

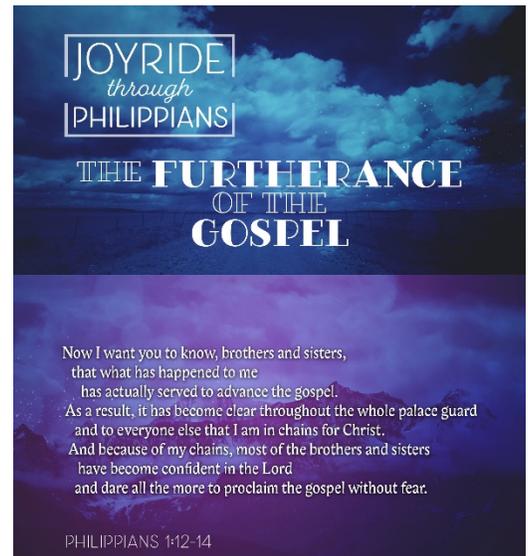
## The Furtherance of the Gospel

We are continuing our series from the New Testament Book of Philippians that we are calling **Joyride**... *Joyride* since **joy** is a persistent theme that runs through the Apostle Paul's letter to the early Christians in the Greek City of Philippi.



While it is absolutely not necessary to hear every sermon in the series, *it certainly doesn't hurt*. While each message stands alone, it is good to hear the others, especially the first in the series. So if you have not heard the first installment, check it out online. You can find sermons on our website at [www.cpNorthshore.com](http://www.cpNorthshore.com), or on YouTube or Vimeo or our Facebook page. There is even a podcast that you can find and subscribe to on iTunes. Check it out.

Last week was *The Fellowship of the Gospel*, next week it is *The Faith of the Gospel*, today it is *The Furtherance of the Gospel*, starting with verse 12. Here is how it starts:



<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

<sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains **for Christ**.<sup>1</sup>

We might want to ask, “So, what happened?”

The New Testament Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are often called *The Prison Epistles* because Paul wrote them while in Roman captivity, from the Capital of the Empire.

Paul had a longstanding goal to preach the Gospel in Rome, intending to get there *the usual way*... but he arrived there in chains. Due to the treachery of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, the Jews had Paul captured... but since Paul was a Roman Citizen, he appealed to Caesar, which eventually brought him to Rome as a prisoner, awaiting trial. His supposed crime was treason, since he preached the Gospel... calling for allegiance to Jesus as Lord and King.

<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:12–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But what was meant to be a defeat for Paul and his message “actually served to advance the Gospel.”

Paul continued to preach the Gospel while in chains. There is no doubt that *some* believed, and *all* were faced with Paul’s powerful testimony... that regardless of his circumstances, God continued to accomplish His mission.

<sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. <sup>2</sup>

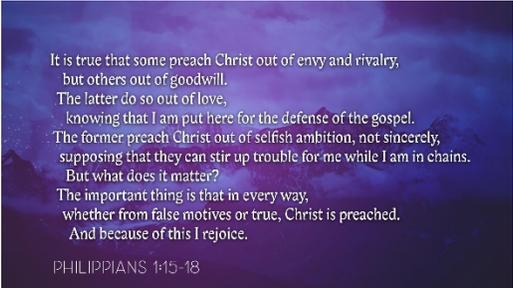
God not only used Paul within his immediate circumstances... Paul’s testimony served to encourage others to “proclaim the gospel without fear.” Clearly, there were reasons to fear. Preaching the Gospel landed Paul in jail; it actually put him *on death row* since the charges of treason could (and actually did) result in his execution.

Arresting Paul was certainly intended to not merely stop Paul, but to serve as a clear message to all. Paul’s chains were meant to intimidate others; they were putting Christians *on notice*. But rather than *intimidating* those who preached the Gospel, Paul’s chains **emboldened** them. Rather than calling for the conclusion that they ought to cease and desist or else they would end up in jail, they concluded, “So what? Look what they’ve done to Paul, yet the Gospel is preached and the mission continues. If God can use Paul in chains, then what can’t God do through others?”

That is one of the reasons we have an *open door* to missionaries and we routinely bring updates about their work. Sure... we invite them so that we can support them with funds and prayer. But we also invite them so that **we** can be encouraged. If they have the courage to follow God in their various ways, doing His work in His world, then what about us? If they can do it, even in difficult and treacherous circumstances, then why can’t we? Their faith and courage breeds faith and courage in us.

<sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>3</sup>

This passage reveals another layer of **opposition** faced by Paul and his message.



It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry,  
but others out of goodwill.  
The latter do so out of love,  
knowing that I am 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 am 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.

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18

<sup>2</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:15–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- He was opposed by the Jews, those who rejected Jesus as Messiah and conspired to kill or otherwise silence Paul.
- He was opposed by the government... suspecting that Paul's message was treasonous. And,
- He was opposed by others who were preaching Christ... essentially *other Christians*.

This may be hard to imagine... but it seemed that the Christians were divided into factions, even in some of these earliest days of the Church. People preaching Jesus in opposition to one another. Actually not all that hard to imagine, is it?

Paul explained that there were those preaching out of goodwill and love, but others preaching out of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition. I suppose that their selfish ambition was that which is common to the human condition; selfish ambition is generally expressed in pursuit of **wealth** and **power**.

While I suppose that there may have been those preaching for money in Paul's day, or some sort of material wealth... it took the Church a while to perfect the *business* of religion, the sort of thing that some continue to perfect even now. There are some rich preachers. (Before I criticize those with fancy houses and private planes and such, I am reminded that on the grand-worldwide scheme of things, I'm doing pretty well when compared to most preachers.)

I suspect in Paul's day, selfish ambition was mostly pursued in areas of power and control. There were those intent to control others, emphasizing religious rules and practice. Many sought to impose Jewish laws and customs on those who turned to faith in Christ and believed the Gospel. Sadly, religion remains as a common way to control people, demanding strict adherence to rules and customs.

Perhaps the control that people want the *most* is **self-control**. We want to call our own shots. Sometimes our preaching is skewed because we insist on making way for our own ways, our own rebellion, our own sin.

So whether it was selfish ambition in pursuit of wealth, power, or control... those who opposed Paul sought to prove that Paul was wrong by pointing to his circumstances. "How could Paul be right if he is suffering like this in chains?" they would ask. "If he is so right, how can things be going so wrong for him?"

This sort of argument shouldn't surprise us; it is a common argument today. If you are poor and powerless, you must be wrong. If you are sick, weak, and downtrodden, without the obvious evidence of blessing, then your faith must be weak, or misplaced.

How could God be *for* Paul when it seemed that everything was against him? This is the trouble that was being stirred up for Paul while he was in chains.

Nevertheless, notice Paul's response.

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup>

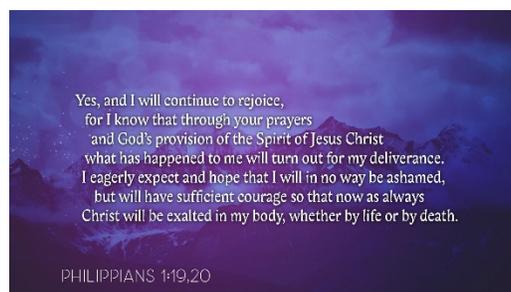
What does it matter? No defense? No dismantling the false theology? No attack on the false motives?

This demonstrates Paul's **confidence** in the Gospel. In a battle between darkness and light, light always wins. Truth prevails over lies.

It is a good reminder to us. We should be careful to not waste too much time and energy either defending our own circumstances or discrediting others. While I am, of course, very much in favor of *getting it right* and *doing it right* from *right motives* and all... we must be **most** concerned with advancing the Gospel of Jesus. Differences in style and approach, our judgements of the motives of others, even various theological nuances, must not detract from the centrality of the Gospel. It is too easy to be consumed with identifying what is wrong; let's do what is right. That is the higher calling.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>d5</sup>

Rejoice! There it is again on our **joyride**. Once again Paul shows us that joy is bigger than our circumstances... bigger than being in chains, bigger than rivalry and envy from others.



Here Paul credits his *source* of joy as **spiritual**... spiritual in two ways:

1. There is the shared spiritual work of prayer among believers (a horizontal aspect of spiritual work) and
2. There is God's provision of the Holy Spirit, here described as the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the vertical aspect of spiritual work).

True joy is not merely a matter of happiness in our circumstances, and it is beyond the natural. We are responsible for one another's joy as we are bound together in prayer... and God provides for our joy with His very presence in the person of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>5</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:18–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Paul's joy was tied to confidence... confidence that all would turn out for his deliverance.

And what is that deliverance?

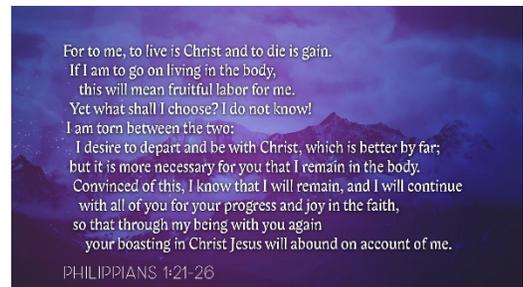
<sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.<sup>6</sup>

It may seem obvious to us that the deliverance sought by Paul was **freedom from his chains**... that his Roman captors would realize that what had him in their custody would be revealed as the hoax that it was, a manipulation at the hands of Jerusalem's religious leaders. That he would be found not guilty and released to go on with his life and work. *That* could seem like a reasonable deliverance, that justice would be done.

But Paul was a devoted follower of Jesus. Paul knew that Jesus was once in the same circumstance, on Rome's death row, falsely accused, all a hoax concocted by Jerusalem's corrupt religious leaders looking out for their own selfish ambitions. And we know, of course, how that injustice ended.

So what might have seemed like an obvious deliverance from a casual observer's view would likely not have been Paul's perspective, not Paul's commitment. His purpose and goal was to exalt Christ, "whether by life or by death."

<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.<sup>7</sup>



"To live is Christ and to die is gain." This is a profound statement of faith. For those who believe, our living these lives is **of** Christ, **for** Christ, and **by** Christ... and the reward of this life, through the passage of death, is to be with Christ eternally. It is great gain.

One might ask, why delay the gratification? Why must we wait?

On Wednesday we'll be baptizing a number of our young ones who are part of our Wednesday evening programs. Each one will make their way into the baptismal. Each one will declare their faith in Jesus. Each one will be submerged in the water signifying their death with Christ; their old life was exchanged for new life with Christ when they believed.

<sup>6</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>7</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:21-24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Here's what won't happen. We **won't** *hold any of them under*.

We might chuckle, but isn't it logical, if eternity is our only purpose, to have that *great gain*?

No, **these lives matter**. God has a purpose for these lives. Only God controls the timeline for our departure into eternity.

Yet the struggle is real, found in these words of Paul.

<sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.<sup>8</sup>

One old translation puts it like this:

**For I am in a strait betwixt the two**<sup>9</sup>

In one world, longing for the next... having tasted Christ now longing for His full presence in eternity, all the while losing our appetite for the flavor of this world. "Torn between the two" is a good translation as well, as it depicts the stress, the affliction and anxiety.

Do notice that Paul's longing for the next life has nothing to do with **escape**; he is not wanting to be *euthanized*, somehow *put out of his misery* or spared from the pain. Paul's only goal is to be with Christ.

But it was more necessary for Paul to continue his work, through his life and testimony in those most difficult, humiliating, and treacherous circumstances.

<sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.<sup>10</sup>

Paul was content to do God's will, leaving *the timeline and all* in God's hands.

If it seems that Paul was convinced that he would set foot in Philippi again, it seems that he was wrong about that. While there is not unanimous agreement among scholars, most agree that Paul did not make it back; it is likely that his imprisonment while he wrote his letter to the Philippians ended in his beheading.

Nevertheless, his testimony was with them, as was his example and prayers. And, of course, his testimony and words remain with us.

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<sup>8</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:23–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>9</sup> Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Braune, K., & Hackett, H. B. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Philippians* (p. 24). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>10</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:25–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

While Paul did not use these precise words, I think the implied lesson can be applied to us with these simple words: **Live Dead**.

This phrase was coined by some of our Assemblies of God missionaries; like Paul, they are devoting their lives to planting churches in very difficult places... literally putting their own lives at risk as they do so. They operate under this banner: **Live Dead**.

Paul said it like this to the Philippians:

to live is Christ and to die is gain... Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!<sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two...<sup>11</sup>

Was he so torn? Don't his life and words demonstrate that he *pressed on* with confidence and resolve?

He put it this way in when writing from his same chains to the Galatians:

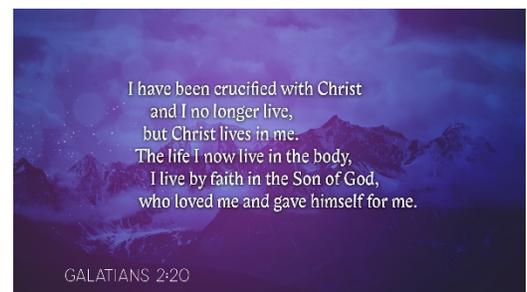
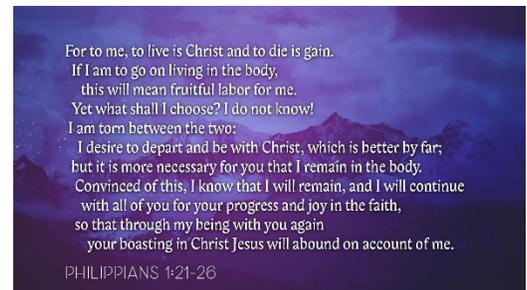
<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.<sup>12</sup>

When in a straight betwixt the two, when torn between two worlds, the solution is not a matter of either/or... it is a matter of **both**.

The solution is to **Live Dead**. We are called to **Live Dead**.

That is what is so powerful about following the Lord in obedience in baptism (if you haven't, what are you waiting for?). That's why we are **dunkers**, not **sprinklers**. Sure it is a bit more inconvenient... but it is the total immersion in baptism's waters that best depict the death we proclaim as Christ now lives in us who believe.

Please don't confuse the equation here. It is not a matter of living half-dead and half-alive... but fully-dead and fully-alive, now and every day.



<sup>11</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:21–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>12</sup> The New International Version. (2011). (Ga 2:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Again... that is what is so powerful about baptism. Being immersed in the waters of baptism isn't a symbol of future death, or partial death... it is full and complete death associated with believing and following Jesus.

And rising up out of the waters of baptism symbolizes resurrection... full life (I would claim more alive than ever) with Christ living in and through us.

Full death and full life... resolving to walk and persevere with Christ in His work for His world.

It is true... eternal life with Christ begins after death, but not merely physical death that ends these lives. Life with Christ begins with death to self and sin when we believe.

I invite you to LIVE DEAD today.

Perhaps you have never taken that step of faith toward Christ and the new life He gives. Make today your day and believe.

Perhaps there is something that persists that *should* be dead. **Perhaps?** It is a daily, constant sacrifice. Believe with me today that God by His Spirit will enable us to put to death anything and everything that keeps us from fully living for Him.

And perhaps there is **life** to be pursued today. Have you lost your way or focus? Maybe you have given up? Maybe you need God's gifts of courage and faith to *press on* with the life He is calling you to. Today is a day to trust God and believe... believing for more powerful ways for the Gospel to be alive in and through our lives.

This is all possible with Jesus today. This is the Gospel, His Good News. Let's pray that His Gospel will go further in us and through us.

