

Three Catchcries for a New Year

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[0 : 00] The reading today is from Philippians 1, 1 to 26. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi and with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace.

Both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with affection of Christ Jesus.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent.

[1 : 30] And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

[2 : 53] Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, 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.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Thanks, Alan. The title of the sermon this morning is Three Catch Cries for a New Year. I was speaking with John Hollier and he suggested they should be Aussie, Aussie, Aussie.

[4 : 32] But after our shambolic performance at the MCG the last couple of days, I don't think that's fitting, so we'll go for three catch cries. They'll be from the Book of Philippians. If you're one of the children who's normally in Grace Kids in primary school and you can come and tell me at the end of the service this morning what those three catch cries are, that means you've been listening very, very carefully and I may have your choice of some M&Ms; or a strawberry cloud or a sour worm or something.

Some lollies anyway. So, yeah, so kids, listen out, but what are the three catch cries can you tell me? Can you tell me? If you're someone who's in youth group in high school, you need to work a bit harder for your reward.

That is, in my first catch cry, I have three sub points about halfway through and one of them is... I've got to remember what they are now. Well, maybe I've forgotten what they are, but you can tell me what they are, right?

One of them is the wellspring of something, one of them is the bedrock of something, and, you know, you can tell me what the three are, so you need to be listing out for those because they're not on your outlines. You'll have to write them down and try and remember them.

Okay. Well, let's get into it. Now, according to a survey done by finder.com.au, 71% of Aussies, that's 15.5 million people, will make a New Year's resolution for 2026.

[6 : 04] 71% of us. And though you're much more likely to make a New Year's resolution if you're young. So 88% of Gen Z will make a New Year's resolution, but only 39% of baby boomers.

Maybe the baby boomers are tired of making New Year's resolutions and not keeping them. But 71% of us. And the top four most popular New Year's resolutions for Aussies all concern physical health.

Number one, improve fitness. Number two, eat more healthily. Number three, lose weight. Number four, sleep more. And then number five is travel overseas. Are you one of the 15 million?

You know, maybe you have a New Year's resolution or two. Is your resolution among the top five? Well, if so, I have some disappointing news for you. That 80% of New Year's resolutions fail by February.

What that means is, if you've been paying attention to those statistics, and I think if I've got my maths right, that means each year more Aussies fail to keep New Year's resolutions than fail to make them.

[7 : 18] Well, today from Philippians chapter one, this is our final sermon for 2025. It's also, in a way, our first for 2026, because we're beginning a new series that will carry us through to February.

That is, carry us through to about the time all those New Year's resolutions are failing. This portion of God's word will give us something better than resolutions to carry into the new year.

What we'll see this morning are three catch cries for all God's people. I say they're catch cries for all God's people because that's how Paul addresses this letter, at least to the Philippians.

In Philippians chapter one, verse one, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.

This is a letter Paul wrote for all believers, all the saints in Philippi, not just for the leaders, but neither excluding the leaders, the overseers and the deacons. It's for them too. The message of this letter was for all.

[8 : 27] And these three catch cries we're going to see from chapter one are better than New Year's resolutions because their power comes, the power of these catch cries comes not from our own discipline and constancy, which is rather unreliable, but from the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Now, I was talking with Gareth at church on Christmas Day. We were having a chat. And he knew I was preaching on this passage because he was preparing the kids' talk. And he suggested that this passage was too long for me to preach, which I think was more a comment about my preaching than about the passage per se.

But I think we might be able to manage it if we focus on these three catch cries because each of them takes us to the heart of one of the three main sections of this passage.

So for each of these sections, we'll begin with the catch cry and then we'll use that as a springboard to get into the section as a whole. So first catch cry for us to take into 26 from verses 3 to 11 is this. We are all partakers together of grace. We are all partakers together of grace. Now, as usual, Paul begins one of his letters with thanksgiving and prayer.

[9 : 48] But look with me at verse 7. In the ESV, it's right in the middle of the verse. If you have another version, you probably find this phrase at the end of the verse. But there in verse 7, Paul says to the Philippians, you are all partakers with me of grace.

Or to express it another way, he says to them, you all share together with me in the grace of God. You all share together with me in the grace of God. And that is true of every Christian. Indeed, you could say that is what it means to be a Christian.

A Christian is someone who shares in the grace of God. If you're someone that is who trusts in and who follows Jesus, then God's kindness, his generosity, his favour, his blessing, his joy, it's all yours.

You share in it. It belongs to you. And if you're not yet a Christian, if you're someone here who is exploring or thinking about God and about Christianity, if you're not yet a Christian, then I want you to know this is what Jesus offers you.

[11:18] A share in God's grace, all of his goodness. You, Christian, can wake up each morning and say to yourself, the goodness of God is mine.

The grace of God is mine. I share in it. And that is true, that is true of you, no matter what else is going on in your life.

No matter what your circumstances, it was true of Paul, in prison in Rome. It was true, or perhaps elsewhere, but let's go with Rome. It was true of the Philippians, threatened by opponents in their own city.

And it's true of you, whatever your circumstances, as you face a new year. You might face a new year with anticipation. You might face it with dread.

But if you are someone who loves Jesus and trusts in him, this is true of you. You share in the grace of God. Your sins are forgiven and that cannot be taken away.

[12:24] You can call God your father and that cannot be taken away. You have the gift of God's spirit. You have an inheritance in heaven. God is always working for your good and none of these things can be taken from you.

You share in God's grace. Not because you deserve it, not because any of us deserve it, but because God freely gives it.

And that one thought, that catch cry, ripples throughout Paul's thanksgiving and prayer in this first section. Let me show three ways.

Firstly, knowing that we share together in grace is the wellspring of affection and joy. Sharing together in grace is the wellspring of affection and joy.

Look at verses seven and eight together. Paul says to the Philippians, it's right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

[13:30] Now, what's Paul talking about here when he says it's right for me to feel this way about you all? Well, he's referring in part to his thankfulness and joy, which he mentions in verse three and four.

He says, verse three, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for all of you, making my prayer with joy. And now in verse seven, he says, it's right for me to feel this way about you all, this thankfulness, this joy, because I hold you in my heart.

Why? For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

It's because the Philippians share with Paul in God's grace that Paul says it's right, it's just, it's fitting that he should hold them in his heart.

It's fitting that he should be filled with thankfulness and joy on their account because together with Paul, they share in God's grace.

[14:38] And this is the basis of Paul's affection for them too. We see that in verse eight. Verse eight, for God is my witness, how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul loved his brothers and sisters in Philippi. He felt affection for them. He longed to be with them. You can see from Paul's precise words in verse seven that it mattered to the apostle not only that in which we share, that is God's grace, the thing we share in, but it also mattered to Paul that we share in it together.

You are all partakers with me, Paul says, of grace. See, sharing in something unimaginably, as unimaginably good as God's grace is reason enough for affection and joy and thankfulness between believers and on behalf of one another.

Think of it, think of two groups of exuberant fans of a sports team that has just won the grand final or maybe the fourth test.

And they see one another on a train or a tram on the way home from the sports ground and they recognise the team colours and maybe the accents and they've never met before.

[16:08] Their names are unknown and yet they recognise one another and they cheer and they laugh and they sing the team song or the national anthem and they retell the most memorable moments of the match.

They're so elated, these fans, sports fans, so elated that they cannot possibly feel badly toward one another for they share in the same victory.

And if that's the camaraderie and euphoria over something fleeting, over something that doesn't last, well how much more fitting is thankfulness and mutual joy and affection that these are the mark of those who share together in the grace of God.

We share together in infinite riches, the infinite riches of God's grace and that's a basis for affection and joy.

But there's more. Not only is being partakers, fellow partakers in grace the wellspring of affection and joy, it's also the bedrock of assurance. The bedrock of assurance.

[17 : 23] Look at verse 6. For God is my witness, oh sorry, that's verse 8, verse 6, and I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul was convinced that God would continue his work in the Philippians until the day Christ returns. He was certain they would persevere. He was certain they would press on as believers until the end.

How could Paul be so sure about the Philippians' future? Were the Philippians super-Christians? Was it because they were more tough, more resilient than anyone else?

Well again, follow the logic through. I'm sure of this, Paul says, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ? How so?

Verse 7, it's right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace.

[18 : 32] It's right for me to feel this way about you. Right to feel what way about the Philippians? Well part of how Paul feels about the Philippians is his confidence, his certainty that God would complete his work in them.

And again, the basis of this is what Paul says in verse 7 that it is because they are partakers with Paul of grace. To put this another way, how was Paul so confident for the Philippians?

Well his confidence was in God himself. It's God who began the work. It's God who would complete the work. because of course God will complete what he has begun because we share in his grace. What would grace be if it carried us only halfway there? So Paul was confident for the Philippians but he was confident in God and in his grace.

Sharing in grace is the bedrock of assurance. And thirdly and finally in this section being partakers together in grace is the root of our fruitfulness.

[19 : 45] It's the root of our fruitfulness. Look again at verse 6. Paul says there I'm sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ or perhaps better will bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

There's a sense of God carrying it on throughout that whole time frame. But what is the good work which God will complete and perfect until the day of Jesus Christ?

Well in part it's our faith and our salvation as I've just implied. But if we look in the context in verse 5 Paul has just been thanking God for the Philippians partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

So they were not only Paul's partners in the blessings of the gospel sharing in the blessings that come from God's grace. They were also partners with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel in evangelism.

Now later on in Philippians in chapter 4 we learn at least one way they did this was by giving financially to support Paul's evangelistic mission to the nations. They had done that in the past.

[20 : 54] Indeed they had done it Paul says from the first day ever since they first became Christians. Christians they had shared with Paul in his mission. They had done it again recently sending another gift to Paul to meet his needs even as he was in prison awaiting trial.

But Paul was confident that God's grace would continue to make them fruitful in love and righteousness and good deeds. Hence his prayer for them in verse 9 to 11.

We won't look at all of it but his prayer concludes in verse 11 that they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

They would be filled but it would be through Jesus and so the glory would be to God. It's grace, it's a gift, it's God's work, it's fruit, fruit which grows on us but which comes from him.

Trust that he will do it, that sharing in his grace will be for you the root of fruitfulness, that there'll be fruit, he'll do it, there'll be fruit in your life, fruit of evangelistic fruit, fruit of righteousness, of holiness and godliness, he will do it even for you, even for the person sitting next to you.

[22 : 24] And so partaking of God's grace is the wellspring of joy and affection, it's the bedrock of our assurance and it's the root of our fruitfulness.

What a catch cry to carry into 2026. How much better than a new year's resolution which depends on us. We are all partakers together of grace.

That is what it means to be a Christian, we share in the grace of God. Well the second catch cry of this chapter from verse 12 to 18 is this, what has happened has actually served to advance the gospel.

That comes from verse 12, verse 12 Paul writes to the Philippians, I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Now what has happened to me Paul is there referring to his imprisonment as verse 13 makes clear.

There are three main candidates for which imprisonment this was, Paul was imprisoned multiple times. It may have been his imprisonment in Caesarea from AD 57 to 59, we can read about that imprisonment in Acts chapters 23 to 26.

[23 : 35] It may be his imprisonment in Rome around AD 60 to 62, we read about that in Acts 28. It may be an earlier imprisonment in Ephesus, we don't have any direct evidence of that but it may have occurred in the mid-50s.

I'm not going to go into the arguments for or against each of these locations. In my view, Rome best fits the evidence and I'm going to treat it as if he's in prison in Rome but if it's in one of the other places it doesn't really change the meaning of the book we have before us.

In any case, Paul is under arrest, he's in custody, he's chained, he's facing trial, the threat of execution hovers over him and all of that must have seemed like a major setback for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Well, Paul says what seemed like a setback was actually a step forward. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Don't be discouraged, he says to the Philippians, take heart. He assures them, not just I'm okay but the gospel is okay, the cause of Christ is okay.

[24 : 53] Now, how could that be? How could this be the case? Because this was Paul, right? Paul, the one who had been appointed by Jesus Christ himself as the apostle to the nations, languishing in chains in Rome.

This is Paul, the travelling missionary who had been deprived of his liberty and freedom of movement, now stuck in place. This was Paul, the church planter, the pioneer.

He planned to carry the gospel even further west to Spain. But now here he is in Rome, a city the gospel had already reached even before Paul got there.

You know, things had certainly not worked out as Paul himself had planned and hoped. But now, Paul says, this apparent retreat was in fact an advance.

How so? Well, in two ways. First, in the opportunity it afforded Paul and secondly, in the way Paul's imprisonment inspired others.

[26 : 01] So first look at verse 13. It's really served to advance the gospel, verse 13, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

In Acts chapter 28, we read that Paul in Rome was allowed to stay by himself in his own sort of rented quarters, but with a soldier who guarded him. And that during the two years he spent there, Paul continued to proclaim Jesus with boldness and without hindrance to any who visited him. Now, presumably, you know, there's a soldier with Paul guarding him. Presumably, there wasn't just one guard who lived permanently with Paul. What seems more likely, and verse 13 would tend to corroborate this, is that various soldiers of the imperial guard, the praetorian, rotated on shifts, keeping watch over Paul.

And that created opportunities for Paul to share the gospel with them. I mean, they're stuck with him. What are they going to talk about? Why he's in chains? Why not start there?

Even if Paul didn't get to share the gospel with them directly, they may well have been listening in as Paul shared the gospel with others who visited him. Certainly, given Paul's relatively high status as a prisoner by this time, it's no surprise that over time, the entire imperial guard and all the rest learned the reason for his confinement.

[27 : 44] At the end of the letter, Philippians 4, verse 22, Paul passes on to the Philippians that the believing members of Caesar's household send their greetings to the Philippians.

So Paul's imprisonment created opportunity for, you know, his lengthy imprisonment. It led directly to the spread of the gospel at least among some portions of Rome's civil and military administration. Paul's imprisonment gave Paul opportunities for the gospel, but there's a second way in which it served to advance the gospel, and that is in how it inspired other believers.

Look at verse 14. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Now, that's a seemingly strange comment to make, isn't it? How could Paul's imprisonment lead to others being confident and preaching the gospel without fear?

[28 : 53] Wouldn't it be the reverse? You know, Paul's in prison. Paul's been arrested, so maybe I could be arrested too, so I better shut my mouth. But it doesn't work that way.

It had the opposite effect. Most of the brothers were apparently more impacted by the example of Paul's courage than by his confinement, fear of his confinement like his.

Actually, Paul goes on to explain it was a mixed bag of people who had stepped up their evangelistic efforts around the city of Rome. Verse 15, some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm put here for the defence of the gospel. The former proclaimed Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

See, there are those who were sincerely motivated. They loved Paul. They shared his desire to see the gospel advance, and so they were emboldened to preach Christ. There are others who are motivated by rivalry, who envied Paul and who imagined that by making more noise about Jesus in Rome, they might stir up some trouble for him, they might cause him some problems.

[30 : 17] Isn't that a very sad state of affairs, actually, that second group? That there might be people who preach Christ in order to bring trouble on another believer.

And yet it's, you know, it's an accurate and damning appraisal of the human heart, isn't it, that sin can be so insidious that it's possible even, that even in the most noble of activities, preaching Christ, we can be motivated by the most base of desires, envy and malice.

But listen to Paul. Paul offers his own remarkable commentary on this situation, considering these two groups preaching Christ.

Verse 18, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

You know, what a testimony to the heart of the apostle here. If I were in his situation, you know, even if I could somehow stoically endure the physical ordeal and confinement of my imprisonment, I can't imagine responding to the activities of those rivals with anything other than outrage and self-righteous indignation.

[31 : 42] You know, their intentions were so mean and warped. But Paul's not concerned about his own status or his own well-being or his own vindication. He just wants people to hear about Jesus.

That mattered more to him than anything. As long as more and more people were hearing about Jesus, it didn't matter how it was happening. That was enough for Paul to rejoice. He didn't care what it cost him personally.

He just wanted people to hear about Jesus, about their Lord and Saviour. And in writing to the Philippians in this way, Paul clearly expected them to share his value system.

Now, I want you to know, brothers, Paul begins in verse 12. He expects his words in this section to comfort the Philippians, to reassure them. But they can only comfort and reassure the Philippians if they did share his value system, or at least if these words of Paul would help them change their perspective.

Now, the Philippians loved Paul, and so they had reason for anxiety and grief because of the troubles he was facing. But Paul expects that what matters most to the Philippians will not be Paul's well-being, but the same thing that matters to Paul, that more and more people hear about Christ.

[33 : 03] And when it comes to people hearing about Jesus, God loves to turn setbacks into opportunities. John Piper, in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, tells numerous stories from the last two centuries of how suffering and seeming setbacks have served to advance the gospel.

Here's one of them, which Piper takes from a book by Bill and Amy Stearns. In the 1930s, the Japanese invaded North Korea and thousands of Koreans fled.

And many of the Koreans who fled settled around Vladivostok. And then in the late 30s and early 40s, Joseph Stalin began developing Vladivostok as a weapons manufacturing centre.

But he deemed that the Koreans who were living in the region, in the area, they were a security risk. And so he relocated them throughout the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin.

Relocated them to five different areas of the Soviet Union. One of those areas was Tashkent, where these group of Koreans were settled among a staunchly Muslim population, the Uzbeks.

[34 : 22] Now, the Uzbeks are a large people group which had for hundreds of years violently resisted any Western efforts to introduce Christianity. But when these Koreans were moved in to live amongst them, they welcomed them because of their industry and kindness.

And within a few decades, this community of Koreans had integrated with Uzbek cultural life. Among the Koreans were pockets of Christian believers.

He began bringing Uzbek and Kazakh friends to Christ. And so on June the 2nd, 1990, the first open-air Christian meeting in the history of Soviet Central Asia was held in the capital of Kazakhstan.

Through the labours of these Korean believers. Now, consider the hardships that those Korean believers faced. First displaced from their homeland.

Then again, forcibly relocated by Stalin. And placed among a foreign culture and a foreign people. And yet God used that to bring the gospel to an unreached people group.

[35 : 40] Actually, a people group that is still largely unreached today. But the work has begun. God turns setbacks, apparent setbacks, into steps forward.

Now, what will 2026 bring for you? What will 2026 bring for me? What will it bring for us as a church? What will it bring for the missionaries we support?

Now, if you've been here as part of this church for a while, long enough to hear about the missionary support, and I'm speaking about the others, not about myself and the AFES team here.

But if you've been here long enough to hear about the missionary support, you will know the hardships and the obstacles and the apparent setbacks that each of them are facing.

And have faced in recent years. What will 2026 bring them and us? There may be griefs and trials and obstacles and setbacks.

Don't be surprised. But let us carry this catch cry into 2026. What has happened has actually served to advance the gospel.

[36 : 58] God's mission won't fail. His plan won't fail. Let's be open to unexpected twists in the mission of God.

Let us be ready to see in our weakness, Christ's strength. In our defeat, Christ's triumph. And let us learn to prize the cause of Christ more than we prize our own comfort.

You know, what could be better, however much it cost us, what could be better than that more and more people hear of Jesus? And in a similar vein, let's carry into 2026 our third and final catch cry from this passage.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. That statement comes from verse 21. Verse 21.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Now, why does Paul say this? Paul says this because he's confronted with those very two, there's those two very real possibilities, life and death.

[38 : 10] He's a prisoner. He's awaiting trial. His imprisonment could end in either way. It could end in his condemnation and execution, his death. Or it could end in his acquittal and his release.

Life. And he weighs up. These two alternatives are before him. And in verse 22, he weighs them up. He says, verse 22, if I am to live in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me.

Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

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

Paul considers these two alternatives, life and death. He desires to depart and be with Christ, better by far, Paul says.

[39 : 24] But he knows that if he stays in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor. Now, I was reading this passage with some uni students earlier this month. And I asked them, I want to ask you the same question.

What do you think about verse 21? In particular, do you think that verse 21 is as true for you as it was for Paul?

Is that a true statement for your life? For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. I asked these uni students that question and they answered in the affirmative.

They said, yes, it is. What do you think? Just ponder that for a moment. Is verse 21 true of your life? Is it a catch cry that you could hang over your life?

Now, I pushed the uni students I was reading the Bible with. I want to push you a bit too. Do you really believe it's as true for you as it is for Paul?

[40 : 26] Let me offer three reasons why it might not be as true for you as it is for Paul. Reason number one, Paul himself says at the start of verse 21, For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Could it be that Paul's just sharing his own personal opinion here? This is how Paul feels. It may not apply to us. Second reason, Paul says, to me, to live is Christ.

And that if he went on living, it would mean fruitful labour for him. Well, of course it would for Paul. Paul was an apostle. So, of course, life meant fruitful labour for him.

He'd been appointed to preach Christ. Of course he could say to live is Christ. His entire life was about Jesus and making Jesus known. Specifically called to that.

What about you? Are you an apostle? Sure, Paul's life was all about Christ, but is mine? Is yours?

Third reason it might not apply to us the way it applies to Paul.

[41 : 31] Paul says, to me, to die is gain. Because when he died, he would depart and be with Christ, which is far better. This is one of four verses, I think, in the New Testament that is talking about the intermediate state between our death and resurrection, where we go to be with Christ.

We can talk about that later if you want to. But he anticipates that when he dies, he'll go to be with Christ. And, of course, that's far better for Paul. I mean, after all, Paul was a prisoner.

Paul had enemies. He had opponents. He had rivals who were out to trouble him. He'd been beaten. He'd been stoned. He'd been shipwrecked. He'd been hungry, cold, in danger, persecuted. Life for Paul was one misery after another.

One suffering after another. But me? I have a very pleasant life. I live in a comfortable house. I have a beautiful wife.

I have four amazing kids. I have a wider family that, for the most part, gets on incredibly well and where people love and respect one another. I enjoy good physical health.

[42 : 37] I have leisure time. I have hobbies and interests I enjoy. I mean, of course, Paul would say to die is gain because his life was horrible. But could I say it?

I mean, are those words equally true of me? Wouldn't I rather say to die is loss? But what do you think?

Is verse 21 equally as true for you or equally as true for me as it is for the Apostle Paul? Is it true that for you to live is Christ and to die is gain?

Do you really believe that verse is true for you? And if you do, why? Why do you believe it?

Perhaps you remember the words of our Lord. Then he said to them all, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

[43 : 55] For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

For me, to live is Christ.

To die is gain. And if that is true for you too, ordinary disciple, if it's true for you, is that a catch cry you're willing to carry into 2026?

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If this is your catch cry for 2026, then you'll have the same prayer and ambition as Paul and the same hope as Paul.

See, look, the last couple of verses we'll look at, verse 19 and 20. Paul says, Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, my salvation.

[45 : 25] Now, when we first read verse 19, what is the deliverance? What is it that Paul expects in answer to the Philippians' prayers? We might, our first thought might be, he expects to be released from prison.

But that's not actually what he's talking about. I know this will turn out for my deliverance, verse 20, The deliverance, the salvation that Paul anticipates is that he will not be ashamed, but that Christ will be honoured in his body, by whatever means, whether by life or by death.

That's salvation for Paul, to be someone who is unashamed of Christ, someone in whom Christ is glorified. His ambition, his prayer, his expectation, his hope, is for the magnification and exaltation

of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in Paul's body, by whatever means the Lord may choose, however the Lord may do it.

And if you're serious that this is your catch cry for 2026, to live is Christ and to die is gain, then you are saying to the Lord, Lord Jesus, may you be magnified in my body, in my life, by whatever means and whatever path you choose.

may you be magnified in my body, whether in health or in sickness, whether in life or in death, whether in prosperity or in poverty, whether in honour or dishonour, whether in comfort or in adversity, whether in laughter or in sorrow.

[47 : 23] whatever you will, Lord, I will receive from your hand. Only may you be honoured in my body.

And when the days of my mortal life draw to a close, receive me to be with you forever. For I know that whether my days are spent among the splendour of kings or in the dust of the destitute, whatever I enjoy, whatever I suffer, to be with you is better by far.

So, Heavenly Father, engrave these words as the cry of our heart. We are partakers together of your grace.

whatever happens, may it really serve to advance the gospel. To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Engrave these words on our hearts. We ask this through Jesus and in his name. All glory and praise be to you. Amen. Amen. Thank you.