

Courage and Conviction

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Date: 12 September 2021

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[0 : 00] We'll turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippians chapter 1. I'm going to read the first 26 verses and focus particularly on verse 20 and 21.

Let's read the context. Let's read from the beginning of the letter, Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi 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, for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And 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. It's right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you're all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in defence and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus. It's my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and with all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent 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.

[1 : 51] I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. 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. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus, 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.

[3 : 24] I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to part and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary in 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.

May God bless that reading from this holy word, and as we particularly focus on the earlier, nearly, I suppose, the middle part of this section that we read, verse 20 and 21, these well-known words of verse 21, where Paul writes, For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Of course, with the context of these words that Paul wrote about his eager expectation, hope that he wouldn't be at all ashamed, but with full courage, now as always, Christ honoured in his body. And this whole theme of courage, courage and conviction, in terms of the courage of faith, the courage that the believer shows, and demonstrating his faith in the Lord Jesus, and with that courage, the conviction, the true conviction of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, as the one true saviour.

[4 : 54] You know, there are good traditions, and there are not so good traditions. A good tradition honours God, and honours God's word. Not so good traditions, well, they major in the minors, and, well, they regard the minors as majors in the life of the church.

But one good tradition, certainly, in my own experience, in my decades in this denomination, this congregation even, one good tradition is a thanksgiving service at the end of a communion season, when a particular service is given to return thanks to the Lord for his goodness to us, particularly in relation to what's happened before in terms of the Lord's people coming together and remembering the Lord's death till he comes.

And I believe it is good tradition to maintain that practice, to have a service, you know, a closing service, when we remember the goodness of God in giving and sending his one and only Son. and I pray that we make the most of this opportunity as a thanksgiving service to rejoice in the Lord and to give him thanks, and to give God the Father thanks for the gift of his Son, the gift of the Lord Jesus.

I said then that a thanksgiving service is a time to return thanks, but then you might ask, well, how do you return thanks? Is it simply saying and praying thank you, Lord, thank you for Jesus?

[6 : 35] Well, of course, that's absolutely important. That's crucial. We should all have that gratitude of heart that's expressed in our prayers before God, our prayers of thanks to God.

We speak about grace at mealtimes, of course, grace from the Latin, gratia, grace, thanksgiving, and of course, at all times, we should be giving thanks to God, not just mealtimes, not just gently, but at all times.

One of the great encouragements even that we have in our midweek meetings have been the prayers of the Lord's people when they offer up thanks to God and we hear these thanks uttered vocally.

And even when so many of us go through particular trials and struggles and sufferings, but the one who prays to the Lord still thanksgiving can thank God for His grace, His mercy, His love that never ends.

But saying all this, there has to be more than simply words of thanks and gratitude when we return thanks to God. Surely there has to be that resolve in your heart to live a life of thanksgiving, to live a life that's really just defined by gratitude to God, to live that Christ-centered life and in that Christ-centered life to resolve to live for the Savior and live unto Him, to live a life that's not ashamed of the gospel and to live that life that's not ashamed of Jesus.

[8 : 18] and in having that resolve to live that life of Christ-centered, delighting in Christ, that life of gratitude to Him, well, to be courageous, to be courageous in living that life, living your life for the Savior.

And it's that sense of courage even just a few days ago in our midweek meeting, that came across in the prayers of the Lord's people, that emphasis in having courage to live for the Savior.

It's a resolution, it's a resolve that was heard on Wednesday evening. And it certainly struck a chord with myself, I'm sure it struck a chord with many, many who attended that meeting.

Because each one of us who loves the Lord Jesus, you still need that courage, that courage of faith. You still need to have that courage to truly live for the Savior.

And so what better circumstance than to focus on that need to be courage, to have courage and not to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus and to do it, to have that resolve, even to grow in that resolve in a service of thanksgiving.

[9 : 36] Because those of you who protrude of the Lord's Supper this morning particularly, well, what did you do? You remember the Lord's death. You did it by word, by the Bible, and you did it by sacrament, by taking the Lord's Supper itself.

But remember too, as we were mentioning this morning, that taking of the bread, that taking of the wine, more than just seeing and representing, being aware of what represents the Lord and His death.

You'll have been nourished in your faith. You'll have been strengthened in what you took in the bread and the wine. Ordinary food, well, that gives you health, it gives you strength.

And that simple meal of bread and wine that many of you took this morning, the meal that you took by faith, I pray that that has given you that spiritual health, that spiritual energy, so that you're the more equipped to go out into the world and be encouraged to be the more strengthened in your love for the Savior and to tell others of the Lord Jesus.

Even if you didn't receive the Lord's Supper this morning and you know that you're of the Lord's people, you know that you're a Christian, you know that you're in Christ, there's still much to encourage you here this evening, even in the context of this Thanksgiving service.

[11:02] because, you know, as we grasp again Paul's message here in Philippians 1, take to heart the words that he writes to the church there in Philippi, words that have resonated through the millennia, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

So what's Paul saying there in these words? Well, as we see there, he speaks of courage, the courage of faith, and think of what he's already written before he even goes to speak of living for Christ.

Think of what his circumstances are. In many ways, he's in dire straits. I mean, he's imprisoned for his faith and he's aware that there are others that are not so warm towards Paul, they're rivals of Paul.

They've been preaching as it were, almost in rivalry against Paul. Many who are jealous of Paul himself. And yet, despite these things, despite his imprisonment, despite the rivalry and jealousy of others, we find, we find that he's still rejoicing.

See that, the end of verse 18. I mean, he's rejoicing because he knows, he knows that his deliverance or his salvation is happening in two ways.

[12:33] Through the working of the Holy Spirit and through the prayers of God's people. He's speaking of his deliverance, his salvation, that he believes is happening at that very moment that he's writing because he does believe, and he certainly has confidence that he is going to continue his ministry after his imprisonment is over.

So, we can say in that sense, he knows, he speaks about his deliverance. He's got absolute confidence that his ministry is going to continue. He knows that he's going to have to face the judgment of the Roman powers, but he still has that confidence he'll be delivered to carry on preaching.

But we can also say this, that he believes that his salvation is going to be fully vindicated before the judgment seat of God.

and he's already, even in prison, he's fighting the good fight of faith. He's doing what he's doing, not for any self-glory, but for the glory of God.

We're singing in the first Psalm, there's Psalm 96, ascribing glory. That's exactly what Paul's doing, even in his prison ministry, even in his writing.

[13:44] He's giving glory to God. He's got that confidence that he's not going to be ashamed in life. He's not going to be ashamed in his life before others, or even after his death when he stands before God.

And it's that emphasis, that connection between not being ashamed and courage that really we see here spelled out in detail.

not being ashamed and having courage. These two aspects of faith, if you like, that Paul speaks of in his conduct as a follower of the Lord Jesus.

So what we read there, we'll read it again in verse 20. It's my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul's chief desire, it's not for his own comfort, it's not for his own glory. Paul's chief desire is to exalt Christ through his ministry.

[14:54] Yes, he knows, and we've read already he's suffered so much in that desire, but he's not ashamed. I mean, he knows there's nothing to be ashamed of in his witness to Jesus.

He's in that prison layer. He's the prisoner of the Roman authorities. But he's not ashamed of that status of being in that situation. I mean, yes, outwardly, he might appear absolutely destitute. Outwardly, it might appear that he's without hope and he's certainly without the freedom that others have. But he's not going to be ashamed of his saviour because he is a prisoner for Christ and rejoicing in that.

And that's what he's doing. He's writing of joy. He's writing of eager expectation. He's writing of hope. Even just looking at these words he's using, these are positives.

But they're more than just words. They're expressions of his heart. Others might look at him and see and think he's in just a sort of pitiable physical condition.

[16 : 02] He's got all these restrictions in his movement. He's got that lack of freedom. He's not going to bring any kind of shame upon himself. But it's a confirmation that he's on the Lord's side and he's rejoicing and continuing to rejoice that he serves as Lord and saviour.

And if that's the case with Paul 2,000 years ago, Paul, whatever circumstances he's in, he's not being ashamed of the gospel. What about you?

What about you? You, for example, you who took the bread and wine this morning, are you ashamed? Are you ashamed of Jesus? Are you ashamed to testify to the Lord Jesus as your saviour?

Are you who profess his name, are you even remotely ashamed of that profession? I mean, even if there's a hint of being ashamed of the gospel or ashamed of Jesus, well, if you detect that in your heart, then pray that that's be rid of.

Because it's for the Lord's people to be like Paul here, to be even not ashamed, even when the world is around you, the world would attack you and vilify you and shame you for being a Christian.

[17 : 23] But remain strong in the Lord, be strengthened. don't be ashamed of making a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. Don't be ashamed to take your stand for Jesus.

Don't be ashamed to take that stand when the name of Jesus is mocked, when his name is ridiculed, maybe even by your close friends, even close family members.

Don't be ashamed even when you're setting out in the morning, those of you who are still coming to the building, when others and your neighbours see you going to the car at whatever time you go into the car. Are you ashamed to do that?

Are you ashamed to be seen? Are you ashamed even to carry a Bible with you? Don't be ashamed of Jesus, especially when Jesus isn't ashamed of you.

I mean, Jesus has every right to be ashamed of you because you deny, I deny him. You so often bring shame on his name but he's not ashamed of you.

[18 : 28] You listen to the words that's written in the book of Hebrews that confirms that amazing truth. Hebrews 2.11, He who sanctifies Jesus and those who are sanctified us all have one origin.

That's why he's not ashamed to call them brothers. So if Jesus isn't ashamed to call you to call me a brother, a brother of Jesus, who is any of us to be ashamed of Jesus?

How can you be ashamed of your Lord and Savior? How can you be ashamed of Jesus when he did for you what you couldn't do for yourself, when he died on the cross for you, when he obeyed fully and absolutely?

Just be reminded of even what happened this morning, even in this building. the Lord's people testifying to the salvation that's yours because of what Jesus did for you and his perfect obedience even in today.

Can you still be ashamed of Jesus? Well, Paul certainly wasn't ashamed. He wasn't ashamed of his Savior. Neither should you or neither should me today.

[19 : 45] And especially those of you who were here in this building this morning and took the Lord's Supper. I pray then even that take in the Supper, you've been strengthened even in not being ashamed of the Savior.

You know, each year, or certainly before lockdown, each year there are acts of remembrance to remember those who have given their lives in battle.

It's always a solemn occasion if you've ever taken part in one of these acts of remembrance. It really is a very solemn occasion. Because, you know, we're remembering lives that have been taken in conflict, lives that have been given selflessly, lives given even in death.

Nobody's ashamed of these names. Nobody's ashamed of those who, as it were, gave themselves in the ultimate service for their country. So how can any of us be ashamed of remembering the Lord, Jesus, who gave his life for us?

Yes, there can be shame, but not shame being ashamed of Jesus. We can certainly, I can certainly be ashamed of myself. I'm sure you can as well.

[20 : 59] We can be ashamed of all the times when we've denied the Lord Jesus by our words and by our lives. Ashamed of these times when we prefer to be with the world rather than be with Jesus.

Jesus. But that wasn't with Paul. But some might think, oh, well, Paul was just one of these people that had superhuman strength not to be ashamed.

But no, Paul was human just like ourselves. But he had courage. He had courage through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and, as he says, through the prayers of believers, fellow believers.

So he was enabled to be bold for the Lord. And that combination of the power of God's Spirit and the prayers of fellow believers, that enabled, these things enabled Paul to be courageous for the Lord.

So Paul could speak in public for Jesus, could speak of Jesus. He wasn't ashamed to do that. He had that courage to take a stand for his Lord and Savior.

[22 : 12] So he wasn't ashamed. And he had that courage in not being ashamed. Now, as we said, he wasn't some kind of superhuman who was immune from weakness and fear.

Paul had emotions like everybody else. But he had a courage that enabled him not to be ashamed of his chance. He wasn't ashamed of his being imprisoned for the sake of his Savior.

He wasn't ashamed of his testifying to his love for his Lord. He had that courage, courage that he received from God and was strengthened by fellow believers.

He had that boldness not to be ashamed. And surely it's that same combination of the power of the Holy Spirit and the support of fellow believers that gives you that courage to fight the good fight of faith and in that fight to fight against self, to fight against Satan, to fight against the world.

And yes, we know there are these times when we rely on self and it's that, these times when we can lack courage. And there are even these times when we can quench the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 27] We don't call upon God as our Lord and guide and we sometimes depend upon our own so-called wisdom and capabilities. It's these times when our courage weakens.

All our attempts, you know, to work for the Lord, it's when we're not relying on the power of the Spirit, that's when we become discouraged. It's when we lose that courage, that strength in the Lord.

Or even these times when we fail to support one another in prayer. Paul, Paul rejoiced in the prayers of others and their support of him. But, you know, we can so easily fail to support one another in prayer.

You know, you can, I did it myself many times, you know, we can assume that, you know, leaders in the church are somehow, you know, really strong within themselves, you know, able to drive through all the difficult tasks of the church and able to do it without any prayer support.

But that kind of thinking's foolish. There's Paul, he's seeking and acknowledging the prayer support of others. But then think, of course, of the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 39] Think of Jesus in Gethsemane. Think of Jesus just before his trial and crucifixion. He craved the prayer support of his three closest disciples.

And so, may this even be an encouragement for you to pray for one another. Yes, to pray, to give encouragement, to give that prayer support to a fellow believer even when that believer's going through a particularly difficult time.

Whether the believer's going through a time of trial, a time of struggle, maybe having to make difficult decisions in life. Pray, pray for that fellow believer.

And may, and through these prayers, may God bless these prayers, prayers, and may those who are of the Lord's people, you, be emboldened, and have that courage to fight in the fight that God gives you for his name's sake.

And so, yes, give thanks for the, yes, for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip you, to equip you to take your strength of the Lord in the world that you're living in, a world that so despises the truth of the gospel.

[25 : 52] people. But yes, give thanks. Give thanks for the mutual prayer support that happens in the church.

And of course, it should happen the more in the church to give encouragement. Because when you know that someone's praying for you, you're given encouragement. Even listen to the word again, encouragement.

Because that word itself speaks of giving courage. marriage was fellowship that happened this morning in the Lord's Supper. I pray that's not just going to be a mirage, but really a true presentation of the fellowship that's enjoyed even in this congregation, the support that you give one to another.

Because that support is ultimately for the glory of the name of the Lord Jesus. Because that's what we're all about, isn't it? to live for Christ and exalt his name.

That's what we're here to do. Man's chief purpose end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Well, surely that tells us that you are to live for your Lord and Saviour, to glorify him.

[27 : 04] Because that's what Paul had, that absolute conviction of his faith, of his heart. As we have read before and will read again, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Paul has that maturity to know that, you know, in life and in death, well in life he's honoured his Saviour and he's going to continue to honour his Lord and Saviour.

And even in his death he'll still honour and exalt his Lord. But at the same time as you read here, if you've read in the verse here, he's in a bit of a dilemma.

Because he knows for him to live is Christ. In other words, all that he's doing is for his Saviour, for the Lord Jesus, it's Christ centred.

And so for him to carry on living means that he's going to encourage the believers there in Philippi. He's going to encourage them, he's going to enable them to make progress in their faith.

[28 : 09] And he expresses all that, these truths in verses 24 to 26. So he knows so long as he lives he's going to be enabled to give courage to the church, whether in Philippi or elsewhere.

But if Paul dies, he knows he's going to be with his Saviour in glory. And he knows, as we see in verse 23, he knows that's far better than life on this side of eternity.

But, you know, all in all, Paul's convinced, he is convinced that his being alive at that point in time is going to enable him, or it's going to enable the church to grow and to remain strong in the Lord.

Now, what does this say to yourself? What does this say for your own conviction of faith? For to me to live is Christ. Well, let's focus on that before we look at to die again for a moment.

Are you honouring the Lord Jesus Christ in your life? For to me to live is Christ. Does Jesus have first place in your life? Is your life as living for Jesus the primary purpose, whether it's in your home, your place of work, in your relationships, in your interests, in what you read, in your leisure time, in everything that you do?

[29 : 32] Are you living for him who gave his life for you? then ask yourself, is your conviction of faith in Jesus, is it such that, come what may, that you'll remain steadfast in your faith and trust in the living Lord Jesus?

Even when others physically assault you for being a Christian, even when the name of your precious Saviour is blasphemed and dishonoured, will you still remain convinced and convicted in living for the Lord Jesus?

Now, we all know, each one of us knows that there's an idol in our lives, and that idol is self. And so often we exalt self and put the glory to the Lord Jesus on one side.

But with the help and encouragement of the Holy Spirit, then seek to know what truly glorifies Christ in your life, and seek to know what doesn't, and have that faith, that resolve of faith to live the more for Christ, and say for me, for to me, to live is Christ.

But then, what about the second part? And Paul says that to die is gain. Is Paul saying he's got some kind of death wish? You know, some kind of real desire to die a martyr's death?

[30 : 59] Well, no, no, that's not what he's saying, but he knows that even in his death, as in life, he's going to glorify his Savior. Because in his death, he knows that he'll be found righteous.

He knows that he's going to be able to enter the glory of heaven and be with Christ eternally.

Because he knows there's even something more important than life itself. And that's the gain of being in the presence of Christ forever.

Because in Christ's presence, in the presence of the Savior in heaven, there's no more tears, there's no more fears, no more struggles, no more disappointments, no more sin.

There's gain, the gain of glory, glory. That's your sure hope. It's the hope that the believer has both for himself and for loved ones who pass from life into glory.

It's such an encouragement, you know, when maybe a beloved family member or friend has entered the presence of Christ, you have that sure confidence that for that person to die is gain.

[32 : 08] Well, is it your conviction for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain? Or is it the opposite? For to me to live is self and to die is loss.

Well, if that's the case in your life, then turn to the Lord Jesus, hear him cry out unto you, to cry for you to come to him. Because there's no gain, there's absolutely no gain in the death of anyone who's not in Christ.

You know, in comedy programs, for example, quite often you hear jokes about people going down below, down there after they die. But hell is no laughing matter.

The horror of the eternal darkness absent from, or absent from the presence of the Lord Jesus, that's no laughing matter. But there's gain in the glory of the believer who enters the glory of heaven

and being with Christ.

So I pray that's your testimony and conviction to return thanks to God this day, that you are absolutely convicted and convinced that Jesus is yours and you are his.

[33 : 26] Give thanks, give thanks for your salvation. Give thanks that your salvation is secure because by faith you received Jesus as your saviour. By faith you repented of your sins and your trust is in the one who died for you.

He died the sinner's death for you, a sinner, who will not know that eternal death because Jesus gave his life for you.

And grow in that courage. Give thanks for the encouragement that the Lord's people receive at communion time. Give thanks for that encouragement that the Lord's people receive in fellowship with the Lord and one another.

And with that encouragement, with that conviction of faith, we'll go back into the world. Don't be ashamed. Don't be ashamed of Jesus, but have that courage of faith to want to make his name known and rejoice.

Rejoice in your saviour that he's given you life. Life to, for all eternity, but even this side of eternity, life to testify to the risen and living saviour.

[34 : 40] Amen. And let us pray. Our Lord, our God, we give you thanks for the encouragement that you give to each and everyone who is yours.

You give encouragement through your word. You give encouragement by the power of your Holy Spirit. You give encouragement through the mutual affection and prayers of the Lord's people.

And so, Lord, may we truly rejoice in the provisions that you give to us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.