

Philippians 1:12-26

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[0 : 0 0] I'm here for three Sundays, so on the three Sunday evenings that I'm here I want to look at just a portion of Philippians. From chapter 1 verse 12 down to probably chapter 2 verse 11.

We'll see how we get on. So tonight we start with chapter 1 verse 12, Philippians chapter 1 verse 12. And we'll read down to verse 26.

Fearlessly. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel.

The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I'm in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.

And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. 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 : 4 0] I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Yet what shall I choose? I don't know. I'm torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

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.

Well, can we turn back to that passage that was read, Philippians chapter 1? You're probably aware that of all the letters that Paul wrote, the letter he wrote to Philippi, the church at Philippi, is the most obviously joyful.

[3 : 0 8] And in the letter Paul often talks about his own joy, and he exhorts his readers to rejoice, to be joyful with him, to rejoice in the Lord.

And again I say, rejoice. So it's a very joyful letter. And peace, well that comes into Philippians as well, chapter 4 verse 7, the peace of God, which passes all understanding.

Contentment, contentment, chapter 4, I've learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content. So joy, peace, contentment, that's the kind of style of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

And it's amazing when you consider the circumstances in which Paul wrote this letter. They were far from ideal. He was under arrest.

He was in some sort of prison. Probably not the worst possible prison. He was a Roman citizen. He therefore had rights which had to be respected.

[4 : 23] He had probably not yet been found guilty. It may have been the imprisonment in Caesarea, described in Acts, where he was imprisoned for two years for his own protection.

Because the Jews wanted to kill him. So the Romans had to rescue him from the Jews and keep him in safe custody. And they did so for two years until Paul tried to hurry things along by appealing to Caesar, which meant that he had to have a safe journey, protected journey, to Rome in order to appeal to Caesar.

So it may have been written in Caesarea. It may have been written in Rome. But he had not yet been found guilty. And we know from the letter that he was able to receive visitors.

We know that he was able to receive gifts from people who supported him. People like Epaphroditus, who's mentioned in the letter. But he was not a free man.

Three or four times in the letter he talks about his chains. I'm not sure that that means that he was necessarily chained for 24 hours every day because he was writing letters.

[5 : 39] It must be difficult to write a letter if you're in chains. I suppose it's possible. But certainly at times he was in chains.

Probably during the night he was in chains. I don't know. But he mentions his chains. So he was not a free man. And the outcome of this imprisonment was completely uncertain.

He was unsure what the future held. If he was about to appeal to Caesar, then that appeal might have been successful and he might have been set free.

On the other hand, if it was unsuccessful, he faced possible execution. So his future was uncertain. Freedom, possibly. Execution, possibly.

He didn't know. And meanwhile he was housebound. If it's the imprisonment described at the end of Acts, it says that he was kept under house arrest.

[6 : 39] So he may well have been literally housebound. His ministry was curtailed. Severely curtailed. And it must have been extremely frustrating for him.

And yet, it's the most cheerful and the most joyful of all Paul's letter. Why? What's the secret of his joy?

Well, verse 21 of this passage sums it up. A wonderful statement. For to me, to live is Christ. And, therefore, to die is gain.

That sums Paul up. To me, to live is Christ. And to die is gain. The secret of joy is to live for Christ.

And if we're living for Christ, then death is gain. Because it will bring us more of Christ. It will bring us nearer to Christ. So if Christ is what we're living for, then death, which brings us more of Christ, is gain.

[7 : 49] Now, if you live for anything else, death is loss. If you live for your possessions, for pleasure, for status, for your job, for your spouse, for your family, if you live for any of those things, death is loss.

Because you'll lose them. When they die or you die. If you live for Christ, then he is the same, regardless of how you're doing with respect to these other things, job, possessions, pleasure, spouse, family.

Christ is the same, regardless of how you're doing with respect to those things. And, therefore, to die also is gain. So that's the secret.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I want to show you tonight, from the passage that we read, how this works out in Paul's experience.

I think what he says surrounding this statement in verse 21, both before and after it, shows us what it means to be able to say, for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

[9 : 17] Let's look at the first one. For to me, to live is Christ. Look at verse 12. Take a look at verse 12. I want you to know, brother, I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Paul. He had probably been visited by Epaphroditus, and the church that Epaphroditus had come from had sent him with a gift to find out how Paul was doing.

How are you doing, Paul? How are you coping with this long imprisonment? How are you coping with these chains? Well, how would you and I have responded in his situation?

I want you to know, brothers, how deeply disappointed I am that my strategic ministry has been halted. I want you to know, brothers, how frustrated I am at these restrictions to my freedom.

I want you to know, brothers, how terrible this lack of privacy is, how unpleasant these Roman soldiers are, how this constant bureaucratic delay in getting my case before the emperor is driving me round the bend.

[10 : 47] The uncertainty is getting me down. Would you and I have responded, perhaps, with something like that? Well, that's not how Paul responds.

How are you getting on, Paul? How are you getting on? How are you coping with those chains? Well, this is what I want you to know, folks. Don't worry about me. I'm alright.

What has happened to me is advancing the gospel. For me to live is Christ, you see. What is happening to me is advancing the gospel. Therefore, I'm okay if the gospel is being advanced.

My life is not about my freedom or my comfort or my success or even my life. My life is about Christ and about the gospel. And what has happened to me has advanced the gospel.

more. And that makes me happy. Isn't it remarkable that the imprisonment of the world's greatest missionary was advancing the gospel?

[11 : 58] How could that be? Some of you might be thinking. Well, Paul answers the question in the passage. Look at verse 13. 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.

Paul was being guarded by Caesar's household guard. He was an important prisoner. He was a Roman citizen. They had to look after him until he had been found guilty.

Professor F.F. Bruce, who was a classical scholar as well as a biblical scholar, he says that Paul would have been chained to a Roman soldier and that the guard would have been chained every four hours.

Well, think about that. What an opportunity for the gospel that is. Just imagine it. It wasn't just Paul that was captive.

He had literally a captive audience. they couldn't get away. I mean, you lot can walk out of here if you want to. The Roman soldiers couldn't who had to look after Paul at the risk of their own lives.

[13 : 21] So every four hours, a new Roman soldier bored out of his mind, chained to the apostle Paul. So what do you think the apostle Paul talked about? Why are you here, Paul?

You don't seem like a criminal. You don't seem like a dangerous man. What are you doing here in chain? Well, let me tell you. And gradually everybody was hearing that he was in chains for Christ.

He was in chains for the gospel. And the gospel was becoming a talking point throughout the palace guards, says the apostle Paul. As he says somewhere else, I might be chained, but the word of God is not chained.

They can't chain the word of God. Just imagine it. Four hours, chained to the apostle Paul. Listening to his conversations with his visitors.

Perhaps even listening to his prayers, listening to their prayers as they prayed together. maybe even reading his letters. What are you writing Paul?

[14 : 36] I mean, bored out of his mind, that poor old Roman soldier. What are you writing Paul? What's all that about? What's that letter to the Romans about that you're writing? Well, you can read it if you want. I wonder if there are Christians here who through circumstances beyond your control.

Your activities, your ministry has been curtailed. Might be through age, might be through retirement.

I retired about four weeks ago. You're looking at a retired man. Might be through illness. doors have closed that used to be open.

And perhaps you feel frustrated. Perhaps you feel a bit bitter. Maybe you might even feel a bit guilty that you can't do what you used to do.

Well, think of Paul, the traveler, Paul, the missionary, Paul, the leader, Paul, the strategist, the church planter, housebound, chained to a Roman soldier.

[16 : 04] And don't let brooding about what you can't do stop you from doing what you can do. Because there's always something you can do. There's always somebody you can witness to.

There's always somebody you can write to. think of all the letters that Paul wrote from prison. Thank God for Paul's imprisonment. Would we have had Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, 2 Timothy, Titus, would we have had them if they hadn't put Paul in prison?

Would he have had time to write these letters if he hadn't been in prison? On Ephesians, it doesn't seem to have been any particular problem that Paul wrote Ephesians to deal with.

He just wrote Ephesians because he wanted to write Ephesians and he had time on his hands. And the result is a tremendous meditation on the gospel of the grace of God and the church of Jesus Christ.

There's always somebody you can witness to. There's always somebody you can write to. There's always somebody you can pray for. And Paul began this letter by telling the Philippians how much he was praying for them.

[17 : 24] Ceaselessly, without stopping. Paul could have sat in his cell and moped about what might have been and about what he couldn't do.

And if he'd done that he would have done nothing other than by his miserable attitude put people off the Christian faith. God won't hold you responsible for what you can't do.

He will hold you responsible for what you can do. So don't let what you can't do stop you from doing what you can do. You can always do something.

And did you notice Paul's trust in the sovereignty of God. Look at verse 16. He says I am put here I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

I am put here for the defense of the gospel. That's how Paul saw his imprisonment. I've been put here he said. Who put me here? Well the Jews put Paul in prison.

[18 : 39] They wanted to kill him in Jerusalem. The Romans had to rescue him. Otherwise he'd have been lynched like Stephen was before him. So you could argue that the Jews were responsible for Paul's imprisonment.

You could argue that the Romans were responsible for Paul's imprisonment. They delayed taking action. It actually says in Acts that it was either Felix or Festus.

I can't just remember which. Either Felix or Festus kept Paul in prison because he wanted Paul to pay him a bribe to set him free.

Roman corruption, Roman bureaucracy, Roman delay. That kept Paul in prison. You could argue that the devil put Paul in prison.

The devil put him in prison. The Jews put him in prison. The Romans put him in prison. But what does Paul say? I've been put here. Why? For the defense of the gospel.

[19 : 39] So who put Paul in prison for the defense of the gospel? Definitely not the devil. Definitely not the Jews. Definitely not the Romans. Who put Paul in prison for the defense of the gospel?

Definitely God. That's how Paul regarded his imprisonment. Look, he said to himself, you can imagine him thinking this through. You ought to think about these things with the Bible open.

When you're in these situations, think them through. Imagine Paul thinking these things through, scratching his head. Why am I here in prison? You know, God is pretty good at getting people out of prison.

Read the book of Acts. It happened in chapter 4. It happened in chapter 12 with Peter. Peter and John in chapter 4.

Peter in chapter 12. And it happened with Paul and Silas in chapter 16. And there was an earthquake involved. The other two cases, it was angels. Chapter 16, it was an earthquake. God can get people out of prison quite easily if he wants to.

[20 : 42] So why didn't God get Paul out of prison? He could have done and he didn't. Why? Well, because he had a job for Paul to do in prison. That's what happens when you think things through with your Bible open.

Instead of just moping, think it through. And so Paul realized that God had put him there to preach the gospel.

And read Acts. Read the second half of Acts. You find him preaching to Felix. You find him preaching to Festus.

You find him preaching to Agrippa. Right at the heart of the Roman government, either in Caesarea or possibly even in Rome itself.

Paul was making a stand for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why are you in that hospital ward?

[21 : 44] Who's put you there? If you're a Christian, God could get you out of there. If he doesn't, why not? Because he's got a job for you to do in there.

Why are you in that nursing hall? I remember my father who was a very, very active preacher well into his late 80s.

He was still a preacher. And when he was about 89, he died when he was 90, but when he was 89, he had to stop preaching. And he was very frustrated by it.

And I remember saying to him, because he had carers coming into the home, oh, maybe six times a day, and even one in the middle of the night towards the end of his life.

Constant queue of carers coming in to look after him, to make him a simple male, to change this and change that and change the other as he got worse. One carer after another. So I remember saying to him, look dad, your preaching days are over, you're not going to be preaching again, but you've got these carers coming in.

[23 : 01] They need the gospel. They've got to come in, they've got to stay for a certain amount of time, they've got to actually record in their book that I stayed with him for so many, such a length of time.

What are you going to do with these carers? They need to hear the gospel. Okay, so Paul says, it has become clear throughout the whole palace garden to everyone else that I'm in chains for Christ.

That is one way in which the gospel was advanced by Paul's imprisonment, but there was another way as well, 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.

In other words, Paul says here, because I'm in prison, other people have been stimulated to follow my example, remarkably. It's actually encouraged others to pick up the baton and to speak the word of God more courageously.

I mean, you can imagine people thinking if Paul can be as faithful as that at his age, isn't it time I got serious about the gospel? What am I doing?

[24 : 18] And others began to pick up the baton. And that reminds us that example is the most powerful of all Christian influences and it's the one of which we are least conscious.

And we are examples. Every Christian is an example to other Christians and to other non-Christians actually, but every Christian is an example to other Christians, whether we like it or not, we are examples, either good examples or bad examples to other Christians.

Our example will either help or hinder other Christians. So however limited our activities may be, our very attitude to those limitations will help or hinder others who look on.

The way we cope with old age, the way we cope with illness, disappointment, the way we cope with retirement, the way we cope with death, will either help or hinder others who are looking off.

So Paul, by his example, was stimulating others to preach more courageously. And then in verse 15 following, he makes a slight qualification.

[25 : 47] Verse 15, it's true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I'm in chains.

So what's happening here? Well, some have been stimulated to preach the gospel by Paul's imprisonment more boldly, but for the wrong reason.

Maybe they saw Paul as a rival, maybe they resented Paul's influence, maybe they felt overshadowed by Paul, maybe they felt jealous of his gifts, and maybe they were quite glad when he was set aside, and it was their opportunity to get a following for themselves.

You know, I am Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ. So other people came along, wanting to build up a following for themselves, and wanting perhaps to influence some of the people who Paul had led to Christ, to follow them.

They came crawling out of the woodwork when Paul was in prison. Sin gets in everywhere, doesn't it? It taints even the greatest human activity, preaching Christ, out of selfish ambition, and envy.

[27 : 14] Now these people weren't false teachers. They weren't preaching a different gospel. If they'd been preaching a different gospel, Paul would have given them a Galatians, let him be accursed, if he's preaching a different gospel.

These people were preaching the gospel, but they were preaching the gospel with mixed motives, and some of them with sinful motives, but they were preaching the gospel.

So how did Paul react? Well I think actually we see Paul at one of his greatest moments here. How did he react?

Well as one writer puts it, with relaxed indifference, with relaxed indifference, I like that phrase. He reacted with relaxed indifference. If Christ is preached, I rejoice.

What if they're more successful than me? That's great if they're preaching Christ. What if I'm losing my following? If Christ is gaining a greater following?

[28 : 21] For me to live is Christ. For me to live is not Paul. For me to live is Christ. And therefore if Christ is preached, I'm happy.

It doesn't matter who's preaching Christ. What a contrast to the pettiness and the tiny mindedness of some Christians. Are we glad when other churches and other ministries are blessed more than we are?

Or do we pour cold water on it and say, oh it can't be real. Not if it's them. It can't be real. Let's see how long it lasts. Paul doesn't react like that at all.

He's pleased. He's thrilled if Christ is being preached. And if other people are bringing more people to Christ than he is, because for me to live, says Paul, is Christ. And to die is gain.

So, I think his words there have shown us in more sort of practical detail what the statement for me to live is Christ meant for Paul.

[29 : 31] What about for me to die is gain? For me to die is gain? Remember, Paul doesn't know what the future holds. He might be executed.

He might be released. And we've got this amazing passage from about verse 20, from about verse, halfway through verse 18 onwards, verse 18, verse 19 onwards.

We've got this amazing passage where he says, when I think about the future, release, execution, you know, I can't make my mind up.

I'm torn between the two. There's part of me that would like to depart and be with Christ, because that's far better. But there's part of me that would like to remain and continue my ministry, because I don't think my ministry is over yet with you.

I think there's things I've still got to teach you and things you need to learn from me. So part of me would like to go and be with Christ, but part of me would like to stay on and continue my ministry with you.

[30 : 43] And actually that's what I expect will happen. I actually expect that I'm going to be released so that I can continue my ministry to you. But if that isn't what happens, it doesn't matter.

Because for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So if the verdict goes against him, good.

I'll depart, says Paul. Paul. I'm sure you've heard from many preachers who preach on this passage that this word depart had two very common uses in the New Testament world.

One was of a ship leaving port. A ship loosing its mooring and sailing off to the next destination.

Sailing home perhaps. And the other common use in which, the other common way in which this word was used was of breaking camp, of an army breaking camp and moving on to the next place.

[32 : 08] What's the idea here? Paul says, if the verdict goes against me, okay, I'll depart. I'll be going to the next place.

Somebody described retirement to me the other day as the departure lounge. Departure lounges are exciting, aren't they? I find departure lounges exciting.

you. Paul says, I desire. I desire to depart. And that word desire is usually used in the New Testament in a bad way.

It's the word lust, which is usually used in a bad way in the New Testament. Lusting for bad things that we shouldn't have. Paul says here, I crave, I have a longing, to depart.

To depart where? Well, he says to be with Christ. Here's a verse that tells us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

[33 : 24] Here's a verse that confirms what Jesus says to the dying thief. Today, today, verily I say to you, you've got my word for this. You've got my solemn word for this.

Verily, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. This is what theologians rather boringly call the intermediate state.

It doesn't sound very exciting, does it? The intermediate state. Are you looking forward to the intermediate state? Perhaps not. Are you looking forward to being with Christ?

Well, I hope so. We call it the intermediate state because it's not our ultimate hope, that it is not the ultimate Christian hope. And we do need to remember that.

And we do need to stop talking as if it is, because it isn't. The ultimate Christian hope is the resurrection of the body. Christianity is about resurrection.

[34 : 18] It's not about souls going on in a disembodied world. What excited the first Christians was the fact that Jesus was raised on the third day.

Something happened to his body on the third day. The fact that his soul continued wouldn't have been of interest to anybody. Most people believe that anyway.

What changed the world was the fact that on the third day, his body was raised and transformed into a new body which would never die again.

And the Christian hope is to have a body like unto Christ's glorious body. Paul describes it in Romans 8 as a body which is redeemed from corruption.

And it's not just our body which is going to be redeemed. The whole of the material creation is going to be redeemed, set free from its bondage to decay. And the resurrection of Jesus' body which is a part of this material creation is the beginning of the new creation.

[35 : 28] That's what it is. Nothing less than that. And that's our hope. The new heaven and the new earth. And new creation. And new bodies to enjoy that creation like unto the body of the Lord Jesus.

And Paul actually tells us that in Philippians. In Philippians chapter 3 verse 20. We eagerly await a saviour from there, from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

That's the Christian hope. But, Paul is saying here, it seems to me, quite definitely, that in some sense, as soon as we die, even before Christ returns and before the resurrection of the body, as soon as we die, in some sense, we are with Christ, absent from the body, present with the Lord.

because nothing can separate us from Christ. Nothing. Not even death can separate us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Our union with Jesus Christ is forever.

It is inseparable. And even after death, and before the resurrection of the body, therefore, we will be asleep, but we will be asleep in Jesus, and we will be in some sense with the Lord.

[36 : 53] so, here is a man who really means what he says when he says, for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

And that is why this letter is a letter of such joy, such contentment, such peace, and I hope that you will have found some blessing from that passage this evening.

And next week we'll carry on and look at the rest of chapter one, and then we'll move into chapter two. Father, we pray that you'd stop us living for such trivialities, for things that are going to pass away, even for Christians, temptation to be diverted from Christ to such things.

May we be honestly able to say with Paul tonight, for to me to live is Christ, and then we will be able to say with Paul, for to me to die is gain.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's ride two things. Amen. Let's move into heaven.

[38 : 37] God doesn't wonder yet as