Philippians 1:19-26 To Live is Christ

1. Introduction

a. To summarise the last session, the gospel is still making good progress despite Paul's imprisonment. People who are being overcome by their circumstances focus on their circumstances. People who are overcoming their circumstances focus on what God is accomplishing in the midst of the circumstances.

b. Paul begins to look to the future and what might be in store for him going forward. He maintains his confident expectation, and encourages the Philippian church that their prayers for him really will make a difference. In the process he makes one of the most profound statements in the whole of the New Testament that encapsulates his whole outlook on life and death.

Philippians 1:19-26 *Yes, and I will rejoice, [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] 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 honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. [24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [25] Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, [26] so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again..*

2. An uncertain future

a. What's the purpose of your life? The answer will be different for each one of us. This is the reality that Paul is placing before the Philippians in this passage. Paul was very clear and focused on his purpose – the purpose for which he lived was the only purpose that takes eternity into account, so that whether we live a long or short life, that purpose will be fulfilled.

i But before we get to verse 21, Paul has something important to say concerning prayer.

Philippians 1:19-20 *…for I know that <u>through your prayers</u> and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out <u>for my deliverance,</u> [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always <u>Christ will be honoured in my body</u>, whether by life or by death.*

b. Verse 19 might seem to be saying that Paul is confident that because of the prayers of the Philippian church he will be delivered from his circumstances. This isn't Paul expressing a hope, but an absolute assurance of a positive outcome. Some bible translations use the word "salvation" instead of deliverance, and although that is a legitimate way of translating the Greek word, it is misleading here.

c. What is Paul expecting to be delivered from? It's not being delivered from imprisonment – at the end of verse 20 he plainly states that death is a real possibility. And he's not referring to God's judgment because it would make no sense in the context. So what does he mean? This same phrase is found in a couple of places in the Old Testament, and in each case the context is pointing towards a deliverance in the form of vindication:

Job 13:16 *Indeed, this will turn out <u>for my deliverance</u> [vindication], for no godless person would dare come before him!*

Psalm 35:23 *Awake and rouse yourself <u>for my vindication</u>, for my cause, my God and my Lord!*

d. The kind of deliverance that Paul is talking about here is his vindication at the final judgment. In v20 he didn't want his imprisonment to result in him succumbing to temptation or his own weakness that would bring shame on Jesus. He wanted to exalt Jesus in everything he did – in life or in death. That was the reason he encouraged the Philippians to keep praying for him, because deliverance would be in part because of their prayers. Paul knew the weakness of his flesh and how it could pull him down. He knew he couldn't do it on his own, so he greatly values those who would pray for him.

    i The principle Paul is highlighting here is the importance of praying for one another, especially for those who you think are strong in the faith. We're all in a spiritual conflict that is not won by our personal strength or our personality, we can only be victorious through the power of God at work within us.

e. The second thing that Paul highlights in v19 is deliverance will come through prayer and by the help of the Spirit of Jesus – the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The word "help" is speaking of being fully provisioned, an abundance of resource and lacking in nothing. Paul knows there is a direct connection between the prayers of the Philippians and the work of the Spirit within that will culminate in his ultimate vindication.

f. In v20 Paul says he has an eager expectation – a very descriptive word meaning "to strain the neck." – to which he adds hope. Biblical hope is the confident expectation of something that will happen in the future. He is confident that through the prayers of the saints and the work of the Holy Spirit, he would be delivered from bringing any kind of shame on the name of Jesus, whatever the outcome of his physical circumstances.

    i Paul wasn't concerned with shame that would come through his enemies dishonouring him – that didn't bother him. Jesus endured the shame of the cross and endured ridicule to accomplish the will of God, reaping great joy as a result. It was OK for Paul to do the same thing in his own circumstances, even to the point of death. His great concern was that he didn't want to be ashamed before the eyes of God.

g. Paul states his philosophy for living – and dying – in this well-known verse. We understand from the context in which Paul delivers it that it's the key to his boundless joy, even in the face of death.

Philippians 1:21 *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

3. To live is Christ…

a. The words of a song we used to sing in our youth group:

For me to live is Christ, to die is gain, To hold his hand and walk his narrow way
There is no peace, no joy, no thrill, like walking in his will
For me to live is Christ to die is gain.

i Although we didn't really connect with the weight of Paul's words at the time, a seed was sown in our hearts that for many of us has stayed with us throughout our lives, and now, I view these words through a different lens.

ii How truthfully can I echo Paul's words? What does it mean to live Christ? How do we do that? Paul's statement here not only defines his life, but it also demonstrates what the life of any Christian should be about. But what does Paul mean by "to live is Christ?"

b. Paul's experience was that Jesus completely satisfied him in every respect. May that also be true for each of us as we grow in our relationship with Jesus. Paul's passion was to live for Jesus above anything else if his earthly life was to continue. Jesus is the object of his affection and the goal of his life. He's not just talking about service, but intimacy. For Paul, this relationship with Jesus is a lifelong obsession that he will pursue every moment he has breath in his body.

c. John Piper – when considering this verse – sums it up by saying that *God is most glorified when you are most satisfied in him*. That's what Paul is saying: there is a synergy that causes God to be glorified when we are living fully for him.

d. The Bible gives us four practical ways that tell us what "To live is Christ" means:

i **"To live is Christ" means to live in union with Jesus so that he becomes my "all in all."** It's a growing awareness of Jesus' involvement in my life at every level, and a deepening appreciation that all I need is found in him.

ii **"To live is Christ" means that we exalt Jesus through everything we do.** We may either exalt Jesus or bring shame to His name by our attitudes, our words, and our behaviour.

iii **"To live is Christ" means to die to selfish desires in order to serve others.** We need to get back to the biblical truth, that it's not about us but about Him.

iv **"To live is Christ" means our identity is found in Him**. It is God's plan that every Christian becomes conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). We should be like a mirror reflecting the life of Jesus in us to all around us. Paul desired to have Jesus Christ seen in his life in everything he did. He described it this way:

Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."*

4. …To die is gain

a. The second half of Paul's statement is – to die is gain. The contrasting statement is that for him, "to die is gain." Only someone that has a complete confidence in what lies on the other side of death can say what Paul says here. Jesus has conquered death and promised his followers eternal life in heaven. The sting of death, sin, has also been conquered and Paul knew he could stand before God with confidence because Jesus' death has paid the price of his sin.

b. In the world, death is most often associated with loss, not gain. They regard death as a terrible loss. Most people view death as tragic and they go to great effort and expense to hang on to life for as long as possible.

c. Paul in this verse is not speaking of our emotional response to the death of another, he is speaking of our own death. It's not a subject that we like to dwell on, yet it has been said that a person is not ready to live unless he is ready to die. We must live purposefully, and always in view of both the certainty of death and the uncertainty of when it will occur.

   i Martin Luther said, "*Even in the best of health we should have death always before our eyes [so that] we will not expect to remain on this earth forever, but will have one foot in the air, so to speak*". Jonathan Edwards, as a young man, wrote down 70 resolutions which he read weekly to help keep his life focused. No. 9 was, "*Resolved, to think much, on all occasions, of my dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death*".

   ii You can't live the Christian life properly unless you understand the Christian perspective on death. Our views of death must be formed from the truthfulness of God's revelation to us in His Word, and not on the speculations of people devoid of God's Word.

d. For Paul, and for us, death, though an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26), is simply a door to pass through in order to be in the presence of Jesus, and there is no other place Paul would rather be. Death is a gain for the believer. Paul develops this theme of life and death in his letter to the Corinthian church:

2 Corinthians 5:1-9 *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. [6] So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.*

e. Have you ever heard the expression, "*Heads, I win; tails, you lose*." It's just another way of saying, "*Either way, I can't lose*." That's what Paul is saying here. No matter what the verdict, no matter what the outcome of his trial, Paul could not lose; he could only gain. If Caesar pronounced his innocence, Paul could continue to live out the life of Christ. If Caesar sentenced him to die, then Paul gained even more. The alternative was not between "bad" and "good," but between "great" and "far better."

f. Before we move on, just a little etymology on the word "gain." The word that Paul uses in the Greek, ***kerdos***, comes from the financial world and describes the profit made on a transaction or the interest gained on an investment. So a life that is invested in God, at the end of the day when that life is over shows a considerable gain on what was originally invested.

5. Paul's dilemma

Philippians 1:20-26 *…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 honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose [prefer] I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart*

and be with Christ, for that is far better. [24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [25] Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, [26] so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

a. Paul has a dilemma, he is caught between two possible outcomes. Does he carry on living as he is as a bondservant to Jesus? If he dies the result is a far greater personal blessing to him. Paul is faced with two possible and different outcomes, he is weighing up in his mind the pros and cons of each of them. In v22 he remains undecided as to which is preferable. When considering the prospect of death, Paul's not looking to escape, but he longs to be with Jesus.

   i Paul's future will not be determined by himself, that is in the hands of the Roman authorities. Paul is setting before the Philippians the two main thoughts that immediately impact upon him so that they are prepared for whichever outcome ensues.

b. To understand better we need to to tap into Paul's stream of thought – to see the bigger picture that is the cause of his dilemma. Paul's overriding concern (v20) was that Jesus should be honoured or magnified in his body. He is going to make a series of connections in these verses. To remain in the flesh will mean fruitful labour for him – he connects that fruitful labour to the Philippian church, to remain is necessary because of them.

c. Paul sees there is purpose in remaining alive, glorifying Jesus by serving the church. Death would mean great blessing for <u>him</u>, but to remain would mean great blessing for <u>them</u>. Paul says (v25) if he continues with them it is for their progress and joy in the faith. If Paul lives, they would get more joy, if he dies he would get more joy because he would be in the presence of Jesus.

d. Paul's goal in life is that Jesus would be magnified in his body (v20). It can happen in two ways: he can go on living, or he can die. If he dies, he honours Jesus because dying is gain – departing and being with Jesus in glory. The focus is on dying and the gain you get in dying is personal joy in the presence of Jesus. But if he lives, he is living for Jesus and the assignment he has been given. That mean fruitful labour, and that fruit is the fruit of righteousness that he prays for in v11, and the fruit of joy in v25.

e. Paul's conviction was that he would be set free to continue his ministry among the churches, including Philippi. Piecing together the evidence of other writers in the early church, it is likely that Paul was released and did go on to visit Philippi again before his death at the hands of Nero.

6. To die is gain – revisited

a. One more question – how do we count death as gain? And one other question, according to Paul, is, "How can I honour Jesus, how will I make Jesus look good in the way I die. In the hospital? Or on the street if I get hit by a car — how can I make Jesus look really good there?" That's what Paul is saying – I want Jesus to me magnified, honoured, glorified in my body. He knew death was coming one day – when the sword fell he wanted something to be going on there that made Jesus look great.

b. Death is a threat because it frustrates our goals. Death is fearful because it threatens to rob you of what you value most. Paul valued Jesus most! He looked at death and saw it as an occasion for

the fulfilment of his highest value: that Jesus might be magnified. Life and death: the greatest longing he had could be fulfilled in both.

c. Here are a couple of scriptures that tell us about some of the gain that Paul is talking about.

Hebrews 12:22-23 *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect…*

Revelation 6:9-11 *I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer…*

2 Corinthians 5:8 *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

7. Conclusion

a. It has been said that Christians don't die, they just relocate. Death is just the jettisoning of our earthly bodies because they are not eternal.

b. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures on earth, because they are short-lived, destroyed by moth and rust, or stolen by thieves. Although we can't take anything with us, the bible tells us that we can send things on ahead! That's what Jesus meant by laying up treasure in heaven.

c. We all feel the pull of heaven in our lives and yearn for an eternity with Jesus. Heaven will be far better than our earthly life, for we will be present with our Saviour in a place devoid of sin, sickness, and death. What we lose in life we will gain in heaven.