saying to live as Christ to die is gain. What a strange thing to say, unless it comes with a deep conviction of someone who has met with the Savior beyond the grave, the resurrected Son of God. He's met with Him and He knows Him and He not only in conversion did He meet Him but in the equipping for His role as apostle, He meets Him so He can see. We can see because we know what He sees that to die is gain. That's a great statement.

I wonder who of us can say that? To be happy, to be alive but actually too long to be with Christ. And he has such a powerful statement here of his perspective on life that many ways this life is only the opening gambit, only the opening chapter. There's something far, far greater that is to come for which he longs. In verse 23 he speaks about, 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 in your account. And I think the idea of departing, the word departing there has the idea of pulling up anchor, leaving the shore and heading off on an adventure. I feel a Cory reference coming up to the Hobbit or to Lord of the Rings. He would certainly have done one there at that point. I feel that there's an adventure coming on. But that's the picture of Lord of the Rings, that's the picture of Gandalf and the rest of them going off on the boat. Isn't that they're leaving the shore, they're going away and there's a great adventure leaving the shore. You know the excitement, don't you? I hope of being at one level, anyway, of being in a railway station or an airport or a departure lounge of some kind or another when you're going away on an adventure or on a holiday or to the other part of the world to meet family and anticipation and joy and the expectation is quite different on the way back. But on the way out there's great expectation.

You're looking for a love and a relationship maybe to be fulfilled as you're waiting in the departure lounge. That's kind of what he's saying here. He says that, you know, I have this longing to be with Christ, I'm happy enough to be here but there's something far greater that I've already tasted and I long to just feast on just what I've only tasted up till this point. I doubt if many of us are there yet, I certainly doubt that I am. But what a life we can have in Christ here, but yet this life is only a warm-up for what is to come and for what we can enjoy in him. These great words from 1 Corinthians chapter 2, which again Paul summarizes the way Paul thinks about these things.

[25 : 36] In verse 9 he says, you know, as it's written, what no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. We haven't begun to appreciate what God has prepared for us. We're only second guessing at best. We're only dreaming and we'll never come near to considering exactly what it is. Paul, I believe Paul had a privilege, a sneak preview as one who went into the heavens and he met with Christ and he tasted a little bit and maybe that gave him that extraordinary sense. But we can, through the Spirit of God also, say the same, the more we are in his company, the more we are facing him.

We're getting old. Some of us are getting older than others. We're facing death. Some of us closer than others. But it's not a curse, you know. The curse has been removed from us. It's a curse in this world. It's a curse for most people to the thought of getting old, losing your youth and your vigor and your energy. It isn't for Christians. And it wasn't for Paul, because for Paul, for him to live was Christ and to die is God. For us as we get older, all we're looking forward to is pulling up anchor. That's all. And setting out on another adventure. And we look forward to that. And whether you're young or old or middle-aged or whatever it might be today, we are looking for this great philosophy of life for me to live as Christ and to die is game. Because it's the perspective the Holy Spirit can give us and the prayer that we share for one another, you know. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that's what we're doing. We're not isolates.

We're not monastic. We're praying and caring and loving in city group and in church and in family for one another and praying for these things that we might live for Christ and know that to die is game for us. To its game. Isn't that great? Death is the great unmentionable today, but for the Christian to die is game. If you're not a Christian, you should think hard about that. Because that is a philosophy of life you can only have when you've come to the foot of the cross and recognize your need for a Savior, for me to live not only recognized but entrusted your life and your death and your future to Him. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we need you in our lives and we need to recognize this amazing philosophy, this great perspective that is very counterculture and very different from our life, which is so often about today and tomorrow and the future and just the future in this life as if this is all there is. Help us to remember that the great aim for us is to live for Christ and enjoy this world that He has given us and serve Him and pursue excellence. And yet remember that we are exiles and that we have a home, we have an adventure, we have a journey, we have a departure, which is going to take us into an unimaginably wonderful place of joy and fullness and life and hope and adventure and praise and worship and singing and feasting and a place where there will be no more night and where there will be no more death and no more separation and when we will be with in an unimaginably great way with God in Christ and with His people forever. Amen.