

Title: When You Desire Christ More than Anything

Text: Philippians 1:12-26

Date: February 10, 2019 at FBCW

Sermon Series note: Philippians = sometimes following Christ is a pleasure...sometimes following Christ is painful...but truly following Christ is always worth it.

Last week, I finished my message by talking about former Governor Sonny Perdue's testimony. Nearly twenty years ago, he shared with our home church in middle Georgia on a Sunday night that he would publicly announce his willingness to run for Governor. But the most memorable part of his testimony was the way he concluded.

At that time he was State Senator Sonny Perdue, and he asked that the church sing together the song that had really ministered to him as he was preparing to put his yes on the table.

It's called *I'd Rather Have Jesus* and it was made popular by George Beverly Shea:

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.*

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause; I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than world-wide fame. I'd rather be true to His holy name.*

*He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom; He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs. I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.*

*CHORUS – Than to be the king of a vast domain...Or be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything...This world affords today.*

Question: is it true of me? Would I really prefer Jesus over anything else?

Do I live with a single-minded focus to the extent that whatever happens, however it happens, so long as Christ is exalted in my life – I'm happy with it?

How much of my time/effort is spent pursuing Christ, versus pursuing other things?

Today's text is the personal testimony of a man (Paul) who didn't care what anyone else thought of him, just as long as he was faithful to Christ.

READ the TEXT.

INTRO. Paul is writing this letter called "Philippians" from jail. He is in jail because he has refused to stop preaching the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul's heart is amazing. He has just encouraged the Philippian church in his introduction to the letter with these words: Phil 1:6, "I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."

In other words: "God is faithful. You can trust the Lord. He will finish what He started." – so writes this man from prison.

And now in Phil 1:12, he tells them to be encouraged, because his personal imprisonment has actually been a good thing → because it has resulted in advancing the Gospel.

Paul's words remind me of Joseph in Genesis 50:20, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result..."

Background. Notice this about Paul –

- He spends 1:3-11 speaking words of encouragement/gratitude to the Philippians.
- He spends 1:12-26 talking about how the Gospel was advancing despite tremendous personal persecution.

Observe: you know what Paul doesn't do? Spend time talking about himself!

Question: what would God do if literally everything in our church was about 1) Jesus 2) others and 3) never ourselves?

What if I didn't even have time to dwell on my personal preferences because I was so consumed with praising Jesus and encouraging others?

Today's Church in America has lots of problems. Many have a consumer mentality → what will you do for my kids? Do you have my style of worship? Will your schedule fit my routine? Will it make me feel good? In what way does your church benefit me?

But Paul's mentality → who cares what happens to me, just as long as my life is immersed in the advancement of the Gospel?

Q: Do I spend enough time meditating on statements like this from Jesus:

Mark 8:34-37, *If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? What can anyone give in exchange for his life?*

First, Paul wants the Philippians to know his imprisonment has actually advanced the Gospel (vv 12-14). There is tremendous irony/tension in these verses. Note, something has happened to Paul. He is in prison. Happening = incarceration.

1:13, "My imprisonment is because I am in Christ."

Q: Why is Paul in prison? **A:** For preaching the Gospel.

But stunningly, now that Paul is in prison, the Gospel he preached is advancing quickly!

- Paul clearly makes this statement (v 12) as a testimony to God and the power of the Gospel!
- Paul also means this as a personal exhortation to the baby Christians in Philippi.
 - See my suffering.
 - See me suffering...believing that it is worth it.

Note, the experience in jail has advanced the Gospel very specifically (v 12).

Note, he wants the Philippians to have knowledge of what's happening in the jail (v 13).

- The guards now know about Christ.
- The community now knows about Christ.

In other words, Paul → “See me suffering...but see me content...see me believing it's worth it.”

1:14, “*the brothers have gained confidence to speak the word more fearlessly...*”

Lesson: don't waste your adversity! Don't waste your suffering! (James 1:4).

- Faithfulness in suffering is a testimony that galvanizes others and pushes them to keep believing.

Second, Paul wants the Philippians to know that he personally rejoices whenever Christ is proclaimed (vv 15-19). This portion of the text is deeply personal for Paul, and it's also deeply personal for pastors who read it.

Paul doesn't elaborate on the identity of these critics/detractors. But we know based on the text that there is a group that gloats over Paul's imprisonment.

- They may have dismissed him because of his poor speaking abilities (1 Cor 1-2).
- They may disrespect him because of his constant suffering and weakness (2 Cor 11).
- They might have taken issue with whatever his thorn in the flesh was (2 Cor 12).

But here's what we know – 1:16 affirms yet again – the reason Paul is in prison is because he has been defending the gospel.

While in prison, there are two groups of preachers that Paul is aware of:

There is a self-serving group of preachers (v 15a). Notice how Paul describes them:

- Envy: the attention/success you've had, I wish it was on me.
- Rivalry: not viewing Paul as a teammate or partner...but competition.
 - i. Rivalry = I want to be better than you.
 - ii. Spurgeon: “You may preach the Gospel better than I can, but you'll never preach a better Gospel.”
 - iii. FACT: Gospel is not about me...it's about Christ!
- Selfish ambition (v 17): they view ministry as a means to personally gain/profit.
- Not sincerely (v 17): they go through the motions of ministry, but they don't care.
- Don't mind trampling/hurting Paul...

Warning: God help the Christian who doesn't mind hurting another Christian!

Warning: God help the preacher who doesn't mind hurting another preacher!

Note, this is a painful word to share, church family. I hate to even speak this but it's true—
Not every Christian preacher you meet/hear is in the ministry with pure motives...not all of them are ministering because they care...or because they have been called.

- There are indeed wolves among the sheep that are near the flock to profit, not serve!
 (Acts 20:29-30).

There is also a group of preachers that minister from goodwill/sincerity (v 15).

- Their heartbeat is that the message of God goes forth at whatever cost.
 - i. (If He uses me fine...if He uses the preacher down the street, fine.)
 - ii. (The point of ministry is not that I am known...but that Christ is known.)
- These preach out of love (v 16).
 - i. The focus of their love is the Gospel, and other people.

As a Christian minister, I must ask this:

- Do I really love God? Do I love the Gospel of Jesus?
- Do I love my church?
- Do I love the lost? Do I love seeing people find hope?

Note, if you meet a preacher, and everything in you discerns he: loves money...loves applause...loves affirmation...loves power...loves putting other ministers down to make himself look better → be very suspicious!

But notice Paul's heart (v 18) – Paul just wants the gospel of Christ proclaimed publicly, corporately!

1:18, What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice...

For Paul, when Christ is heard/known/explained – this brings him great joy!

Paul also rejoices personally (vv 19-20) over the Gospel of Jesus. The Gospel is his personal hope of salvation. And it comes through two streams:

- Through your prayers.
- Through the help of Jesus Christ.

What gives me hope when going through personal hardship? Why should I be heart deep in a local church? Because there are moments of real crisis that these two things are the only truths that will get me by:

- 1) People are praying for me and 2) Jesus Christ is aware of my need!

Thirdly, Paul courageously declared his confidence in Christ: living or dying was secondary. What was primary for Paul was personal faithfulness to God (vv 20-26). This is hard to describe. Paul isn't being dramatic, he's just being honest.

This is his personal testimony, “Where I live or die isn’t that important to me...but rather that I’ll be faithful to God.” WOW! Can you imagine saying that, and really meaning it?

Eager expectation (v 20) = watching, intense anticipation, serious waiting.

Hope (v 20) = confidence, faith.

Expecting and hoping in what?

- That I won’t be ashamed about any component of my faith (v 20)
- That I will live with boldness/courage (v 20).
 - Means to tell it with your name signed to it...
- That Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death (v 20).

Rom 14:8, “If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”

Question: does this look like a man worried about: popularity...social acceptance...money...political correctness...? NO!

- What it looks like is a man who says this: even if I must die, I want my reputation to be that I died saying yes to Jesus Christ!

Paul is saying the big vision (the goal) of his life is that he be completely faithful to God.

Phil 1:21, To live is Christ! (very consistent with John 15:4-5, He is the vine, I am the branch).

- If Paul is to live, he wants to live completely by Christ’s power.

Phil 1:21, To die is gain! (very consistent with 2 Cor 5:8, to be absent from the body...)

- If Paul dies, he knows he wins because he goes to be with Christ and his race is over.

Phil 1:22, to keep living here Paul would be committed to fruitful work.

- Fruitful work = not living as a victim...irony of a man writing this from prison.
 - Wherever God plants me, I’m on mission!
 - Wherever God has me, I’m seeking Kingdom real estate.

Note, this text presents an undeniable tension of living verses dying.

- But personally for Paul, there was no real tension.
- Paul was completely ready for whatever God chooses! Paul was ready!

Note, the key to Paul’s heart/effectiveness is that ALL of his life was about:

- 1) Christ and 2) others. → it was never about Paul!

Big Idea. The Gospel will advance when the Church decides to choose faithfulness to God over personal comfortable.

Think about this – what is Gospel advancement? It’s the good news of Jesus getting to the darkest, most hopeless places in the world in time!

All over the world people need the Gospel! Am I doing my part to advance it?
(Praying...Giving...Supporting...Mentoring...Willingness to go...)

What if the dreams I dreamed for my kids/grandkids were, “Lord make them faithful to you...put the on the front lines of whatever heaven considers the biggest deal of all?”

Question: how much of my life is strategically spent pushing the Kingdom of God forward?

- When I spend my money
- When I pray
- The way I raise my kids
- The way I speak to my neighbors
- The way I talk at work
- The number of people I invite to church
- Inconveniencing myself to take in outsiders? Foster kids?

Application:

Notice this about Paul

There’s no anger, resentment, or bitterness in his tone. He’s in prison!

Notice his contentment → at least it’s advanced the Gospel!

- Paul doesn’t view his personal pain as a loss IF it pushes the agenda of Jesus forward.

What if I viewed my difficult circumstances as God’s way of placing the Gospel in an undesirable place to bring hope to the lost – instead of dwelling on how hard it is for me?

Note, oh that this would be my attitude when hardship and difficulty come – not, am I comfortable? But rather, how can God be specifically honored in this situation?

- Is it hard right now in your life? Is it painful?
- You must decide: bad attitude versus begging God to honor His name!

Note, even as Paul is sent into jail – his mindset is this: at least the people in this jail will see, hear, and know Christ is in my life.

Note, this is a valuable lesson: even if I go through suffering/discomfort. May the focus of my life be – oh God make me faithful here, and not complaining here, for your glory.

Note, even as Paul is in jail (people are still coming to Christ) (the devil can stop the messenger, but not the message) –

- I am not telling you every day is easy!
- I’m telling you many days are hard – but be encouraged – Satan can’t stop Jesus!
- There is nothing more marketable for a Christian than Jesus Christ himself.
- Why would we ever make our lives about us and not Christ?

Question: do I have true joy? (In painful situations because my eyes are on Christ?) (Or whenever someone gets saved in the midst of painful situations?)

- The theme of this text is Paul's joy over 1) salvations and 2) God's will.
- Luke 15:7, There's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...

Question: am I unashamed of the Gospel?

- I don't mean unashamed when it's easy (no penalty/cost for believing).
- I mean am I unashamed when it's hard? (Paul was in prison)

Question: am I faithful?

- It's a long way from an ancient, Roman prison cell to Woodstock, but how do you think the Apostle Paul would describe faithfulness today?

Question: Is Christ truly my life? (Phil 1:21)

- Does Christ drive my choices/decisions?
- Does Christ have his say in my marriage and home?
- Is Christ known at my school because I am there?

CONCL: Paul was happy/willing to advance the Gospel even from prison! Why? Because for Paul, Jesus was worth it. He was content with whatever his life needed to be – so long as the name of Christ goes forth!

FACT: The sum of what I am willing to do for Jesus with my life...is directly tied to how much I personally value Jesus.

High value of Jesus = willing to absorb pain...willing to be called a fool...so long as Christ's name goes forth.

Low value of Jesus = don't ask me to stop my preferences...don't ask me to send my kids to be with those kids...don't ask me to give that amount of money...don't ask me to take less so that the kingdom of God can have more...

Question: Do I desire Christ more than anything else in my life? O God, for your glory, may it be so.