

Lesson 5
Glorifying Christ in Life and Death
Philippians 1:19-26

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. What is the one thing which controls and commands us in life? Is it the passion for money? Is it lust for pleasure? Is it the desire for prestige or power? What ever occupies our minds, drives our emotions and commands our wills, is the thing which tells us what we really are. The Bible says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).
- B. This was especially true of the Apostle Paul, for he was a man dominated and driven by the Lord Jesus Christ. He had one purpose in life and that was to glorify and exalt Jesus Christ in everything he did or said. His single passion was to glorify the Lord Jesus in life and in death. Paul, over a period of thirty years as a Christian, had developed a philosophy of life with Christ at the center of it all. These are the words of a mature Christian who had been through war. For Paul, life was Christ and death was more of Christ. He found Christ sufficient for every facet of life and knew He would be sufficient for the final act of life which is death. By way of background, we need to understand Paul had been in a Roman house-jail for two years. All of his hopes, his desires, his aspirations to preach the gospel as far as Spain had been dashed to the rocks. He was confined to four walls; he was constantly bound to a Roman guard, he was surely at times lonely, frustrated and discouraged, but by faith he found Jesus Christ sufficient for living even in the most difficult circumstances. Death was not a distant event or thought for Paul. It was a live option because he was waiting trial before Caesar with the distinct possibility he would be executed by having his head chopped off by the sword. Yet, in all this, he knew Christ would be sufficient in death. This man was so occupied with Christ that nothing about life or death could shake him up.
- C. The Philippian Church was basically concerned about two things when they wrote to Paul in Rome: 1) How was Paul faring in light of his imprisonment and the possibility of his imminent death, and 2) How was the gospel of Jesus Christ faring in light of Paul’s imprisonment. In 1:12-18, Paul responded by saying the gospel was faring well. In fact, it had not been hindered but advanced by Paul’s imprisonment. The gospel had gone to all of Rome through the Palace (Praetorian) Guard and the gospel was the “talk of the town.” In fact, it had even gotten into Caesar’s household and some of them had trusted Christ (***Phil. 4:22: All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.***). Now in 1:19-26, Paul will answer the question as to how he is faring, but he will do it with such a positive note. He will not talk about all his problems, his woes, his crosses but he will talk about Christ and how He is sufficient for every circumstance in life. Paul does not know what lies ahead for him. He knows nothing for certain about the future but his confidence is in Christ. He does not fume, fuss and worry about the future but occupies himself with Christ and His plans and purposes for him in life and death. NOTE: Paul’s point was that the gospel was advancing in the world because of his imprisonment, and more importantly the gospel was advancing in Paul’s personal life.

II. GLORIFYING CHRIST THROUGH PERSONAL SUFFERING 1:19-20

- A. ***Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.*** -- Paul rejoiced in 1:15-18 because Christ was being preached by men who disliked him. He rejoiced not that his brothers in Christ disliked him, but that Christ was being preached and people were being saved in Rome. But now Paul is going to continue to rejoice because he knows that all that has happened to him will result in his deliverance. Paul refused to sulk about his negative circumstances but rejoiced. Someone has said, “A Christian is one who is consistently fearless, continually rejoicing and constantly in trouble.”
- B. ***For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.***
1. Paul had a confidence that he would be delivered. Most commentators agree that this is a reference to Paul’s deliverance from prison. He had a confidence he would be delivered physically from jail, being acquitted by the Roman Supreme Court. However, there seems to be a hidden meaning in this word “deliverance” for in the Greek it is “salvation.” Could it be Paul was saying, “What ever happens to me, whether I’m released or executed, I will be delivered.” One sovereign act of God would deliver him from prison to minister again. The other act of capital punishment as an innocent man would deliver him into the presence of Jesus Christ forever. Whatever, for Paul, life and death were Jesus Christ.
 2. Notice carefully Paul’s deliverance would be accomplished through the prayers of the Philippians. Somehow the prayers of the saints would move an infinite God to work out Paul’s deliverance from prison. NOTE: We Christians have the human responsibility to pray for all Christians, especially those who are missionaries and pastors (***Eph. 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.***). Who knows how many things have happened because Christians have prayed, and how many things will happen if they do pray.

There is a story about P. K. Smith who was working in East Equatorial Africa as a missionary for the CMA Church. He was rather new on the field. He and some others were out preaching to a tribe of people in the jungles. A torrential rain came and they were forced to make camp in the jungle. They went to sleep and at about a quarter past twelve, they were awakened by a strange sensation of the moving of the earth beneath them, and the tent was shaking. They also heard a strange, whistling noise as if giant animals were approaching. He took his gun and moved in the direction of the noise, intending to shoot. When he got on the other side of the tent, he saw at least fifteen elephants about thirty yards from the camp. His first impulse was to shoot, but he concluded that to kill one would simply do no good. He decided to retreat slowly behind the tent, for something told him not to shoot. As he moved through the dark, he did not notice a table loaded with foodstuff, dishes and empty cans, and he ran right into it and made a loud clattering sound. His first thought was that the elephants would charge but instead they fled the scene.

He later contacted some natives and related to them about the incident and they told him, “Mr. Smith you did the only thing that will frighten the elephant. If you beat an empty tin and make a good noise the elephant will

immediately run away, but as soon as you shoot they become so infuriated that it is very dangerous to have anything to do with them.”

Later, when Mr. Smith came home to America on a furlough, he was preaching at various churches about his missionary experiences. After one service, a lady walked up to him and told him that one day while she was cleaning her windows she had an urge or burden to pray for him. She fought the urge but then knelt and prayed fervently for some time. She recorded this date, and much to her surprise it was the same time as Mr. Smith was having the episode with the elephants.

What is the point? God was using prayer as a means to move the Almighty to protect his servants.

3. But Paul’s deliverance from prison would also come “through the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” This is divine sovereignty, for it would be omnipotent power which would release Paul. Yet, somehow omnipotent power is released through the prayers of God’s people. Such a mystery is too deep for me.
- C. ***I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed,*** -- Paul had an inner confidence he would be delivered, but he wasn’t going to “second guess” God. He knew he would have to face the Roman court for a final decision as to his release, and he wanted to make sure he would be bold for his Christian convictions. He did not want to compromise the gospel before the dignitaries in Rome, even if it meant his own death. If he bungled his testimony before the court, this would reflect on the gospel. Paul was not concerned for himself but wanted men to think well of Christ and the gospel of Christ. NOTE: Are we ashamed of the gospel in front of friends, family or business associates? Do we give the unsaved world the idea we Christians are ashamed of the Christ we claim to follow? We must be persuaded that the gospel is true before we will ever be bold for it (***Rom. 1:16: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.***).
- D. ***But will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body,*** -- The word “courage” means a frank, unhesitant proclamation of Christ. Paul desired to glorify Christ in his body; that is, through every part of his total being, men might see Christ in his life. NOTE: If people really know Christ, they would not abuse their bodies with drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, overeating, tobacco and lack of exercise, for the body belongs to the Lord. The body is just as important as the soul and it is to be brought under discipline. NOTE: The word “now” should be etched in our hearts and minds. We should honor Christ now. Never again will we have the opportunity to live for Him in this moment, to please Him in our present circumstances, to trust Him with all the suffering we are experiencing. Now is the time to live for Christ.
- E. ***Whether by life or by death.*** -- Paul clearly sees whatever happened to him, Christ would be exalted. Christ would be magnified whether the outcome was release or martyrdom. If Paul is acquitted and released, he will continue his apostolic labors. If he is condemned to death, he will go to the Lord with unwavering faith and with a song in his heart. Either way, Christ will be glorified. He placed no limitation on how God wanted to use his body. Paul had tremendous confidence in the purposes of God and knew Christ was with him no matter what happened.

- A. ***For to me***, -- Paul is giving his personal testimony and philosophy of life. He couldn't speak for the unsaved world, or even for those who outwardly professed Christ, but for him all of living and dying was wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. He had come to know the resurrected Christ personally and was going to live and die for Christ no matter what the rest of humanity did. NOTE: Most of this world of five billion people will never become Christians or follow Christ, but Christians follow Christ, do Christ's will, suffer for Christ, rejoice in Christ and die in Christ because we are convinced Christ alone is the way of salvation. NOTE: How do we know we are right? Ultimately eternity will tell the true story. If Christ is not the way, then all we Christians have lost is a little pride because we have followed a myth. If Christ is the way, however, every man, woman, boy and girl outside of Christ has lost their souls. The Christian loves, commits to and follows Christ, believing he will see Christ in eternity.
- B. ***To Live is Christ*** -- These words tell us Paul was excited about life. He saw life as an adventure with Christ. He found the key to living was being occupied with Christ. Living is Christ. Christ is what Paul got out of life. So many people think Christ can get them ready to die, but never realize Christ can also prepare them to live. Life lived to its fullest is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. NOTE: Paul knew the secret to Christianity and that is Christ. Real Christianity is not church but Christ, not rules and regulations but Christ, not cultural religion but Christ. Real Christianity is knowing the resurrected and living Christ personally. It is being loved, cared for, guided and dominated by the person of Jesus Christ. It was a divine person who invaded Paul's life and changed him not a religious, human institution. All of Paul's activities, all of his interests, his whole sphere of existence was in Jesus Christ. For Paul Christ was his life (***Col. 3:4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***). NOTE: Suppose you were asked to sum up your life, how would you do it? For to me to live is _____? You fill in the blank. Would you say, "To me to live is accumulating material wealth, or to live is my job, my business." Men sacrifice health, wife, family, church everything to pursue material goals which will never bring spiritual satisfaction. Others might say, "For to me to live is family, prestige, acceptance, power and influence." Others might say, "For to me to live is pleasure, sex, drugs, food or whatever." Men give their lives, all interests, every bit of attention, unlimited energy and devote themselves to these goals which will never bring them happiness, satisfaction and meaning, but will bring them eternal judgment in the next world if these goals are not tempered by Jesus Christ. Men set goals but they are not always the right goals or the best goals, and wrong goals can lead to destruction in time and eternity if we do not know Christ.
- A. ***And to die is gain***. -- No philosophy of life is complete without an explanation of death and the hereafter. How we view death will affect how we live life. If death is a dreaded event, we will live life in fear. If death is scoffed at, we will live life as a cynic. If death is the end of existence, we will eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Yet Paul says, "For to me to die is gain." Death for Paul was an anticipated event. Why? Because death for Paul meant a face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ. That One who he had loved and served by faith would then be a total reality to his sight in glory. NOTE: The very "die" in the Greek is in the aorist tense and could be translated "have died." Paul is not looking primarily at the act of death but the result of consequences of death. Death itself would not be a gain to Paul, but to be in the presence of his Lord in glory, that would be gain. NOTE: No Christian looks forward to the act or method of death. Some will die by old age, others by disease, others by accident, others on the battlefield. Some will go quickly; others will linger long and suffer much. There is a

built in fear about the way we shall die but the consequences of death for the Christian will be glorious. Death shall usher us into the presence of Christ forever. Someone has said, “It is dying that bothers me not death.” Yet, even in the process of dying with all the suffering, Christ will be with His people and will give them dying grace as they pass out of this world into the presence of Christ. NOTE: Death for Paul simply meant more of Christ. It meant total, complete and perfect, face-to-face fellowship with Jesus Christ. Death for the Christian means clearer knowledge of Christ, more whole-hearted service for Christ, and more rapturous adoration through Christ. The Christian can actually anticipate death because it means more of Christ.

Charles Spurgeon once said a most unusual thing. I recall it whenever I think of man’s innate desire to escape suffering and death. “If I had my choice between being raptured at the coming of the Lord and taken up into glory and changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump; if I had my choice between being raptured to the Lord and dying and being resurrected, I would choose to die in the agonies of death, for my Savior suffered and died and only through this did He experience the power of God in His resurrection. I would like to experience the suffering of my Lord, the pangs of death, to die and to be buried that I also might experience the power of the resurrection of God as He raises me up unto glory.”

IV. GLORIFYING CHRIST THROUGH SERVICE 1:22-26

A. Paul’s Dilemma Over Life and Death (vs. 22-24)

1. ***If I go on living in the body, this means fruitful labor for me.*** -- If Paul is acquitted and released from prison, it will prolong his ministry and Paul would have more fruit – souls won, saints built and churches established. This would be good but death would be better.
2. ***Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*** -- Paul realized the importance of his earthly ministry but he also would like to have perfect fellowship with Christ which comes through death. Paul had two wonderful alternatives before him – to be acquitted and go on with the ministry or be martyred and go home to be with the Lord. His personal inner desire was to die and be with the Lord. The words “better by far” are a triple comparative in the Greek and should be translated “which is much more better.” This is terrible English but wonderful Greek, for Paul runs out of adjectives to describe what ultimate and perfect fellowship with Christ will be like. NOTE: Notice also that Paul after death was looking forward to being in the presence of Christ immediately. He gives no hints of a purgatory, or some type of soul-sleep or reincarnation. Paul was looking for Christ after death even though he knew his body would not be resurrected until the final resurrection at the Second Advent of Christ. NOTE: Paul refers to death as a departure. “To depart” is a military word used of taking down a tent and breaking camp to go home. It is also a nautical term used of unmooring or untying a ship so it can move on to its new port. For Christians, death is not an ending but a beginning. It is breaking camp and going home to be with Christ. It is untying us from the earthly things and setting us free to go to our new destiny which is heaven. Death sets us free and takes us home to be with Christ. NOTE: Paul personally was torn between dying and gloriously possessing Christ or living and gloriously bearing fruit for Christ. This presented a tough choice but it was only hypothetical because ultimately it was not Paul’s choice

to make but God's. The decision about whether he would live or die would not be made by Caesar; that decision would ultimately be made in the councils of heaven. Paul's life would not end until God decided it was time. When Paul was not needed on the front lines of Christian battle, God would take him home. Paul knew the Roman Empire could not touch him as long as God desired to use him. Augustine said, "Man is immortal until his work is done." John Wesley said, "I'm immortal until the hour of my departure." NOTE: Death cannot touch any Christian until God is through with His work He is performing in and through them. From a divine perspective, there are no untimely deaths among Christians.

3. ***But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*** -- For Paul personally, death would have been the best way out, but we are not to think only of ourselves but we are to think of others. The Apostle Paul placed the objective need of the ministry to the saints above his own personal subjective desire to die and be with Christ.
- B. Paul's Decision To serve (vs. 25-26): ***Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*** -- Paul had a great confidence he would be released. He desired to be released that he might once again minister to the Philippians so they could progress in the faith – growth in love, in knowledge, in obedience and in fruitfulness. As they progress, they then will have the joy of their faith in Christ. Paul wanted these Philippians to experience joy. NOTE: Joy comes to the Christian as he is progressing in the things of Jesus Christ. Why is it important to progress? Progress means joy. Not to progress means to regress, and regression produces depression and discouragement, which is nothing but the lack of inner joy. As someone said about the word J O Y -- Jesus first. Others second. Yourself last.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Saved. What are the lessons for Christians in this section? First, God wants Christians to realize Christ desires to live His own life through the Christian and the Christian allows this to happen through faith and obedience. Second, Christ desires that Christians be joyful, for joy is a fruit of the Spirit and a proof of the filling of the Spirit, Third, Christians can face death squarely because it means more of Christ and face to face fellowship with Him. Fourth, God wants us to realize the worst thing that can happen to us is death. Yet, if death is the presence of Christ, then death is a blessing not a cursing. Therefore, if the worst thing that can happen to us is taken care of, then anything else that happens to us is tolerable as we can face it with the person of Christ. Fifth, Because living is Christ, there is meaning, purpose, value and importance to life. Since Christ is in our life, whatever we are, whatever we do is important because Christ is working out His own plan and character through us. Sixth, since death is gain for the Christian, do we Christians anticipate death? Do we look forward to it? On sickbeds and deathbeds, do we speak honestly to people about the alternative of death as the best way? Death is not a black monster for Christians but a blessed event, and we must portray that concept to people. Seventh, the ultimate reason we Christians live on this earth is to minister to others, glorifying God in the process. If we are not ministering, we are not going to be experiencing the joy of Christ. Joy is connected up with spiritual growth and service.
- B. Unsaved

1. Christ is the answer to life and to death. One skeptic said, "Life is a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing." But the Christian says that Christ is the key to the puzzle and can say with positive assurance, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
2. For you here this morning without Christ, I urge you to receive Christ into your life, for only Christ can prepare you to live and prepare you to die. Christ can make life worth living and make death an event longed for. Will you consider the claims of Christ on your life? If you do not receive Christ, you will perish in your sins for all eternity.