

**Sunday, October 21, 2018**

## **A Confident Joy in Life and Death**

*Philippians 1:18b-26*

We've been considering Paul's update to the Philippians on his ministry and situation. Paul knows that this church that he founded and he loves dearly is very concerned for him. They've heard he's in prison, they have heard that these, unqualified preachers are taking advantage of Paul's imprisonment to gain a following in order to hurt Paul. The church is fearful for Paul, now Paul is writing to let them know "I love how concerned you are, but don't worry for me. I'm joyful. Yes, all of this is true, but God is using these circumstances to advance the gospel, so I am rejoicing!"

Paul appears to have this unshakeable joy, which doesn't just endure suffering, but can increase in suffering. And you can imagine the Philippian's wondering, and we ourselves might be wondering – is that true Paul? Are you really rejoicing? I know that Jesus and your salvation are keeping you from being as sad as you could be – but you're not actually rejoicing are you? This is probably just Paul's version of "buck up", he's just trying to grin and bear it.

But Paul wants to assure us – no – I will truly rejoice. I will absolutely have joy in any circumstance. Today we get to see

into Paul's heart, as he shows us just what can give him this unshakeable joy.

Let's read Philippians 1:18a-26

**Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored 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 live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.**

That initial outburst from Paul, continuing from the last outburst, is him assuring the Philippians that none of his difficult circumstances will keep him from rejoicing. He will not despair, because God is using even his imprisonment, even these false preachers, to send out the gospel, and Paul adores the gospel. It's the gospel that saved him, that magnifies the name of Jesus, who saved Paul. And Paul knows that nothing can thwart this joy.

On what does your joy rest? Is it unshakeable? For most of this world, joy hangs on a delicate thread. If it rests on wealth or comfort, we know that finances can be lost without any fault of our own. If our joy rests in health and long life, one diagnosis can shatter our confidence. Reputation, influence, are even less certain. If our joy rests on these things, we can't be confident they will sustain our joy, or even be satisfying when we have them. We also know that there is an expiry date on everything that we invest in in this life. Death is a silent terror for most of us because even if we find something that makes us happy enough, death promises us that all of our joys, everything we placed our confidence in, is suddenly going to end.

Before his conversion, Paul was confident in many things – his education, wealth, political influence, even in the reputation of being a godly man that he had as a Pharisee. When Paul became a Christian and began to preach the gospel, he saw all of these things lost or even taken from him. His choice to be a Christian itself became evidence of how fleeting these things were, suddenly he was hated, tortured, and poor.

But that doesn't mean Paul lost his joy – in fact, his conversion moved his joy off of those things which clearly could be lost onto what could never fail. His joy moved off of sinking sand onto a solid rock. Our first point this morning is this: **Joy that rests on Jesus is confident in all circumstances.**

**Paul says “Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”**

Paul’s joy now rests in the magnification of Jesus, that His gospel would be proclaimed.

Paul has such rich, deep love for His Saviour who stopped him on the road to Damascus, showed him he was a sinner and then became His only hope. Now it’s Paul’s greatest desire, the thing that gives him the most joy, that Jesus would be magnified. That’s not to say that Paul thinks that he can do anything to add to Jesus’ glory. To magnify something isn’t to add to it, but to see it more closely. Paul wants to be a magnifying glass for Jesus’ glory, helping others see it better in all its beautiful detail. When we talk about glorifying Jesus or giving Him glory, we are not talking about going to get Him glory, but wanting to better see and worship Him for the glory that He already has because of who He is and what He’s done. This also means wanting to share the gospel and disciple others so they can also see Him better and worship Him more. This is what Paul was doing, that was his life’s pursuit as soon as he became a believer. And because this was his goal, his deepest desire, it was what gave him the most joy.

And Paul knows that he has rested his joy on something that nothing can take from him, even death. He says he hopes and expects that Christ will be honored in his body, in life or in death. So no matter what happens to Paul, he knows that everything he experiences, imprisonment, even death, will work towards the magnification of Jesus, and therefore his joy.

We can be certain that Christ will be honored in all circumstances because the Father promised Him that He would be. He promised that because Jesus went willingly to die on the cross, and because He committed to hold and keep every person who was saved by calling out to Him, the Father will absolutely make sure Christ's name is magnified, whether His people are healthy or suffering, rich or poor, safe or martyred. God will use all this to glorify His son. Because the Father is committed to this, there is no greater or more certain pursuit for us as His children than to live to magnify Jesus' glory. And this is a gift to us because God is giving all of us who trust in Jesus a foundation for our joy that cannot just survive the worst trials but flourish in them.

That doesn't mean we will pretend that suffering is inherently a good thing, or be eager for suffering to come to us. Those who are in Christ in some ways recognize that suffering is the result of the curse, it flows out of sin in this world. So gospel joy isn't a promise we will always be happy-go-lucky. The gospel isn't a pain reliever. Even Paul speaks of

times when he despaired. But gospel joy is a serious joy – hope in the midst of struggle and praise in the midst of pain. Because even as we hurt and grieve, we have a greater joy that we know is being accomplished through our struggle. It’s a joy we can have while crying sad tears, while we are grieving the fact that sin is still in this world and even in ourselves, hurting us, and warring against Jesus. There is a joy that sustains us in this and even causes us to hope for a future, greater joy, which we will consider soon. So even our grieving can be used to glorify Jesus, to show how worthy He is even in the worst trials, and in that, we have reason to rejoice.

This means, then, that the only thing that really can really wreck the joy of a believer would be to take it off of Jesus and put it back on fleeting things. This is why Paul hopes that he would not be ashamed – ashamed of Jesus and the gospel. If we are ashamed of the gospel, it shows that we are placing our joy in something else, something we fear that we would lose if we were bold in our magnification of Jesus – maybe support of our community, or family or friends, the respect of our peers, the things that Paul lost when he was saved.

There are many people who claim Christ as Savior who are missing the full joy of the gospel, wondering why Christ is not their source of hope and joy, yet they themselves are ashamed of Him, they don’t really want Him to be magnified in their body, in life or death. They don’t want to trade the

worldly things they take joy in for the gospel. This is evidence that they are still not really confident that the gospel will bring them more joy than these things, vacation or Netflix, food or work, family, money, or sin. So this means for many of us, while we claim that our joy is in Christ alone, our joy is still primarily resting on worldly things that we can't be confident in. If we are ashamed of the gospel, then our joy has shifted off of a certain foundation onto a shaky one.

If you are feeling this lack of confidence in Christ and this lack of joy, then hear God's word today. The more we cling to Jesus and love our own salvation through Him, the more our confidence and joy will grow, and it will become our greatest joy to proclaim it. What Paul wants then, what we should also desire, is the courage to never be ashamed of the gospel, to never lose confidence in it. Then we can rejoice with Paul in knowing that because the Father is committed to magnifying Jesus, He is also committed to providing His people with everything they need to grow in their confidence in the gospel, even through suffering.

Paul tells his readers **for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this (which is this suffering) will turn out for my deliverance.**

Paul has no doubt that God will help him in his suffering, not just to keep him from becoming ashamed of the gospel, but to give him more reasons to rejoice, and to work for Paul's own good. Paul is confident that God will work this

suffering for his deliverance. The word for deliverance here is the Greek word for Salvation, so beyond just looking at whether he will be freed from prison, Paul's expectation here is that all of this would work out for his salvation. Our second point is this: **Our joy in suffering is God working all things for our salvation.**

Paul wants the Philippians to know that there is a continuing work of salvation that people who are saved by Jesus can look forward to. Salvation first and foremost refers to being born again, when we believe and put our trust in Jesus. That's the moment we are saved when our wretched sin and the punishment it deserves was placed on Jesus on the cross and exchanged for His clean record and His reward for His perfect life. That glorious moment is salvation. But God's saving work in us doesn't stop there. It continues in how God works in us, delivering us from sin, working on our conscious, making us like Christ and preparing us for heaven.

Then there is even a future salvation for us to look forward to, when we will be received by Christ, actually passing through God's judgement because we were covered by the blood of Jesus, delivered from sin and death forever through His total victory. That future salvation is for those who have enjoyed that first great salvation.

God's word tells us He uses means to accomplish this saving work in us. Paul tells us here two particular ways that He knows God will work out his own suffering, and indeed

any experience, for his salvation – and that is through the prayers of the church and the work of the Spirit.

Remember in the introduction to Philippians where Paul expressed how dearly he loved the church and prayed for them, and his prayer was that God would perform this continuing saving work in them - that He who began a good work in them, that is when He saved them – would bring that saving work to completion, at the day of Christ Jesus. So Paul's prayer for Philippians is one of the means that God used to grow the faith and joy of the Philippians. Here in this passage, Paul is now confident that the Philippians, in turn, will be a means of God's saving work in Him.

Our God loves to give His good gifts to His children, He loves to answer our prayers to Him and He loves to answer the prayers we offer on behalf of each-other. It's the delight of the Spirit to work in response to those prayers. Your deliverance, your joy, is accomplished by the work of God's Spirit and the prayers of the saints. The Spirit sanctifies us, it causes our hearts to break when we read God's Word, it drives us to prayer, it turns our suffering into deep-rooted faith, and it loves to do this in response to the prayers God's people pray for each other. So brothers and sisters, for the sake of our joy and our love of the church, let's love to pray for each-other. The prayer of a righteous person has great power – that's the power of God's Spirit working in response to our prayers. God loves to see Jesus' family celebrating

Christ by living as a family. So for the glory of Jesus, pray for each-other, and trust the work of the Spirit. Through those means, we can be confident that God can work everything for our deliverance and our joy.

From here Paul looks beyond his present circumstance and suffering. Not just in this situation, but in every moment Paul knows he can be confident in Christ's glory. Now we get that wonderful statement that has been written on the hearts of saints since the church was founded. **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** This is a full display of the confidence of a Christian. The confidence of God's people is that our whole life is bound up in Christ and that death is gain.

Paul seems to be aware that he will not be in prison much longer. What he does not appear to know is whether he will leave by freedom or by death. So now he considers what will happen and he weighs his expectations based on how much he believes each option would magnify Jesus. But Paul also knows that no matter what happens, Christ will be glorified, so it will work out for his own joy.

First, Paul evaluates whether he might live, and this gives us our third point today **Our joy in life is serving His church.** Paul says: **If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.** If Paul is to continue to live in this body on earth, then he knows that God will increase his joy by giving him a fruitful ministry. Remember that one of the things that Paul prayed

for for the Philippians themselves was that they would be **filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.** The life of a believer magnifies God's glory when it produces the fruit of righteousness. This fruit is a testament to the power of the gospel, because it shows the power that Jesus has to change our hearts, that we who were once enslaved to sin can now by His power live to righteousness. So this fruit is not evidence of our own goodness, but Jesus power, so it reveals His glory.

But this fruit of our salvation also works out for our own deliverance and joy. Paul said the fruit of righteousness in the Philippians would show they were **pure and blameless for the day of Christ Jesus.** This fruit of our salvation becomes our assurance of the future completion of our salvation, that we will not be punished but will be received by God when Jesus returns.

When Paul says, to live is Christ, he is thinking both of his own identity and his service to Jesus. Paul says in Galatians: **I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** When we are covered by the blood of Jesus, when we are given a new heart, that heart is Christ's, we take on His identity. We first receive it when God sees us as Jesus instead of ourselves, calling us clean and justified in His sight

based on Jesus' record because Jesus took on our sinful identity to the cross. But now, because of Jesus, we who believe in Him see our old identity crucified, and we now live in that identity of Jesus that we received when we were saved. And God's spirit, then, actually molds us to that identity. We aren't just called Christ, we become like Him. We are no longer our own. Paul introduces himself in this letter as a bondservant to Christ. And this is joyous for him because it means he is no longer a slave to sin. He is overjoyed that it is no longer he who lives because he recognizes that the he that once lived was a vile, wretched, self-righteous cruel man, and to be Christ now is more than any of us deserves. So to live is Christ, and that means not just identifying with Him, but now devoting our lives to Him, like the disciples laying down their nets and leaving their families to follow Him. We live to serve Jesus, to joyfully offer fruitful labor to Christ, the fruit of righteousness. Paul explains in verses 24-26 what that service to Christ will be. **But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.**

Just as Paul was eager that his own deliverance would be served by the prayers and ministry of the church, it's His joy to magnify Jesus by living to serve His church.

If we are devoted to a king, we are devoted to a kingdom including its subjects. When Jesus called Peter back to him after Peter denied him he asked – do you love me, and when anxious Peter said you know I do, Jesus charged him – then feed my sheep. The great commission was a charge to serve the church through making and growing disciples.

So though we are not apostles, we still live to magnify Jesus by laboring for His church.

You cannot claim that your joy rests in Christ if you have no desire to love and care for His people. Imagine I tell Jenn “I love you, I would do anything for you, just tell me what to do.” “Can you watch Ellie this afternoon.” “Um no, I said I wanted to do things for you, not Ellie.” Not only does that answer show contempt for my daughter, but it also proves I was not being honest in my devotion to my wife. When we claim to love Christ but do not love our church, we are not just holding the rest of God’s people in contempt, but we are claiming to love Christ while hating the work He gave us to do. And if we do not live for the blessing and joy of other believers, we are certainly denying ourselves the joy that Christ promises us. You cannot have joy in Christ if you do not delight in His people. Christ wants you to love His family.

In fact, Paul ultimately says he believes he will survive his time in jail because he sees the needs of the church and believes that Christ will be most glorified by keeping Paul alive to continue to serve His family. That is the only reason

Paul believes he will live longer. It's not to complete his bucket list, or out of any desire for his life. It is because there is more for Him to do in service to Jesus' family, for the sake of their joy, their faith.

When our old self dies, and our new self finds identity in Jesus alone, when we love what Jesus loves, it then becomes our joy to be devoted to the progress and joy of our brothers and sisters in the church. Paul knows that by his service to Jesus, he is giving the Philippians more reasons to glorify Christ, so Jesus is more magnified. So the glory of Jesus is best shown when we serve each-other, giving each-other reasons to rejoice. As I pray for you and serve you for your progress and joy, my own joy increases, and likewise I experience joy by being blessed and prayed for by you, which also serves your own joy! And all this joy that becomes knit together in the church doesn't glorify any of us, but the One who saved us all, the founder of this family of faith! So as a church, we magnify Jesus' glory together.

So if serving the church is the joy of a believer in life, what is the joy of a believer in death? Paul says of his choice between life and death in verse 22 and 23. **Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

Our final point this morning is this: **Our joy in death is seeing Jesus.**

Paul has given his life to serving Christ and His church. He loves his Savior and wants nothing more than to see His name lifted up, and this has made Paul less and less at home in this world. This is the reality for those who are in Jesus. When we are saved, when our identity and priorities change and when we say, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” then we start to enjoy more than anything those tastes of heaven that we get from God’s word and His people, and we care less for the things we loved in this world, and our greatest longing is to go be with Jesus where He is. those tastes of heaven we get now in living for Christ, we care less for the things we loved in this world, and our greatest longing is to be in Christ’s country, to be where He is. Jesus says of His disciples **They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.** The world where we once enjoyed pleasure and power and prestige is suddenly a place where we realize our joy is not complete. Paul will tell the Philippians that we have a new citizenship in heaven. So Paul has a longing, to depart and be with Christ, and he knows that that is far better, and indeed more joyful than any life, no matter how comfortable, where he is away from Christ.

As a citizen of that country, we are not in this country as residents, we are aliens, ambassadors of a different kingdom. While we are here we live to serve Him, and as we see the sin and hurt that harms us and others, and even our own wickedness in this life, we long to be free from this place and

to go home, to our country, where Jesus is. While we are here we will serve him dutifully and joyfully by serving His other citizens who are still here, His church. And we will serve as long as He desires us to, but always with an eye to that better country, where sin and death and suffering will end.

That is the hope of a believer, and it is the joy of a believer in death. One day, that invitation will come, “your work is finished, Jesus is satisfied, depart and be with Christ.” The Greek word for depart here is not a sad one. It’s meant to evoke the idea of a ship setting off on a great adventure. And though this will be sad to those that are left behind, we are meant to think of the believer boarding that ship to finally cross that wide river. The ropes are loosed and the sails are extended, and with a gust of wind it sets off towards the rising sun. The work is finally done, the time in the hard country is over. We go to that place where sin has no dominion because Christ defeated it on the cross when He paid the penalty for it and where death can never touch us because Christ has abolished it for all His children when He rose from the dead.

And at the other side of that voyage we will open our eyes to look upon a beautiful country, where the air is sweet and everything is singing praise and all of this is just a frame when our eyes finally see Jesus, our King, who Himself went to that far country and suffered death to save us, now welcoming us home, embracing us as His own. That is joy.

And we will wait with Him for that day when He will make all things new when all the universe will be a blessed eternal and joyful home for the people of God. Paul says no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, what God has prepared for those who love Him. For those whose life was Christ, death is the greatest gain, the end of their joyful labor for Christ and the beginning of their greater joy when they look upon Him. This is the death of a child saved by the blood of Jesus. It has been the hope and joy that has sustained martyrs and missionaries and every person who has faithfully loved Christ while living in this world. Even my dad, who recently learned he has cancer, paraphrased Paul when he told me and my siblings **I'm so torn. I'm so ready to be healed. I'm so ready to go home.**

And the thing that makes death most joyful for a believer is that it will magnify Jesus more than anything in our lives, because it will be that moment when we should be delivered over to God's wrath, but we will instead be welcomed by Him and it will all be because of Jesus. Jesus will get the glory when God says, "because my son died in your place, I welcome you into my kingdom in His place, as my child." Each soul in eternity is a testament to the glory of God's plan of salvation and Jesus who accomplished it on the cross. And each soul in heaven will use all eternity to praise Jesus for this because this is what He deserves.

So this is how the joy of a believer can grow in every circumstance and even in death when it rests confidently on the magnification of Jesus. If our lives are lived for Christ, for the love of the One who saved us, serving His church and proclaiming His name, then even suffering works for our salvation, and death is the final reward for our labor.

On what does your joy rest? Is it on what is certain, or what is fleeting? All flesh is like grass, and its greatest glory, riches, honor, wealth, power, fame, are like the flower of grass, withering and fading and blowing away. Do not place your joy in these things, they promise you nothing but disappointment in life and hell in death. If your joy is not in Christ, I am sure death is something you fear, or at best try very hard to ignore. It is the end of all you loved and worked for and its the fear of something worse. Believe in Jesus. Give up your little joys and passions in this life and trust in Him. Then your life will be Christ and your death will be gain. Get your joy off of shaky ground and set it on the Rock.

And brothers and sisters, I know that there are many of us who are at war with living our whole lives for Christ. We claim to take our joy from Him alone, but the thought of living entirely for His glory instead of ours sounds dull and depressing to us. We would rather pursue our own glory while trying to make sure that there is a space for God in that.

The statement - To live is Christ and to die is gain - is not something we can take in halves. We cannot hope for death

to be gain if we have not lived for Christ. And if your joy is not in Christ in life, if your life is not devoted to magnifying His glory and serving His church, it is very likely that you have no joy in the thought of your own death, because it will be the end of the things you are really clinging to for hope and peace. If you desire the confidence in death that comes to those who are in Christ, you must first heed what His word has taught us about making Him our confidence in life. If you want to go joyfully to Him at your death, take your joy from Him now. For many of us, heaven is not a place we would want to be, we would not enjoy dying and being with Christ, because even now when we are offered tastes of what is so rich and sweet about heaven we reject those things. We do not desire fellowship with the saints who we will call our family forever. We do not love to lift up Christ's name in worship when we are told that will be our main desire in eternity. We do not love to obey His word now when we are told that in heaven we will rejoice to see Him and hear His voice. So hear this warning, if you desire that death would be gain, then make your life Christ now. Do not be torn in two any longer. Do not give God your half-measures, allowing Him to share your heart with sports, school, retirement, work, money or even sin, lust, greed and power.

To all of us, let's give up our passports to this world that is passing away. Lay down its pleasures and embrace a citizenship in heaven, bought by the blood of Jesus for all

who believe in Him. Become an ambassador of His kingdom, serving Christ's church and living to take joy in proclaiming His name, and then we will taste what is so sweet about heaven now, we will be prepared for it, we will long for that voyage, and we will even endure suffering joyfully while waiting for it, because our joy rests on what cannot be shaken. **To live is Christ and to die is gain.**