

Philippians: Magnify Christ
Sermon 9-23-18
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Philippians 1:18b–30

^{18b}Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— ³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Message:

(Play at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnrBWla-oFc>) If you haven't seen the Disney Pixar movie "Inside Out," it's a good one. What I love about our passage today is that we don't just get to see what Paul thinks, but we get a glimpse at what he feels. We get to see Paul's inner conflict or inner monologue a little bit. Like the video, Paul has many emotions. Many things that are pulling him, emotionally, in different directions. As displayed in verse 23 and 24, "²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you." Paul isn't necessarily fearful of death nor is he fearful of life. He has a love for the people whom he serves and for spreading the gospel. He also has a love for Christ and longs to escape his suffering to be with Him. If we were to put ourselves in his

shoes in prison, we would probably have similar emotions or maybe even very different ones. Again, this passage shows Paul's great maturity recognizing both his inner conflict and what's needed of him while he's still here on this earth.

Paul begins our passage though by recognizing the concern of the Philippian people. They know that he's in prison. He knows the strong relationship that he has with them. So, therefore, it's only natural that they're going to show great concern for him. ^{18b}“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.” As we read these words, we get this sense of warmth that Paul has for the Philippian people. He knows their character. He knows that they will be praying for him. And that will mean his deliverance. But Paul also knows the possible reality that lays before him. He could be staring at the face of death during his imprisonment. He hopes that he will not be put to shame as Jesus was, but you have to understand something about Paul. Paul totally embodies both Jesus' life AND His death. Do you hear that? Paul doesn't just embody the way Jesus lives, but He also embraces Jesus' death. In other words, if Paul is humiliated, flogged, mocked and shamed, it would be the greatest honor to Paul. Because it means that Paul has fully embraced the gospel. He's not afraid of becoming a martyr. He's not necessarily seeking out death, but if he dies because of his faithfulness to the gospel, then it is his greatest honor. That's why he says, “...that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.” It's also why he leads into the second paragraph with this: ²¹“For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” If the people of God are blessed by Paul's presence on this earth and the gospel spreads because of his presence, then praise the Lord. If the gospel spreads because of his death, then praise the Lord. If Paul dies he gains heaven with Christ. To Paul, it's a win-win situation.

²²“If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer.” Again, Paul desires to be with Christ in His death and in the afterlife with Him, but that means that he would be cutoff from spreading the good news of Jesus on this earth. You know, I heard this a lot in the hospital setting, of people who have strong faith, but you can tell that they are eagerly awaiting death to be in heaven. On the one hand, I can understand that life on this earth can be so horrible that one's only hope is the hope of death and heaven. And if that's your perspective, I want to urge you to not think this way. While Paul desires to be with Christ, he's not merely waiting for death. In other words, he's not going to be in this holding pattern for death. And neither should we. If death is going to come, let it come. But the Lord has left us on this earth for a reason. There are still

people to bless. There are still people to love. There are still opportunities to spread the gospel and tell people about the good news of Jesus. Mother Teresa lived for 87 years and she lived out the gospel and spread the good news of Jesus until her very last days. She was not merely waiting for death. She lived her life, the life of Jesus, as best as she could until her last breath. And Paul exemplifies here that he's called to do the same. ²⁵“Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.” He chooses not to err on the side of waiting for death, but to promote life with the time that he has left. Whether that's in prison or whether that's out spreading the gospel on the streets in the Mediterranean world. So much so, that he errs on the side of hope that he will see these people again.

At the same time, Paul also acknowledges that his death might bring life to these communities. In that first paragraph in verse 20, “...Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.” Paul knows that if he dies, that Christ will be exalted in his death. It's not about Paul. It's not about his ego. His chief concern is that the gospel is spread and that Christ is glorified. Whether by life or by death, Paul wants to be a magnifier for the life of Christ. That, like Christ, on the other side of death, that death does not hold back the good news of Jesus Christ. Because Paul knows that Christ will be magnified through his death or life, he can say these encouraging words to the Philippian people, ²⁷“Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” I'm really struck by those last two verses. ²⁹“For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” What I love about this is how Paul is living out what he's saying. He's practicing what he preaches. That as he suffers in prison Christ is being magnified in the streets. Just as we learned last week, Paul knows that the gospel is spreading with or without him. He hears of people defending him and therefore the gospel is spreading. Paul knows that people are speaking against him and still, the gospel is spreading. Providence, in our suffering, in our death, are we willing to not just preserve life out self-interest and survival, but to magnify Christ in our suffering and in our death? Are we willing to bless others, to exult Christ and to glorify God in our suffering?

Likewise, we have a paradoxical theme that spans the entirety of the Biblical narrative. When is the gospel most alive? When do you witness expansive growth and people coming to Christ? Even as we look at the Biblical narrative, when do we see victory? Even as we look at the gospels, when is Christ magnified the most? Amazingly and incredibly, it comes through weakness. Christ is magnified the most not in his miracles, but in his willingness to lay down His life for the sins of all of humanity. At His death, He is at his seemingly weakest point. And yet it's in this weakness that the power of God comes forth in that death cannot hold God back. When does Christianity spread the most? When it's under threat. When it's being persecuted. Remember Yang Hua's story from last week? In China, 3000 people are coming to Christ each day despite the fact that they're being persecuted by the Chinese government. Even think about this on a personal level, when is your faith the strongest? When are you praying more and seeking out the Lord more? It's not when you feel security and assurance. It's not when you're comfortable. It's not even when you're at your strongest in life. Your faith, my faith, is strongest when I'm weakest. When I don't know what direction things are going. When I don't have assurances. When the future is uncertain. That's when we lean into Jesus all the more.

You know, technically speaking, at or around age 24, researchers believe that the human body begins to die. It begins to deteriorate. So, believe it or not, as young as I look, I'm in the process of dying. We're all in the process of dying. In 1 Corinthians 15:35 Paul responds to this concern of the body dying and how it will come back to life, ³⁵“But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ ³⁶Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.” Paul's words are pretty jarring. What we sow will not come to life unless it dies. Paul is witnessing in prison that the spreading of the gospel is not dependent on him. In fact, he acknowledges that his death might be what sparks more life. And part of Paul's argument here is that before his death he and others have the opportunity to sow seeds among them. The temptation is to dictate and control how those seeds grow. What shape they take. And even answering the eternal question that he begins with, it doesn't matter whether you come back in your youthful body or in your older body. Paul is instructing the people of Corinth to let go of such notions. When I think about our context and circumstances, Providence, I wonder, “what seeds is God calling us to plant? What type of seeds are we willing to plant?” Further in this 1 Corinthians chapter, Paul says, “What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not

all die, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this season, Providence, we have an incredible opportunity to plant seeds and to bless. When we choose to plant seeds in which we dictate how it takes shape and grows, we plant seeds that are perishable. We take control of what God wants to germinate. We end up building our own kingdom here on earth rather than planting seeds that last for eternity. That last for the kingdom of God. Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks to this a little more directly in chapter 3:6, “I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” So even as our body decays and dies, even if Providence Church dies, what seeds can we plant today for eternity? Seeds that will not just die on this earth, but seeds that God will germinate and grow. Seeds that will bless God’s people. Seeds that will have an eternal impact in this life and the life thereafter.

“...living is Christ, dying is gain.” Again Providence, I’ll say, death is not the end. The Kingdom of God is bigger than the power of death. Jesus Christ dying on the cross and coming back to life proves that God is bigger than death. But what we do in the face of death matters. We can choose self-preservation and selfishness or we can choose to plant seeds that last for an eternity. Even in your personal lives, we are all living with the reality that each of us will eventually die, believe it or not, I’m decaying at age 33, what seeds can you plant today in others and for the Kingdom of God that will last for eternity? Seeds that are bound for heaven. Seeds that God will willingly water for the growth of His Kingdom. While it’s a mortifying thought to contend with the reality of death, do we have the capacity and maturity to think as Paul does? “...by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.” “...live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Whether in life or by death, magnify Christ by the manner in which you live today. That when the day comes when it is time for you to die that you can die in peace knowing that you have shared the gospel with others and you have magnified Christ with your life. In this season, Providence, we have an incredible opportunity to bless and to plant seeds for the future of the Kingdom of God. We might not witness the germination or even how it takes shape, but if we trust in the Lord, we can trust

that God will give the growth. Praise be to God that we can hold to these truths that Christ can be magnified in our life or by our death. That God's Kingdom will go-on and that more people will be saved by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Savior. I don't know about you, but I have hopeful anticipation for the seeds that you all plant that are bound for eternity. Let us magnify Christ today in everything that we do. That whether by life or by death, Jesus is glorified. Amen.