

Life in Christ

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[0 : 00] Right, so if you haven't already, if you could open your Bibles to Philippians chapter 1, looking at 12 to 26. Have you heard the phrase, too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good?

Too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good? Perhaps you've heard it, yeah? Perhaps you weren't owned up to actually using it on someone after that kind of song, but have you noticed that sometimes you kind of feel that way towards people?

You know, cheesy, over-the-top Christians who keep posting Bible verses and inspirational quotes on Facebook. They wear t-shirts with a Bible verse on it.

They have a fish car sticker on their car if they have one. They have a real Bible, like a hard copy Bible, not just an app. They always seem to want to talk about God.

Always. Everything seems to give them a reason to it. It's like they don't even care what people think about them. You know, people like that.

[1 : 15] What is it that actually even makes us come up with a category like that? What is it that prompts us to come up with the phrase, too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, as if that's possible?

I'm going to suggest to you that I think it's the fear of social cost. The fear of the cost of actually being so public and enthusiastic about our faith, that it's actually going to have an effect on our relationships, our friendships at work, our relationships within the home.

And behind the fear of the social cost lurks a shame in what we believe.

Let me just be clear here. Gil is how you feel about because of something you've done. That's a helpful and that's a useful thing. And so is shame. But shame is not so much how you feel because of what you've done, but how you feel about yourself, what you think about yourself because of what you've done.

Shame relates to the values and beliefs of the community. And these things, they shape how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. And because of shame, we tend to be quiet on subjects that we think won't be acceptable to speak about.

[2 : 39] We tend to want other people to be quiet about these subjects as well. But as we look into this chapter, Philippians chapter 1, what you'll see is that Paul is not afraid of the social cost of promoting the gospel.

He's not afraid of the social cost because he has something far greater to gain. Imprisonment, ugly opposition, the possibility of execution, none of these things shame him into silence because his pride and joy is in Christ.

Look at how things actually unfold. And what I'll do is I'll open it up this way. I'll look from Paul's perspective. What has happened to me? The effect on you, as in the people that he's writing to, the way that I see things, and what will happen to me?

He raises that as a conjecture. What's going to happen next? So what has happened to me? In verse 12, Paul says this, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

What has happened to Paul? He's been imprisoned. He mentions it repeatedly in this early part of the letter, and a significant thing for the Christian church. Imprisonment in Roman times was not a punishment in itself.

[3 : 59] It was a place to hold criminals awaiting the death sentence. To be imprisoned was a shameful thing. So shameful that the Romans of the time actually allowed for people to go into exile instead of facing justice.

They didn't, death row in our terms is actually a really heavily guarded area, section of the prison. In Roman times, they weren't too fussy if you escaped and ran off and went into self-imposed exile.

They actually would prefer that. There was less shame on the community if you were actually sentenced and executed for your crime. Paul should be ashamed of his imprisonment. Some might even have expected him at the time to choose to flee into exile. He should at least avoid the subject. But he does the opposite. He owns it. He calls it my imprisonment. And the reason he owns it is threefold. First, it's because of the effect of his imprisonment.

[5 : 03] Paul says his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel. The Praetorian Guard or the Imperial Guard, depending on what your Bible verses have to say there. That's the special shock elite troops that were the bodyguards.

It's like the Secret Service of that time. They were the emperor's elite troops. They were physically capable and politically powerful. On more than one occasion, they helped emperors in and out of office.

And they were unreachable in terms of missionary endeavor. But here, here they are, Paul's captive audience. Paul owns his imprisonment because of its effect.

He owns his imprisonment as well because of what it's for. Paul says in verse 14, my imprisonment is for Christ. His particular circumstances are unique in this sense.

Rarely in Australia, I'd suggest, will a Christian get jail time for witnessing to Christ. We don't tend to have that fear. It was a very real fear for them at that point in time. It's because of what it's for.

[6 : 11] And it's because of who put him there. In verse 16, Paul gives us an interesting insight to how he sees his imprisonment. He says, I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

Yes, technically, he was put there by the Praetorian Guard. But how does Paul see the circumstances that he's in? He sees it as entirely within the plan of God for his life.

He hasn't stepped outside of God's will here. He hasn't been dragged away from the path that he should be walking. He is right on course. Now friends, I wonder, is that how we see life?

The everyday circumstances of life as God orchestrating opportunities for us to declare his goodness. Sure, if he was free, he'd be visiting the Philippians to encourage them in Christ.

That's not a guess. He says that later in this passage. But he's not. He's not free. He's in prison. So here he is with a different opportunity to witness to Christ.

[7 : 22] Is that how we see the circumstances of life? I had the privilege of going to memorial service for Greg's mother a couple of weeks ago.

And she was in hospital for several days and she knew that as her kidneys were failing, she knew that she was facing death. And one of the testimonies to how she used that time, which was just so challenging and heartwarming, was to use that time in her bed in the hospital to witness to the health professionals that came to care for her.

Witnessing to Christ in her last days. Is that how we see life? Even the challenges and the hardships of life?

As God orchestrating opportunities for us to declare his goodness? Or are our most fervent prayers that God would remove these hardships?

Paul starts with explaining what has happened to him. He then goes on to explain or to address the effect that it's having on the people that can see. He knows his circumstances are having an effect.

[8 : 44] Well, more than one effect as we discover. There's a major effect and a minor effect. The first, Paul describes, I was calling it a major effect because he says most of the brothers. Okay. And in verse 14 we see this.

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

Most of his Christian brothers and sisters in Rome have been emboldened. They understand why Paul is in prison. They love him for it. Paul's example then goes on to inspire them and they follow it.

Boldness begins to overwhelm their fear. Remember that boldness means to dare to do something despite the danger or the cost.

And the dangers for them were very real. A physical, a social, an economic cost. Perhaps even paying with your life. It's a huge cost to step out and promote Christianity like this.

[9 : 49] They existed in a polytheistic society. And they were promoting a monotheistic Christianity. They existed in a culture that tolerated multiple religions. And they were proclaiming a message that said there is only one God and there is only one way to him through Christ.

Going into someone's house at that time, being part of a working guild, visiting a city, everyone had their own gods. You were more than welcome to have your own god too.

But it was polite, acceptable to honour the gods of the places you visited. They were more than happy for you to worship your own god. But you honoured theirs at the same time.

To refuse to honour someone else's beliefs was extremely offensive. Does that at least sound familiar? Refusing to honour someone else's beliefs?

Causing deep offence? So what keeps us quiet? Are we being shamed into silence about Christ? [10:57] What do we fear losing that we don't gain more of in Christ? The major effect of Paul's example is inspirational.

It's like when you hear these testimonies that make your jaw drop. It's this kind of testimony that impacts us. And it does so because it expands our understanding. We learn that God is more trustworthy and good than we ever thought possible before.

And it moves us to stretch our willingness to trust him in this way too. To let boldness replace fear in our lives. What a challenge.

But Paul only says most here. And most implies the existence of some. And Paul addresses them next. The minor effect that's happening. You see there are some who see Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity for their own selfish ambitions.

In verse 15 to 17. 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 defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition.

[12:11] Not sincerely but thinking to inflict me in my imprisonment. This smaller group ministers out of envy and rivalry.

Where envy is wanting what someone else has. That's a heart thing. It's a heart attitude. And rivalry is wanting the success or status that someone else has.

And competing to get it. It's when that heart thing becomes a strategy. And brothers and sisters the root of both is pride.

The root of both is believing yourself to be superior to someone else. And pride is a dangerous thing because you can't see it in yourself.

Not easily. Because if pride has hold of you, you really believe that you're better. You really believe that you're serving God's best interests by pursuing your strategy.

[13:12] You really believe that you're serving God's best interests by pursuing your strategy. You really believe that you're serving God's best interests by pursuing God's best interests. Pride blinds you to the notion of ever questioning your motives. And so there were some who saw themselves as superior, even to their leader, even to Paul.

Some who wanted to promote themselves. Some who, for them, Paul's imprisonment was an opportunity to climb the ladder. How do we spot this in ourselves?

I can give you some suggestions. But I'm going to suggest that we actually need to do this as a community. Because pride really does blind us. But if we find ourselves judging others in our own hearts.

Considering them less worthy of their role than I am. Believing I could do a far better job. Criticizing their efforts. Maneuvering to get that role for myself. All the while engaging in ministry.

Notice Paul calls these people brothers. All the while engaging in ministry. Then I can start to get a sense that I'm drifting into this path. And it matters when we do.

[14:21] Paul himself felt the effects of their pettiness. He noticed it. He knew what they were doing. And their behavior was actually harming the fellowship. Which is why he's addressing it. But notice how he does.

Not primarily by rebuking or defending himself. He doesn't get caught up in the rivalry. He shows us a better way to see things.

And this is what he goes on to next. The way I see things. This is Paul's perspective. What does Paul see? Well, Paul sees everything through the lens of Christ.

His goal is Christ. Because his heart's desire is Christ. Let's look at how he expresses Christ as his goal. What does he say about these petty envy and rivalry things?

In verse 18, Paul actually raises this very point. What then? What do we do about this? Well, here's what I see. Only that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed.

[15 : 29] And in that, I rejoice. It's not about what benefits us most. But what benefits Christ. Roles and status, they're the wrong things to be grasping for.

When we make life about ourselves, then we seek to promote ourselves. But when we place Christ at the center, then we want to proclaim Christ.

Even when someone proclaims Christ with their own interests in mind, we still are moved to rejoice. Because Christ is proclaimed.

Paul goes on to say, 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 at all be ashamed. But that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

[16 : 31] Just to be clear here, deliverance is the word that Paul uses for his salvation. So he isn't talking about getting out of prison here.

He's talking about vindication on the last day. This is the only affirmation that Paul seeks. God's affirmation. That he is a good and faithful servant. And even in this, he knows that he is upheld by God through prayer and the direct help of the Holy Spirit.

Upheld by the Holy Spirit, he is able to say these words, For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. How can you honestly say that?

To live is Christ. To live is Christ. And to die is gain. To live is Christ. Think of it all that it actually means to live.

Every moment, every breath, every heartbeat, every waking thought has a focus for Paul. And that focus is Christ.

[17 : 43] He is oriented to Christ and for Christ, which is only made possible because he is in Christ. Christ is his life-consuming goal. Jesus told two parables, two very short parables, so it's not a massive digression, about this kind of single-mindedness.

The parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl of great price. Maybe you know them. If you don't, here's a basic, very quick breakdown. There are only one-verse parables. It's already taken too long, taken longer than Jesus did.

A man comes across a treasure in a field and he joyfully sells everything, everything he has, to buy that field and get a hold of that treasure. A merchant comes across the perfect pearl.

It's beautiful. He has to have it. He too sells everything he has to buy that pearl. All of life, every resource, every achievement up to that point, up to this point in our lives, turned over to pursuing one goal, Christ and his kingdom.

But friends, it's not just that proclaiming Christ is a superior life goal. Because it's not that Paul actually has like the best goal you can possibly have in life.

[19 : 09] That would just make this a matter of willpower, wouldn't it? He actually has a heart's desire behind that life goal. And we know that because Paul goes on to say this, to die is gain.

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. That takes what he treasures most beyond the realms of just this mortal life that we live at this point.

To die is gain. The point when his heart stops, when he breathes his last, he gets more of Christ. Not a goal, but the person, face to face and unfiltered.

Do you think this way about God? Our God is a personal God. He is a person. He is someone we can get to know, to delight in, to treasure more than anyone else.

Again, I'm going to make a digression here because I think Moses was the first one that taught me this in any depth and really challenged me on it.

[20 : 20] I love Moses for these two things that he did and they're in the same kind of section of Exodus, Exodus chapter 33. Not the plagues, obviously, that's beyond that. Or the parting of the sea or the provision of food and water in the desert or his wise leadership.

God could have used anyone for those things. Moses did two things that I am so grateful for. He said to God, don't leave us.

And he said to God, show me more of you. Do you remember these? These events. The Israelites had made a golden calf and God's anger burned against them. So God said, look, okay, you guys go to the promised land, but I'm not coming with you.

I'll send an angel with you to lead you along the way, but I'm not coming with you. And Moses wouldn't go. He begged God not to send them without him.

Why wouldn't God go? Because the people were so far short of his holiness that if he went, he knew we would end up destroying them. So God effectively offered them the land and the blessing. [21 : 27] He basically offered them heaven, but without the confrontation of having to face the holy God. Moses was heartbroken. He begged God to stay with them.

He said it wasn't even worth going if God wasn't with them. Don't leave us, he was saying. And then straight after this, right on the other end of this event, Moses asked God, show me more of you. Show me your glory, actually says, so I'm paraphrasing there. Moses couldn't do that and live. The holiness gap between God and Moses was just way too big.

He couldn't survive it. So God placed him in a cleft in the rock, he covered him with his hand, and as God went past, he only let Moses have a glimpse of his back. God had to protect Moses from himself.

More than anything, Moses wanted more of God. Friends, Christ is that rock.

[22 : 42] He is the ultimate expression of the grace and mercy that God declared about himself as he walked past Moses. He is the way that we can actually see God face to face, unfiltered, and live.

Is this how we approach our Christianity? Is it head knowledge? Do we know a lot about God, but struggle to relate to him as a person? Because Paul knew Christ personally.

More than life itself, Paul wanted more of God. He said, my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

What do you want? What do you want? Well, the question, what will happen to Paul, is still hangs over them.

So, only now, at this point, is Paul prepared to answer it. Verse 22 and following, if I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

[23 : 53] 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 accounts.

Paul wanted to depart and be with Christ, but he was willing to accept what served God best. Even life.

Isn't that a turned around perspective? Even life, he was willing to accept. Living is Paul's less preferred option. We all have our bucket lists and our things we want to see and do in life, lives we want to live.

I don't know about you, but I've got a whole bunch of things, you know, I'm only 50, I've got a whole bunch of things that I'd like to do. I'd love to see my children have grandchildren, for example.

I'd love to actually be able to be involved in bringing up a child and spoil the heck out of it for the time that I have it in my care. It's not a liberty you have as a parent. I'd love to have that.

[25 : 01] All these things that we want to do, places we want to go, lives we want to live. And Paul would give it all up in a second just to be with Christ. But while he lives, he will serve with every breath in whatever circumstance he finds himself.

There's something I feel I need to say about this. Paul was in prison. But do you notice that he doesn't see himself as a victim?

He never saw himself as a victim. The things he experienced were just simply the context for his service. Paul never saw himself as a victim.

Now, if you want to have a think about, you know, you think, well, I'm a victim. I know a whole bunch of different situations where I've been, definitely been the victim. Have a think about Paul and the life that he lived.

You can read about it more in 2 Corinthians 10, 23 and following. So if you want to take a note of that, you can read it later when you get home. But I'm going to pick up on a few of the things. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews, he writes in 2 Corinthians 11.

[26 : 17] Five times I received at the hands of the Jews 40 lashes minus one. Strange number. What does it mean? Well, the Romans figured that 40 and above would kill you.

So they used to knock one off so that they would take you to the point of death, but not quite. They would rip their heck out of your back in doing it. Your back was just a mess. Five times he was taken to the point of death.

Imagine what his back must have been like. How scarred up it must have been. Three times he was beaten with rods. Bruises and breaks bones, but it doesn't actually break the skin necessarily.

Three times I was shipwrecked. Did you know that Paul was stoned? That is not a form of punishment. That is a form of execution. They stoned him and there's a process that they use with stoning.

They use a variety of different shapes sizes and shapes of rocks to basically tear you to pieces. They thought he was dead, they dragged him out of the city and they dumped him. This is the kind of life that Paul has lived.

[27 : 28] This is the kind of life that Paul is saying, for me to live is Christ. Paul is now in prison, but he still doesn't see himself as the victim.

The things he experiences are simply the context for his service. we rail against injustice and hardship and humiliation.

We try to pray difficult circumstances away and in life Paul served with every breath and his hope is that they would share in this passion a passion that just overwhelms these kinds of things.

to glory in Christ Jesus more than anything else regardless of circumstances. Paul says in verse 25 and 26 he says this, To glory means to have legitimate cause for pride where Christ is Paul's reason for pride.

Where Christ is what Paul wants more than life itself. where Christ is what he hopes his beloved Philippian brothers and sisters will see as their joy, their passion, their heart's desire.

[29 : 04] Christ himself. And his hope beyond that is as they see Christ in this way that their lips will be loosened, their fear will just wash away and that they will boldly and joyfully proclaim this Christ.

to the people around them. Do you know in Paul's time people were persecuted for their faith and the church grew?

Would we in our time see ourselves as more civilised by daring to be silenced when we have such a treasure to share? Would we could it be possible that we could allow ourselves to become too earthly minded to be of any heavenly good?

do we desire his Christ that Paul is introducing us to? If I were to ask you what do you most want? Is it Christ?■■■■