

What's Your Life Really All About?

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[0 : 00] Our reading comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, from verse 12 to 26. That's page 1178 of your church Bibles.

Page 1178. Paul's chains advance the gospel. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 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.

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?

[1 : 19] 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 God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

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 do not know. I am 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.

[2 : 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 busting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

The word of the Lord. Thanks, Alan, for reading. It would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Philippians chapter 1, and you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful as we look at this portion of the Bible together.

I'm hugely excited about us looking at Philippians together as a church family in the coming weeks. I think it's really exciting. But what's much more important than how I feel about it is that God speaks to us, and we encounter him through his word.

So let's ask for God's help now as we turn to this passage. Let's pray together. Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves us, that brings us into union with him, and through that union into fellowship with you, where we are your people and you are our God.

Help us as we hear your word to know you better, to grow in love for you and for each other, and to discern your will for how we should now live, for we ask these things in Jesus' name.

[3 : 57] Amen. So tonight's passage, as Darren's alluded to, as he's got us talking and thinking, it really makes us think, well, what is my life really all about? What would bring me joy?

What brings me joy? What do I get most anxious about losing? I was reading a book over the summer, one week in December, by Sebastian Falke, and it's about a bunch of people who have completely diverse lives in London, and they meet together on a tube train.

That's what brings them together. And in the book, what strikes you is that, by the way Sebastian Falke describes each of these people through the book, you see that they're each driven by something that they think will give them joy.

So you've got a hedge fund manager who is obsessed with making money. That's what comes first more than anything else. You've got his son who feels completely lost, doesn't know what life's about, never wanted for anything, doesn't know what to do with his life.

So he just plays FIFA soccer in his upstairs room. You've got a barrister who desperately wants to find a wife. That's what he's looking for in his life. You've got a wife who desperately wants her kids to be happy.

[5 : 04] She's so worried about them. You've got a religious extremist, a Muslim extremist, who wants to blow up the train and kill the other people because he thinks that's what will get him to paradise.

A tube train driver, the driver of the train, she lives her life for her second life in a computer game because she's bored of her real life and wants her alternative reality.

There's a book critic who wants more than anything else that his own writing would be recognized by other people. And he'd be published and get the prestige of the writers he writes about. There's an entrepreneur who's from overseas and has lived in England for decades.

And he desperately wants to be on the Queen's honors list because he feels if I could get an honor from the Queen, it would really show that I'm British more than anything else. And these things, these are different sort of ideas for what drives people in today's world, what we really live for.

I don't know how we'd answer that ourselves. What would give you joy more than anything else? What are you anxious about losing? We started this series in Philippians last week and we heard that the church in Philippi that Paul writes to in some ways is a model church.

[6 : 15] It's joined in Paul's mission. They get the gospel and they're partnering with him. And now Paul turns, having written to them the introduction with great joy and affection, he now turns to talk about himself and his own situation.

So we're going from the model church, if you like, last week to the model disciple maker this week. And we find out that Paul is in prison. We see that in verse 13. If you have a look at verse 13, as a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I'm in chains for Christ.

We don't know for sure where he is. Looking at the history, he might have been in prison in Caesarea when he writes this, which is just on the Mediterranean coast, not far really from Jerusalem.

I don't think he's there. I suspect he writes this from imprisonment in Rome, which came after that because if reference is in the letter, I think that's more likely. And if he did that, it's worth tracking quite how difficult the last few years had been for Paul.

He's in prison in Caesarea from 57 to 59 AD. He's under regional governors Felix, who drags his feet and won't let Paul go. Then Portius Festus.

[7 : 27] Then he appeals to Festus as a Roman citizen, that he wants to be heard before Caesar. And so he's sent to Rome and he has a horrendous journey to Rome.

He gets shipwrecked and they end up in Malta. He nearly dies on several occasions. And finally he arrives in Rome and he's under house arrest. So he's not allowed to leave the premises.

He'd have had a Roman guard handcuffed to him on either side. And when they go along in shifts 24 hours a day. And it's worth just picturing how that would have felt if you were Paul.

Paul, my wife, Kathy, tore her leg muscle last Sunday in the park. She's had a week on crutches. I cannot tell you how frustrated she is that she can't walk around properly.

This was Paul, the pioneer church planter, who took the gospel to uncharted territory. He had courage like very few of us have. He was a traveler.

[8 : 24] And he's gone from Jerusalem all the way through what's now Syria, all the way through what's now Turkey. And now he wants to get to Spain because he knows the people of Spain have not heard the gospel.

He's the first man ever to bring the gospel into Europe. He's gone into Greece and up through into what's now Albania. And he's locked in a house. It's extraordinary. So the writer John Stott says this.

He says, That's where the shock comes from in this passage we're looking at here tonight, that none of those pictures are anything like how Paul feels.

The emotion is there twice in verse 18. Just have a look at verse 18. And it's joy. Christ is preached and because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. So the question for us as we look at that is, what could it be that matters so much to Paul? He could rejoice in that situation.

[9 : 46] And the heart of it comes in verse 21. Verse 21. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul says, To me, to live is Christ. That's why we have to think about that question for ourselves. To me, to live is.

How might people around us answer that question? To live is to be skiing, to be surfing, to be on a beach, to be on holiday.

To live is to be popular, to be praised, to be famous, to be accepted. To live is to find a romantic relationship.

To live is my family. To live is to be a consultant in the hospital, to be a lawyer. Paul says, To me, to live is Christ.

[10 : 51] His joy flows from that purpose statement, and we see it woven through the passage. So our first point, Paul rejoices in affliction because of the priority of the gospel.

We get that in verse 12. If you have a look. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

How? Well, he tells us in two ways how it could be that the greatest evangelist of his generation, being locked away, advances the gospel. First of all, it's because of what he can do.

He never shuts up about the gospel. Verse 13, it's become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I'm in chains for Christ. You can imagine, can't you, the guards clocking in each morning.

Who have you got today? Oh, I've got Paul. Oh, not Paul again. The Jesus freak. Hard luck. He never shuts up. Does he? But some of them believe. Some of them believe as they hear Paul share Christ.

[11 : 55] Then there's another impact as well that Paul being seen to be willing to suffer to get the gospel out, standing firm under that pressure, emboldens other believers.

It puts steel in their spine. Verse 14, 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.

It doesn't matter to Paul that he can't be free if the gospel is free. If it means the gospel is going out more for him being in chains, he'll rejoice about the chains because that's where you find his joy.

I just wonder, can you imagine ever doing what Paul's doing here? Can you imagine being unjustly in prison, your freedom's taken away, and you write to some friends, a church, who care about you deeply, and not once do you ask them to pray that you'll be set free.

Not once do you tell them how awful it is. You don't want them to pray about your circumstances. You don't tell them how hard it's been. If I just think about how I ask for prayer when things are difficult for me, naturally, what I want people to pray for is that things will be easy.

[13 : 19] Pray that it will be easy. Pray it will get easier. Well, here is Paul, unjustly in prison, modeling for us, you know, just make the gospel more important.

The gospel matters far more than our personal freedom. So he loses his freedom and he rejoices. Next, it's his loss of reputation. So some people in the church are out to get Paul.

In verse 15, 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'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 we don't know much about these people.

What's certainly clear is that in terms of the content of the message they deliver to the church and to the world, they are still preaching the true gospel. If they were preaching a distortion of the gospel, Paul would say something quite different about them.

[14 : 28] We know that from his other letters. Paul shoots the wolves. The wolves are the false teachers. He shoots wolves. In Romans 16, Ephesians 5, Acts 20, he shoots wolves.

But clearly, there's no problem with the actual message here. The problem is their motivation. Why are they preaching? We don't know. Maybe there are church leaders who feel incredibly put out about Paul and his arrival in their town.

Maybe, you know, they had a bit of a following. People were listening to them. And Paul arrives as the apostle and they've lost their power base. People don't listen to them anymore.

They listen to Paul. Maybe they loved being in charge or maybe they feel their area of ministry was taken away. There's just jealousy about Paul's ministry.

And so while Paul's in prison, they want the crowd back listening to them. And in verse 17, he's quite clear. They want to stir up trouble for Paul. So you can imagine the kind of comment that would have been made.

[15 : 32] Well, look, I know Paul's in prison. But some of us just wonder if he could have gone about things in a different way. Some of us think if only he'd been a bit less belligerent, a bit more diplomatic, maybe he'd still be out here with the rest of us.

He's not really done the reputation of the gospel any favors in our city, has he? So Paul is being slandered by people inside the church. And he hasn't got a chance to defend himself.

But look at his extraordinary reaction in verse 18. 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. People are hearing the gospel. Praise God. It makes me think, how do I react when I hear that a church down the road is enjoying growth?

I long for the people of the West End of Glasgow to come to faith. I long for the people of Glasgow to come to trust Jesus. I would so love the people that I know personally around Broom Hill where we live to come to faith.

[16 : 44] I plead with God for that. But how would I feel if suddenly I went to the school gate to drop off the kids one morning and I found out that everyone had become Christians at Rehope or at Sandyford Henderson or Finley or Partick Trinity?

I mean, I would be buzzing, obviously, but would there not be just a bit of me thinking, what was wrong with St Silas? What was wrong with my ministry? If revival breaks out and it's just down the road, well, hopefully I'd react well, but here, it's actually a lot worse, isn't it?

Envy and rivalry is what causes this. So this is like a local minister looking in at us at St Silas, getting jealous of us being a growing church.

So they set up their church 50 yards down the street and they put big banners outside at the same time as our services and they stand outside trying to get everyone in their church instead and to look at that and say, isn't this wonderful?

Because of their envy, the gospel's being preached more loudly in woodlands. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Rejoice. It's a wonderful example.

[17 : 59] Paul rejoices in loss of freedom, in loss of reputation. Even, he would rejoice thirdly, in loss of life. He describes from verse 19 how he doesn't yet know the outcome of his trial.

At the time he's in Rome, Nero has become emperor. Nero is a very fickle man. Who knows how Paul's trial will go. But Paul says if it was just up to him, dying would be better actually.

An execution order would be a win. If you look at verse 23, I am torn between the two, living or dying. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

Look, in the abstract, maybe we could go along with that. We think heaven is going to be better than the world today, don't we? Of course we believe that.

But when the rubber hits the road, I know this is a sensitive subject to talk about. I'm sorry if this is a painful time to think about the question for you personally, but it's good for our souls to think, just imagine if you were told that tonight you were going to die.

[19 : 05] How would you feel if you were told that news? You're going to die tonight. Would you be able to think, yes, this is sad for the people I'll leave behind, but for me as a Christian, this is an absolute winner.

This is brilliant. Why? Because I'll be with Christ. That's Paul's confidence. That's who this gospel is all about.

He talks about the gospel again and again. It's jargon, isn't it? The gospel is defined by Paul twice in the New Testament. It's the saving news of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. And he sets out a summary of it in chapter 2, verses 5 to 11 of Philipians, that Jesus was God in the flesh, eternally the Son of God.

God has always had a Father and always been a Father and a Son in eternity. And the Son, moved by love for us, entered our world, willing to humble himself to death on the cross, to bear the weight of our sin, that we could be made right with God.

And then God exalted him so that he's now Lord of all and one day every knee will bow to him. For Paul, now that news, that saving news about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, drives his whole life.

[20 : 24] So he'd rejoice at being given a death sentence for the prize of the gospel, to be with Christ. And he rejoices at his loss of freedom in the now and his loss of reputation in the now for the advance of that gospel that other people can be with Christ.

It's striking, folks, isn't it? Freedom, reputation, and life. These three things are as important to us today as they were to the people at the time Paul was writing. Surely three of the things we prize most in our lives.

If we think about freedom, people go to war for that to defend freedom. It's what gets everyone's blood pumping when you watch Braveheart, isn't it?

The Scots defending their freedom from the English. Think about the liberal agenda in politics that dominates politics today. It's about saying people ought to be free to make choices.

Here is Paul with his freedom taken away, but he's discovered something that means he can rejoice. And then reputation. People not looking down on you, not slugging you off behind your back, rather people admiring you, people speaking well of you.

[21 : 38] For lots of us it motivates a lot of what we do, doesn't it? Trying to prove ourselves to the standards that someone else has set, maybe a boss or a parent or a group of friends.

We long for respect, for acceptance. And Paul is locked away, and while he's there his reputation is under fire in the churches he planted, and he rejoices.

Rejoicing in the gospel changes everything. So that even our greatest enemy of all, death, can't win. Death takes him to the unimaginable joy of being with Jesus.

So it's worth thinking, what does his example teach us as a church? If this is the model disciple maker, does it not teach us that as a church we line up all our energy behind the proclamation of the gospel?

When we've got a decision to make, you know, we have conversations as a church family about the building. Oh, what would we do if we had unlimited results? What would we do to the building? Could we ask, how would this building best help us proclaim the gospel?

[22 : 53] Help the gospel advance? How do we use our money? Who do we partner with? What do we partner in? What's our church calendar got in it? If we've got an idea for a new ministry activity, does it help towards that aim of the advance of the gospel so that we rejoice when the gospel is proclaimed?

When we evaluate our Sunday services, our time together, our growth groups, TOTS ministry in the week, toddler groups, routes, outreach events we run, evaluating them by that sharp criteria, what we rejoice in is the advance of the gospel through its proclamation.

And for us as individuals, could we think, reflecting on with the gifts and strengths and freedoms and life that God has given to me personally, how can I help towards that great goal of God in the world that the gospel would advance?

Because that's the priority here of a mature disciple-maker of Paul, that people would turn to Christ and accept him as saviour and king because the gospel has been proclaimed.

And if you're here and you're not a Christian, you might be thinking, this is totally crazy that spreading this message that Christians believe would matter this much. But maybe, maybe you'd be willing, I'd just invite you to reflect on how wonderful this is, that in the Christian faith something is being offered to you that would give you a joy that nothing else can take away.

[24 : 27] Not even if you lost the things perhaps you fear most, losing reputation, freedom, life. It couldn't take away your joy. Is that not worth exploring to see if it's true?

So that's our first point. Paul rejoices in affliction because of the priority of the gospel. And it shapes his hopes for this life.

So our second point, more briefly, you'll be relieved to hear. Second point, Paul still chooses life for its opportunities for the gospel. So he says that he'd see execution as a gain because he could go and be with Jesus now.

And then he says he would choose not to die. He'd rather not die. Let's read his dilemma from verse 23. I am 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.

[25 : 29] 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 boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Paul would sacrifice his desire to depart knowing that he would be with Christ and he longs for it because life brings gospel opportunity. By living, he'll have more time to teach and shepherd and nurture churches like this one so that they grow as disciples.

And the result of that would be, he mentions three things. If you pick them up, their progress in the faith, that they would mature, that there'd be more service and godliness and pressing on and confidence in Jesus.

Then he mentions joy, that they find living for Jesus brings joy. And that progress and joy lead them to boasting more in Jesus. So Jesus gets the glory in verse 26.

And surely that increase in joy that Paul wants for them is also key to his own priority, isn't it, for him. What would make someone say, verse 21, for to me, to live is Christ.

[26 : 45] Is it not that knowing him brings Paul great joy? The joy that he mentioned at the heart of this passage, end of verse 18, because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. And as the letter unfolds, Paul tells us why the gospel brings such joy, life-transforming joy, a joy that your circumstances could never take away.

In chapter 3, if we just turn over the page, we'll just trailer it now. Chapter 3, verse 9, talks about gaining Christ, letting go of everything to gain Christ.

And in verse 9, he says, to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

The joy of knowing all your sin is taken away. All your shame is taken away. And God is pleased with you in Christ. And then in the very next verse, he tells us that the joy comes from a fellowship with Christ.

[27 : 53] In verse 10, I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. In other words, an experience of close relationship with Jesus, the Lord who died for him, is so special to him, he can choose to serve Jesus, even where it involves suffering, because Jesus suffered for him.

And so if he suffers for Jesus, he finds a fellowship with Jesus. It's Paul's joy in the gospel and his desire to see others share that joy that means he chooses to keep living.

I was reading, I mentioned this last week, I've been reading John Patton's autobiography. He was a missionary to the New Hebrides in the Pacific Islands. And he went from Glasgow, he trained in Glasgow, he's from just near Dumfries in the 19th century.

It's an extraordinary book about how he went to these islands as a missionary. But why did he go? I mean, he went at immense cost, immense cost in the family he left behind, in sickness, in losing family there through sickness, in terrible danger while he was there.

But many people were converted. And he writes this autobiography and he hopes that non-Christians in Glasgow will read it as he shares the message. And he says this, he says about his life on the mission field through hardship, he says, Oh that the pleasure-seeking men and women of the world could only taste and feel the real joy of those who know and love the true God.

[29 : 30] A heritage which the world cannot give to them, but which the poorest and humblest followers of Jesus inherit and enjoy. My heart often says within itself, when?

When will men's eyes at home be opened? When will the rich and the learned renounce their shallow frivolities and go to live amongst the poor, the ignorant, the outcast and the lost and write their eternal fame on the souls by them blessed and brought to the Saviour?

Those who have tasted this highest joy, the joy of the Lord, will never again ask, is life worth living? So folks, here is Paul in Philippians 1 telling us what makes him tick.

The gospel has become such an immense priority for him that he lives for gospel opportunity. He's in prison but full of joy and he says, for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Let's pray together. Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that you have sent him to serve in humility, to die, to save and you have exalted him to the highest place, crowned him Lord of all.

[30 : 48] May our understanding deepen of the priority of the gospel, the joy of the gospel, the prize of Christ you give us in the gospel, that we might rejoice above all else when Christ is proclaimed and offer ourselves to this great ambition for the good of others and the glory of his name.

Amen.