

## 1 - For Me, To Live is Christ

Philippians 1:1-30

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Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi while he was in prison in Rome. Timothy was in Rome (but not in prison). Epaphroditus, a coworker from Philippi, had brought him material help and spiritual encouragement. He had risked his life to help Paul. Now, Paul was sending him back with this letter (2:19-30). Paul began his letter by identifying himself and Timothy as servants of Jesus Christ. He wrote to the "saints" or the believers in Philippi, and he greeted them with "grace" and "peace." (1-2) One might think that a man writing from prison would be full of self-pity and excuses--that at least he would complain about the food or the hard beds or the lice or the cruel prison guards. But Paul's letter is so full of joy that the letter to the Philippians has been called the "Epistle of joy." "Joy" is repeated 6 times and "rejoice" 8 times in this short letter. What was Paul's secret of joy? This is what we want to think about today as we study chapter one. And what does it mean to say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."(21)

### 1. Thanksgiving and prayer (1-11)

First, Paul thanked God for the Philippians because of their faithful participation with him in the gospel. Read verses 3-5. "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first until now." So, Paul began his letter with thanksgiving and prayer. This is one of his secrets of joy. Thankful and prayerful people are not gloomy or grumpy. What, then, did Paul remember with thankfulness about Philippi and the believers there?

When Paul entered Europe on his second missionary journey, Philippi was the first city he visited (Ac 16:11-40). Philippi was a Roman colony. Few Jews lived there, and there was no synagogue. So, on the Sabbath Paul went down to the riverside looking for a place of prayer. He found several women, and he preached to them. Among these was a business woman named Lydia. The Lord opened her heart and she accepted Jesus. She was the first convert in Europe. She immediately opened her home to Paul and her home became a house church.

But the pioneering work in Philippi did not go smoothly. When Paul cast a demon out of a poor slave girl, he was beaten and put in a dungeon. However, he did not despair. Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in prison. The prison doors were opened and the jailor was converted. After Paul left Philippi, the believers there continued to pray for him and send him material support. They shared with him in the pioneering of Europe and the world. Many people forgot him as soon as he left town, but the Philippians were faithful from first to last. (5)

Second, Paul thanked God for the continuing work of God in their lives. Read verse 6. "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." They had become believers through Paul's gospel preaching and Bible teaching, but God was the one who had worked in their hearts. Paul prayed for them and trusted God to finish what he had started in them. We must remember that God is our shepherd. We should never despair because of our failures. Instead, we must pray. We must turn from ourselves and turn to God. He is the one who works in us and in our sheep. He will finish what he has started.

Read verse 7. "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me." Paul was very confident about God's continuing work in them because they shared with him in God's grace. He and they, by God's grace, were forgiven sinners; he and they, by God's grace, had been entrusted with God's mission to bring the gospel to a lost world. Whether he was actively going here and there to defend and confirm the gospel or confined to a prison cell, he and they shared the same concern that the gospel be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. All real Christians share God's grace of forgiveness and all Christians must share in God's mission to the lost world. We can share in the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth through our giving and through our prayers and through teaching the Bible one to one as God gives opportunity.

Third, Paul loved them with spiritual love--with the love of Christ. He said, "I have you in my heart" (7) and I long for all of you with the affection of Christ." (8) Because he loved them, he wanted them to grow in faith, so he prayed for them.

Read his prayer for them in verses 9-11. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God." Here we can find that Paul had 2 prayer topics for them. First, he prayed that their love might abound in knowledge and depth of insight. Love is a basic human problem. All of us need to love and to be loved, but many times we don't know how to love others or how to receive love from others. Sometimes it's hard even for husbands and wives, or parents and children to love each other. Paul's prayer tells us that we need knowledge and depth of insight in order to love others. Because we lack discernment, we think we are showing love to others when we give them human sympathy or try to protect them from suffering. But this kind of love doesn't help people. Human sympathy makes people weak and sorrowful. And God uses suffering so preciously to build Christ's character in us. (Ro 5:3-5). We must learn to show spiritual love to others. So we must love God and have the affection of Christ in our hearts. Then we have knowledge and insight. Our love should build up those we love. Does your love build others up or tear them down?

Second, Paul prayed that they might discern what is best and be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus. Some parents pray that their children may be top students or outstanding leaders or successful in the world. These things are good, but we need to discern what is best. Paul prayed that his spiritual children might have the fruit of righteousness in them. We don't become righteous by trying to live like the Pharisees (Mt 5:20). When we love God and are united to Jesus as a branch is united to a vine, we can bear the fruit of righteousness. This fruit is described in Galatians 5:22,23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." The Holy Spirit who unites us to Jesus produces this fruit. When one has the abundant love of God in his heart, he is truly rich and full of life, like a tree planted by a river that bears fruit in season. When God's people are filled with the fruit of

righteousness, God is glorified. We can begin to see why Paul was joyful. He did not think about himself. He thought about how to please God. He thought about God's work in himself and in others.

## 2. In chains for Christ (12-18a)

If Paul had been a worldly man he might have thought that his imprisonment was a great misfortune. Some people in his situation might doubt God's love. He was in prison not because he had committed some crime, but because he had obeyed God; he had ignored cultural traditions and preached the gospel to Gentiles. The Jew's pride was hurt because so many Gentiles believed. They were so angry that they put Paul in jail. Paul had worked hard for God--and look where it got him! He looked like a loser. But Paul didn't see it that way. Read verse 12. "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Paul learned that when we trust God and commit our lives to him he changes adversity into fruitful victory. Let's see how this happened.

First, God used his chains to bring him to Rome, the center for world evangelization. After having Paul arrested, the Jews in Jerusalem tried to kill him, so he appealed to Caesar. Because of his appeal, he was sent to Rome as a prisoner. In Rome, he was placed under house arrest to await trial. This became his opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome.

Second, God was using him to bring the gospel to the Palace Guard. Read verse 13. "As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." The Palace Guard or the Praetorian Guard were the elite troops housed in the Emperor's palace. They were proud and ruthless. They were not likely people to hear the gospel preached or to accept it. But Paul's courage--his soldier spirit--, his humble life and his joy made them listen to the gospel which he fearlessly preached. He testified to Jesus by his life and by his words, and God used his testimony to bring tough and cruel soldiers to faith in Christ.

Some people are Christians when they are with other Christians, but when they are in the classroom or in the working place they blend into the non-Christian atmosphere like a chameleon. But everyone knew that Paul was a Christian. He stood out like a light shining in a dark place. And people wanted to know the Christ who made him so joyful. We must learn from him to let Jesus rule our hearts and shine out of our lives.

Third, Believers were encouraged. Paul's undaunted spirit and joy, even in prison challenged fearful believers everywhere to become bold in preaching the gospel. Read verse 14. "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

These days, the work of God is going on in Northeastern University through a campus club called the "true vine club." M. Joseph Ahn, working with M. Moses Lengthon of India teaches the Bible to students. These students have group Bible studies on campus. They are reaching thirsty Northeastern students with God's word. M. Joseph gave up a promising diplomatic career to become a primary school teacher. He did this to support his family as a self-supporting, full time lay missionary in Chicago. God has blessed his ministry. He had a hearing problem that is getting worse. He had to retire from teaching because of this. So, his son, Dr. Joseph, Jr, decided to support his father to do full time ministry. M. Joseph's enthusiasm and zeal are unblemished. His overcoming life encourages believers.

Fourth, Christ is preached by any means. Read verses 15-18. Paul's imprisonment stirred people to preach the gospel. Some people worked hard because they loved Jesus and loved Paul; but there were others who were jealous of Paul. They thought that he was too aggressive and authoritarian. They saw his imprisonment as their opportunity, so they worked hard, too. If Paul had been self-centered or humanly ambitious, he would have been critical of the opportunists who took advantage of his imprisonment. But Paul loved Jesus and had only one point--Preach the gospel to the world. He didn't try to analyze the motives of those who were preaching the gospel. He just thanked God and rejoiced that Christ was being preached. Sometimes we become distressed when once-loyal friends and coworkers leave our UBF ministry and become very critical, even organizing or joining other ministries. I pray that even though these things wounds may be healed and the gospel proclaimed.

### 3. To live is Christ; to die is gain (18b-29)

What about Paul's future? Paul said, "I will continue to rejoice." (18b) Many people become fearful about the future. They worry about their future security or their health or their children. Future uncertainty drives people to depend on money. With the financial situation is such a mess, many people are very anxious. Paul's future was uncertain. He might be set free from prison or he might be executed. But what did he say? Look at verse 18b. "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice." How could he rejoice when his future was so uncertain? And how can we?

First, he had prayer support and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Read verses 19-20. Paul needed the prayer support of fellow believers. He needed Jesus. He did not trust himself. He counted on their prayer support. He didn't ask to escape suffering. He prayed for sufficient courage to be faithful to Jesus, so that whether he lived or died, Christ might be exalted in his body.

Second, he had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This was the well-spring of his joy and the secret of his victorious life. Read verse 21. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." "To live is Christ" means that he was united with Jesus in a vine and branch relationship.

When Paul had lived as a Pharisee, he had committed his life to promoting Judaism. He had actively persecuted and even killed Christians. His heart was full of ambition and envy, anger and hatred. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians when he met Jesus. His life was turned around. Jesus forgave him and called him to be his servant. He accepted the Risen Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He accepted the mission Jesus gave him--to be a missionary to the Gentiles. To repent and change his life direction was like dying. So he wrote in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

When we prayerfully study the Bible, we can meet Jesus Christ. All God's promises point to him, and he fulfills them all. 2 Peter 1:4 says, "...he (God) has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." John 3:16 promises, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." 1Pe 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." 1Jn 1:9 says that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness...and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin (7). John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." He says to each of us, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20) When we open

our hearts and invite Jesus to come in and reign as our Lord and Savior, he comes in and establishes a personal relationship with us. We maintain that relationship by prayer and by studying and obeying the Bible. (Jn 15:5,7)

Paul said, "...to die is gain." This has a deep spiritual meaning. To repent and die to oneself is great gain, for then Christ can rule and bless our lives. Paul once said, "I die every day." (1Co 15:31) In the context of this chapter, however, "to die is gain" means that Paul was not afraid of death. He had a living hope in the kingdom of God. He remembered that day many years before when Satan ruled his heart and he had stood by consenting to Stephen's death. He could never forget Stephen's words: "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God...Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Ac 7:55-60) He knew that this glorious Lord Jesus had forgiven him; Jesus whom he loved and to whom he belonged was waiting for him with the words, "Well done good and faithful servant...Come and share your Master's happiness." (Mt 25:21)

Read verses 22-24. Paul was torn between his longing to leave this sinful world and be with Jesus in heaven, and his desire to serve God by defending and confirming the gospel to the people of his time. Read verses 24-26. Paul made up his mind to remain in the body so that he could work for their progress and joy in the faith. He was convinced that God still had work for him to do.

Third, Paul gives clear direction to believers in Philippi and to us. Look at verses 27-30. First, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." (27) There are no excuses for compromising with the world. Second, "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you." Bringing the gospel to a lost world must be a believer's top priority. When God's people give their hearts and strength to obeying Jesus' command to world evangelization, they can be united in one mind and spirit. There is no need to fear people. Those who receive the gospel will be saved; those who oppose the gospel will be lost.

Finally, Paul says, "it's a privilege to suffer for Christ." Read verse 29. Small and large sufferings enable us to know Jesus better and love him more. God trains us through suffering to grow in love until we can say with Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." May those who are fearful about making a commitment to Jesus make that one decision to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, whatever comes. This is the decision that makes people truly free, and puts a joyful song in our hearts. Let us grow in faith until we too can say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."