

"Following Those Who Follow The King"

Philippians 1:19-30 January 30, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

In the last seventy-five years in America, it has become increasingly popular for those who proclaim Jesus as Savior to also proclaim a bold independence from the Church. While it is true to say that salvation is a matter between the individual and his or her God, it is not true to proclaim that following Jesus allows for the possibility of detachment from intentional partnership with other believers. As Paul continues his letter to the Philippian Christians, he takes a helpful approach to remind them that God has designed all believers to gather together, love one another deeply, serve one another, draw courage from each other and, yes, even suffer alongside one another. Salvation is a moment between one person and Jesus, but being a Christian is never done alone. We must follow together those who are following the King.

I. Let's Go Upward Together (19-21)

A. Paul's value of intercession (19-20a) – "I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20a as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed..."

As the church at Philippi owed Paul much for his long investments in them, Paul knew that he owed them a debt of love in return. He expresses above a strong confidence that Holy Spirit was working for his deliverance through the prayers of the believers in the Philippians church. Interceding prayers bring our hearts into alignment with the heart of the Father. The more Paul prayed, and the more others prayed for him, the stronger he became in his certainty that he would be delivered from his incarceration. Intercession increased the level of Paul's hopes and he had no fear of being ashamed for having operated in hope.

B. Paul's driving motivation (20b) – "...but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death."

Paul adds here a statement that, even if he were to die in that prison, he still had reason to retain his courage. Because he was not living for his own preservation and safety, and because he had laid down his life as a sacrifice for the Gospel, Paul was at complete rest that his desire to honor Jesus would be fulfilled. It is a liberating place to reach in life where you no longer count your life as the most important thing to you. When we reach this place, we can also declare that Christ will be honored in our daily life and, should we die for His glory,

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there will be honor for Him in our death. Paul was driven by the desire to honor his Lord in every way possible – even in his potential death.

C. Paul's delight in his life (21a, 22a) – "For to me to live is Christ... 22a if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me."

With all the mentioning of dying, Paul was intentional to insert a reminder that his entire life's delight was found in the Kingdom reality of living in Christ. As he expected to be freed from prison, he anticipated future days where he would express the reality that Jesus was supreme in all things. His life fully belonged to Jesus in such an extent that Paul could not separate his living from the context of Jesus' ownership. He actually said that his living on earth was Christ – an unusual way to declare Christ's lordship over Paul. He then adds that any future days he would be able to live would be intentionally committed to laboring fruitful for the good of others and the glory of Jesus. We can learn much from Paul's words. He did not add Jesus to his life. Jesus was Paul's life. He considered the entire scope of his living as being released as a labor of love in the Gospel of Jesus.

D. Paul's confidence about his eventual death (21b) – "...and to die is gain."

What an insight! Most people dread death. Not the Apostle Paul. He viewed death as the doorway to the fulness of his faith. He saw his eventual passing from earth into glory as a great reward. Non-believers typically view death as loss – and, of course, we who are left behind sense a loss when someone we care for dies. Yet, we should never fear our own death. To the degree that Jesus is real to us as we live out our days, to that same degree we will experience such spiritual reassurance about passing into His presence. Dying is the means to the greatest gain in the Christian's life because it ushers us from the realm of faith into the realm of perfect sight. We see things incompletely down here most of the time. We have to fight against opposing forces to believe in full surrender. We contend with our own flesh down here. The devil seeks to destroy us here and the world system blows spiritual smog into our spiritual respiratory system. When we die, we are no longer subjected to any form of resistance. The flesh is gone forever. The devil cannot tempt or attack us. After death, we find ourselves fully delivered from the snares of the world. Paul was completely right to say that, for the believer, to die is gain.

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II. Let's Go Inward Together (22b-26)

A. Our glorious conflict (22b-23a) – "Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two..."

Paul gives expression to the reality that all of us who live our lives for the advance of the Gospel sense in our spirits. We know that our eternity is secure. We also know that this world we will eventually leave behind is very dark. While we are here, we are making a difference in the lives of others as we live unto Jesus. We can serve here. We can teach here. We can impart love to others here. We can pour all of the goodness of God out from our lives into the lives of others. Because we care deeply about other people, we can experience a conflict that arises when we personally want to go and be with Jesus, but we know that we will be unable to serve others once we leave. Paul felt hard pressed between these two potentials. Staying and pouring into other people or going to our full inheritance in Jesus.

B. Our deepest hunger (23b) – "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."

Lest he leave any doubt, Paul stresses here that it is a far greater thing to leave earth and be with Jesus. He personally desired this as all believers do. We long for Him. We look forward to the day when we actually lay our eyes on Him. To hear the actual voice of Jesus is something that should keep our hearts perpetually hungry for Heaven. The greatest treasures of life on earth are not worthy to be compared with one millisecond in glory with Jesus. Of course, we desire to be with Him. He is far better than anything we could ever experience on this planet during this life of faith. This is the cry of a *son of God*.

C. Our mission of love (24-26) – "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."

Yet, Paul was not only a son – he was a *servant* too. He now gives us the other facet of his thinking that caused the hard-pressed conflict that he carried within his spirit. He had been given Kingdom assignments by the Father and he felt that he had not completed

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them yet. To stay here on earth and live out his future days would be a great benefit to the Christians whom Paul served. Somewhere in his praying, waiting and writing, Paul concluded that God was not finished with him upon the earth yet. He would continue to invest in others for their progression in the faith. God would not take Paul away at this time and, because of this, the Philippian Christians could continue in a joyful hope of having more time with him. Paul even stated that he believed he would see them again. Let us learn that when adversity finds us that we have a call to continue to pour into others, even to encourage them. We remember that Paul had lost everything while he had been incarcerated for more than two full years before he even arrived at the imprisonment from which he was writing this letter. Note the absence of self-pity. See that he was not complaining or making the letter all about him and his undesirable circumstances. Paul was delivered from all inner darkness. He was free to love, serve and edify others. May God grant us the same faith, love and tenacity to pour into others even when nobody is pouring into us. Christ-centered living is the gateway to victory over trouble. We keep our hearts affixed upon Him as we fulfill our own mission of love.

III. Let's Go Forward Together (27-30)

A. Let's aim high (27a) - "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."

Philippians is one of the only letters which Paul wrote that does not contain a clear rebuke of anyone. Here, we begin to catch a faint scent that there might be some minor division in the church. He will be a little more direct in 4:1-3 as he nudges two women to protect their unity with each other. He reminds all the believers in Philippi to intentional aim their lives in a way that strikes the bullseye of a worthy testimony for Jesus. Christians have received such immeasurable grace. We are objects of unfailing, divine love. Our sins have been removed and we have been adopted into God's family. We are indwelt by God the Spirit who has sealed us for eternity. What treasure we have been granted! The call upon each of us is to live our lives in a manner that reflects how grateful we are to God for what He has done. Our daily living is to arise to a level worthy of Jesus and what He has done for us. We do not need to live accidental Christian lives. We are to aim high and live intentionally in a way that reveals Jesus as desirable to all who watch us. Our manner of life is

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to remain distinct from those who have never encountered the Son of God and His saving grace.

B. Let's move in unity (27b) – "...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..."

Here comes a mission to accomplish in Philippi: stand firm together with united spirit, cultivate the same mind on the most essential things and pour out their lives side by side for the glory of Jesus and the advance of the Gospel. Paul raised their spiritual eyes off of any potential petty conflicts and had them focus on the unified mission to make Jesus Christ known to those around them. He knew they would not dare to live with disunity if he was physically present there among them. He charged them that, in his absence, the expectation from heaven was still the same: move together in unity as they fulfill their assignments.

C. Let's retain boldness (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."

When we are fixated on Jesus and living in intentional unity with one another, we will find ourselves emboldened and no more subject to intimidation from our opponents. Christians do well to remain aware that we will encounter opposition as we live in the Spirit for the glory of Jesus Christ. They will fight about us. People will lie about us. In some instances, Christians will be threatened with physical harm. As believers, we are not to be intimidated by those who oppose us. We are to love them with the love of Christ, and that love will cast out our fear of them. When they witness our unity with one another and our boldness for Christ, Paul teaches here that this Kingdom dynamic will serve as a visible reminder to them that we have received something that they do not possess. Fear in us will inaccurately communicate to our opposition that they have some advantage over us. Paul, chained daily to Roman soldiers, knew what he was talking about. He may have been stuck in a jail, but his heart was not bound in chains. He projected to everyone that they needed the freedom he himself possessed. This spoke to them of a greater reality that existed above the authority of Rome. Paul was a prisoner of love. He was chained to Jesus. He could not have been more at peace.

D. Let's finish well (29-30) – "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer"

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for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have."

Now, Paul concludes chapter one with the sobering reminder that, as we have been entrusted with such immeasurable gospel treasure, we have also been assigned a level of suffering that will identify us with Christ. The Christian life, when lived out richly and zealously for Jesus' glory, will result in some form of conflict and suffering. A faith that costs nothing is worth nothing. We do not need to pursue suffering, but we do need to know that it will find us. As He suffered, so will His followers. Jesus taught all of us that truth. If the world hates us, it hated Him first. The servant is not greater than his or her Master. While joy is the overarching theme of the book of Philippians, the context for that joy is not found in our ease, but in our fellowship with Jesus through many trials, toils and snares. Like Paul, if we can be brought to the place where we view our lives through the lens of what they mean for Jesus, we will not fear suffering, conflicts or loss. We will see the whole of this life as the means by which we bring Jesus much glory.