

Discussion Notes
Philippians 1. 20-30
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Last Week

- 1. 12-19 - Purpose, Perspective, Posture.
- Paul understood his purpose, which brought him fulfillment and joy as a human being. Paul's perspective allowed him to view his circumstance (jail) as a part of his mission. "When we allow a Kingdom perspective to inform our difficult circumstances they are no longer obstacles but opportunities." Paul's posture is that of a servant, so he is happy that Jesus and his Kingdom is shared, even if it means he experiences hardship or misunderstanding or mistreatment. Paul finds joy in all of this, and then we see how all this is possible (it seems impossible) verse 19 says it's by prayer and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It's not possible otherwise.

The Crescendo

- Today we arrive at a crescendo of sorts where Paul really hits his stride and give a clinic on discipleship that's might be unparalleled in the rest of the New Testament. It's going to start here, and carry through into chapter two, an incredible discourse on what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus.

What on earth am I here for?

- Video: Jim Carey at the Golden Globes – *"Thank you. I am two time Golden Globe winner Jim Carey and when I go to sleep at night I'm not just a guy going to sleep. I'm two time Golden Globe winner Jim Care going to get some well needed shut eye. And when I dream I don't dream any old dream. No sir. I dream about being three-time Golden Globe winner Jim Carey. Because then I would be enough. It would finally be true, and I could stop this terrible search, for what I know ultimately won't fulfill me. But these are important these*

awards. I don't want you to think that just because if you blew up our solar system alone you wouldn't be able to find us or any of human history with the naked eye....but from our perspective. This is huge."

- "What on earth am I here for?" – Rikk Warren.
- Paul had an almost unbelievably firm grasp of both who was and why he was put on earth. Not simply what his personal purpose was, but what life's purpose is for all people.
- Not just what it means to be a Christian, but what it means to be a human being. He took all this, of course, from Jesus, the "quintessential person" (Willard) – most human of all humans.

1.20-26

***20** 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. **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 labor 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.*

Facing Death

- These are the words of a person facing death. It's hard to get our heads around them.
- Some of us in the room might be facing death, and one day all of us will, and so this brings us some measure of personal comfort: to Paul, death meant togetherness with God. These words might bring to mind what Jesus said to the man dying on the cross next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

- So death is not feared by the Christian. We don't worry about what follows death or what eternity will be like. We have a confidence beyond life here now.
- Paul says to the Thessalonians, who were overwhelmed with grief at the death of some in their church, that we don't mourn like those who don't know God. But we know that with death comes God, the fullness of his presence, and ultimately heaven and earth combining in great blessing. In death we have hope. For the Christian, in death, we actually have abundant life.
- But these words are still hard to grasp because none of us face the death that Paul was facing – martyrdom. And this is really what he's driving at, in terms of how he makes sense of his life at the possible end of it.
- For Paul, his death would be a crown – a thorny crown, but a good one. It would be the exclamation point at the end of his life.
- Because if he died for sharing the Gospel, then he would have died because he was offering other people life. He was only in prison in Rome because he was heaven-bent on sharing the generous love of God with all people.
- Who else gave their life so that other's might live? That's Paul's pattern. That's Paul's master. Paul's following his Maker, his Deliverer, his Rabbi. This is what he means by "to die is gain".
- Jesus' death wasn't a loss, it was a gain – the cross gave us something. Paul's death will mean he has given till he can't give any more. He's honored to be put to death because it means other people have gotten life.
- This kind of posture was why the first Christians thrived under persecution. When Christians die under persecution, they still win. Their deaths don't spread terror and hate, their deaths fill public squares and prisons with the shrapnel of peace, hope and love.

To live is Christ – a wasted life?

- So Paul says to live is Christ and to die is gain. What does he mean by “to live is Christ”?
- We might say it this way: *“If I am to live on, that will mean worthwhile work for me. If I’m going to die, then that’s a death in service of Jesus and others and I will have truly given God everything I have. But to keep living is more important for you, Philippians. And this is fruitful labor.”*
- From the perspective of many over the ages, and indeed many in our time now, Paul’s life would have been considered a wasted life.
- We can try to put ourselves in his shoes. Was this a wasted life?
- He didn’t see it that way – he called it “fruitful labor”.
- And if we look closely of course we see that Paul’s following Jesus’ pattern, who didn’t have any money, or a house, or the approval of the leaders of his country, but died a criminal’s death on a cross. Why? For the sake of others.
- This is what Jesus means on the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” That’s what Paul was busy doing. What’s the treasure? God and people!
- What will eternity be filled with? The abundance of God’s presence and his people enjoying it.

The Key to Life

- Here’s another gem from Rabbi Jim Carey: *“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.”*
- We can’t take it with us. Approval from others, wealth, esteem for what we’ve accomplished. A great business plan, in the end, is as dead as a pyramid.
- This is not to say that we shouldn’t manage wealth, or enjoy love from others, or work hard in building a home or a business, or getting an education or creating something great – it’s to ask, as Paul did, *what’s the whole point?*
- Why do we get up in the morning?

- Paul says that spending our lives so that others can live more fully is fruitful labor. And in this, he finds joy.
- That's the great irony of our time! It sometimes seems like everybody is working so hard, trying to hoard and take, to hold and to steal away enough for themselves to be happy, but it turns out we're designed and purposed to live opposite to all that. To give. And in giving, we find our true selves. We find our humanity.
 - Mothers. Good mothers give everything they have to see a child live, thrive and grow. And in that they find an un-paralleled joy. Listen to Paul in 1 Thessalonians *"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."* (1 Thessalonians 2.7-8)
 - Loving husbands and wives who love Jesus. Paul says to the Ephesians, *"Be courteous and selfless with one another by becoming saturated in Christ's gracious nature."* (Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.) (Ephesians 5.21).
 - Some millionaires – there's been some fascinating studies of the super rich over the years, and it is remarkable at what they say, in the end, gives them purpose and joy. Almost every one says the same thing – philanthropy. Being generous, helping others thrive.
- To spend our lives loving others and helping them thrive is to be Godly. If we're made in God's image, then we're made to be Godly.
- Godly might be a word that stirs up stuffy, judgy pictures for us – well then we need a new vision of God. Was Jesus stuffy or judgy? Jesus was refreshingly, positively brimming with life.
- To be Godly is to God-like. To be God-like is to be fully animated, spending our lives on fruitful labor. Loving, serving, helping others thrive – all out of the abundant love of God who's got more than enough to go around.

- That's what Paul means when he says to live is Christ. My joy, is to see your joy increase. It's that simple. That is, literally, the key to life.
- Now remember, none of this is possible by ourselves. The fullness of God's Spirit, his presence in us, will make it possible. It is labour, but we have the energy and passion to do it – "for it is God working in you, giving you the drive and strength to do what will put a big smile on his face" (Philippians 2.13).
- Then Paul says that if he continues to live this way the Philippians will be even more committed Jesus and proud of their faith.

1.27-30

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

- Remember Paul's not writing to bunch of people sitting pretty, with no problems of their own. These people are getting push back and some measure of persecution in their town too.
- And then he calls suffering for Jesus a privilege. Because if the Philippians are endeavoring to serve Jesus as Paul was, they would encounter opposition in their culture.
- So Paul says this should embolden them. That it's a good indicator they're on the right path. Some people will hear the truth and turn to embrace the good news, but others will resist and throw stones. This is normal, says Paul, and shouldn't discourage us.

- So he tells them to stand together in the fire. His words about unity (the inner life of the church) will ultimately influence their outer impact on the city – because how can they show the city the love and unity of God if they are not united as brothers and sisters? (R.P. Martin)
- We'll get to this more later in the letter – but this foundational truth is vital if we want the gospel to spread, if we care about mission or evangelism at all. We can't do out there what we're not doing in here. Love and unity within the church is not only important for a healthy church, it's the first step toward loving people outside of the church. So I can't hate my brother or sister and claim to be full of God's love for outsiders. James and John tell us this is just illogical.
- "Only let your life be worthy of Jesus' gospel", says Paul – "only" meaning at all costs! Do everything you can!
- In closing he says, stay on my wing! Live life that is worthy of the Good News. Stay true to who you really are. Don't buy into what's false.
- One spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the sake for good news Jesus gives all people...
- In the famous words of one of the greatest Canadian's to ever live, Red Green – "Remember I'm pulling for you. We're all in this together."

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- What does our culture say, "to live is _____"?
- How do we cultivate a life of "living in Christ" so that we do experience God's abundance and help others thrive?
- What encouraged you about this passage? What challenged you?
- What is God saying to you?