

It's All About Jesus (2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 September 2021

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn now to read God's Word. We're reading firstly in John's Gospel, John chapter 15. And after we've read this, we'll turn to Philippians, back to Philippians chapter 1.

So John chapter 15, one of the things we're going to see in Philippians tonight is the way that Paul wants the Philippians to continue in the faith, but also with joy in the faith, with joy in their salvation. And Jesus mentions joy also in this chapter as he's teaching here the disciples. This is before he went out to face the cross and to die on the cross. He taught the disciples what you find in these verses, chapters 13 through to the end of chapter 17 in John's Gospel. And here in chapter 15, we can see how he speaks to them. I am the true vine and my father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit, he takes away and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this is my father glorified that you bear much fruit, and so approved be my disciples.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you.

[2 : 5 5] You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the father in my name, he may give it to you.

These things I command you, so that you will love one another. And again, we pray for God to bless our reading of his word.

If we turn now to the epistle to the Philippians, and chapter 1, we finished last week at verse 18, so we can pick up our readings there at verse 18, and then from the second part of verse 18, we can continue through. So verse 18, what then only 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 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 honored 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 labor for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and to 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, cause of my coming to you again.

[4 : 53] And especially from verse 22, if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. Now we saw last time how Paul's main concern was to glorify, to bring honor to Jesus, even through his time of imprisonment and through his experiences in prison. And that's what he was saying, as we saw last time, that Christ would be honored, he says, in my body, whether by life or by death. As he was waiting for the verdict of this Roman judiciary, this Roman court that was going to deal with his case, having had been accused by those who brought these accusations against him, the Jewish accusations against him, as he ended up here before the Roman tribunal that was going to try his case. He wasn't sure how that was going to work out at this moment. Perhaps it would be a sentence of death, or it might just be that he would be released from prison. Either way, he was saying, what his concern was that Christ would be honored in my body, whether by life or by death, or to me to live as Christ and to die as gain. Now we're moving on from there because the whole passage is strung so wonderfully together, because he's now saying, if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

I am hard-pressed between the two. So firstly, we're going to look at Paul's difficult choice. He says, I'm hard-pressed between the two. That means between being set free and therefore being able to continue his ministry in this world. He's set between that. He's hard-pressed between that and actually being executed, being put to death. So these are the two prospects for the apostle, either living and sow fruitful labor or else being put to death and therefore being with Christ in heaven, leaving this world and being with Christ. These are the two options.

He's quite convinced that if he is to remain in this world, if he's been set free, if he's going to be set free, that he says is going to be fruitful labor for me, more of what I was doing, more of my service for Jesus, more labor that will prove to be fruitful to his glory. That's what he's looking for if he's going to remain further in this world after being in prison. But on the other hand, if it's going to be death, then this is going to be with Christ. He's going to end up with Christ, which is far better. Now, the amazing thing is that he presents these two options as competing in his mind.

He's presenting these two options as two options between which he's being hemmed or squeezed. He's saying, you see what he's saying here, I'm hard pressed between the two. He's being tugged in both directions. And that's quite an amazing thing because he makes it very clear that his desire, if it's left to myself, he's saying, if it's really left to my choice as to what I would prefer for myself, then my desire is to depart and to be with Christ for that is far better. He's desiring to go home, to be with Jesus in heaven. He's no doubt about that, that is far better. He's not saying that because he's tired of life. He's not saying that because he's discouraged as an apostle. He's not saying that because he's fed up with his ministry. He's not saying that for any other reason, but hard pressed as he is, difficult though life is, he wants to honor Christ.

But he knows that going to be with Christ in heaven is far better. However much he will enjoy his ministry as an apostle, enjoy in the sense of presenting Christ to sinners and being the servant of Christ, which he relishes, which he has in his heart, however much that will be satisfying to him, he knows that it cannot compare ultimately with being with Christ, with being in heaven. For he says, that is far better. And the language he uses there is really almost exaggerated. He's saying, it is much, much, much better. And so he's quite convinced that that is really the best thing. If he were to have his own choice in the matter, that's what he would choose. But yet, he says, remaining here in the flesh, as he puts it, remaining in this world with my ministry, that's also something that I relish highly, so much so that it's actually competing with my desire to depart and to be with Christ. Now, what a high view of Christian service that is.

[10:06] That's not only challenging, it's hugely humbling. It's something that we find in our own sense of serving Christ and the value we place on serving Jesus, whether we're in the pulpit or in pews, whether we're employed in the world elsewhere or whatever it is, whether we're in our homes or whatever it is, we're serving Christ in some way or other as Christians. If we're his and we're following him and we're seeking to bring him honor and glory. But what a high view this is of the Christian life and of Christian service especially, where he's able to say of himself, I'm hard pressed between departing and to being with Christ, which is far better, and remaining with you to continue my ministry in this world. In other words, he's really prepared to postpone heaven for himself, though that would be his own choice, if God would actually have something more for him to do with these Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith, as he puts it. What a high view of Christian service that really is. It's not just challenging, it's humbling. It makes us see our own, the value we place on Christ's service, and we do place, I hope, high value on serving Jesus in this world. But really, when you look at it in the light of what Paul is saying there, it proves to be very much smaller and almost minute compared to his take on it, his mindset in it. But then you see, that's really just following the pattern of Jesus himself. Because what Paul is saying about himself is something that you find eminently and indeed preeminently in the life and in the ministry of

Jesus himself. Because one of the things that you find about Jesus taught in the Scriptures, not just in the Gospel, but also in Paul's letters, as we'll see, God willing, when we come to chapter 2.

It's that Jesus put the well-being, the life of his people ahead of his own comforts, putting them ahead of himself in terms of how he was prepared to go through so much, even the death of the cross, as chapter 2 puts it, so that they would actually have the benefit. Able to actually say, like Paul here, and even more so, that this was what he came into the world to do, considering his service as the servant of the Father, something of the highest honor, putting the highest value on it.

And so you have this in chapter 2. Look at chapter 2 and verse 3 following, where you find this, the apostle saying, Do nothing from rivalry or conceit and humility. Count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, the translation here. You could also have the translation, which is also found in Christ Jesus or was in Christ Jesus. This mindset of Jesus, the mindset that served others, that put others ahead of himself. As he said himself famously in one occasion, where the kings of the Gentiles exercise authority over them, it shall not be so among you, but the least of you shall be the greatest. And then, of course, he introduced himself. He said, I am in this world as the servant. I came into this world to serve, not to be served. There's the highest pinnacle of serving God in the person of the Son of God himself in our nature. And here is Paul emulating that with his own take on his ministry and his situation at this time. Now, of course, as I said, that makes us feel rather small, but it's hugely challenging to ourselves because wherever you are as a Christian, whatever things God has given you to use in his name and for the benefit of his cause, maybe we can never reach the height that Paul is reaching here of saying this about himself.

[14 : 39] Most of us will probably never reach that, if any of us will. But whatever it is, you place such value on it because you're doing it for Jesus. Not just those of us who have the honor of standing in a pulpit and preaching the gospel, or those who have been called and elected to be elders in his church, or deacons in his church, or whatever it is we have been given to do in the name of Christ.

Every single person that serves the Lord in this congregation, whatever capacity, is placing value on serving Jesus. The person who operates the camera, the person who actually looks after the sound system, the person who cleans the building, the person who shows from week to week dedication in preparing things for others for worship. All of the things that are done in this congregation, the people who look after our young children, the ones who run the creche, those who look after all of these activities that we run throughout the week. You can say of all of that, all of that is valuable Christian service. Tonight, I have to ask myself again, and you have to ask yourself, not just what am I doing for Jesus, but what value do I place on my service for Christ? Do I have such a high value of it, or at least something towards the value that Paul placed on his service? And Paul would be of the same mind, as I've just mentioned there. He would say to us, if he were able to be here, he would be saying, yes, God has appointed me an apostle, but that doesn't mean that all of you others who are doing different things in the kingdom don't have to place value on what you're doing, and that your work is not valuable. That, after all, is part of the imagery that Paul uses in terms of the body being an illustration of the spiritual body of Christ the church. Every part of the body has its own role to play in the overall working of the body, and the hand does something very different to the head, does something very different to the feet, something very different to other parts of the body, but they're all valuable and necessary parts of the whole body. And be persuaded tonight, whatever you can and are able to do for Jesus is a valuable work. It's a work that he takes note of, it's a work upon which you can place such value as to say, I am proud to be able to do this work.

We're going to come across that word proud in a moment. I don't mean it in a sinful sense, taking pride in it as if it's your own achievement, but in the sense of glorying in it because it's for him, and because it's for his glory and for his praise, which is exactly what the apostle is saying.

So here are the two prospects. Either he's going to continue living, which will be fruitful labor, or he's going to end up being put to death, but he wants to glorify Jesus in that as much as anything else. And indeed, he mentions Timothy later in the chapter in the same kind of terms.

Sorry, it's in chapter 2 and verse 20 and 21. Notice what he says there about him. I hope to send Timothy to you soon so that I may be cheered by news of you, for I have no one like him who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy, his proven worth, and so on. Now he's saying, here is someone else that I want you to note, he's saying to the Philippians, because this is exactly again patterned upon the mind of Jesus himself, serving others, putting others first, putting themselves last, and considering others better than themselves.

[18 : 45] But notice what he's saying about his own preference, my own desire really, he's saying, is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better. And I want to just mention that for a few moments before moving on to our second point, which is Paul's conclusion, what the conclusion he comes to, and what he's then saying from that. My own, he says, desire is to depart. My intense desire, my real desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better.

Father. Both elements in that phrase, in that sentence are very important. There's the emphasis on departure, and there's also along with that the emphasis on being with Christ. Because for Paul, leaving this world as a Christian is a departure. And it's a word that was used commonly of lifting a tent that had been placed in a certain, wherever it was placed temporarily, and just taking up the tent pegs and folding up the tent and moving on. Sometimes it was used also of loosing the ropes that held a ship tied to the quayside before it then sailed out on its journey onto the ocean.

However you think about it, it's Paul actually saying, it's a departure, it's a release from the present, it's a sailing out into the ocean of eternity. It is actually me pulling up my temporary residence in this world and going home. Because for the apostle, as indeed you find in the writing of the Hebrew writer in chapter 11, talking about Abraham and Isaac, Jacob, heirs of the same promise from God, that they would have an inheritance to enjoy, that God had provided inheritance for them.

What does it say about them? It says that they lived here in this world in tents going from place to place. Living in the land of promise as in a foreign country, because they looked for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Now you ask Abraham, Abraham, where's your home?

He would never point out even to the land of Canaan literally and say, ultimately this is my home, that's why I'm pitching my tent here. No, he would say, I'm pitching my tent here because this is a temporary residence, this is not my home. I'm looking for a city that has foundations and that city that has foundations, that permanent place is my home and the builder of it is God. It's been designed by him, it's actually built by him, it's ready waiting for me.

[21 : 30] Is that how you see the end of your own course in this world? If you think of what death is going to mean for you, and I know it's difficult for us all to think about death though we know for sure that it's going to come to us sometime, but when I think about that and the nature of death and the realization that death, whatever it is, it's certainly a severing of our tie with this world, but what? What then? What follows that? And obviously when you take the teaching of the Bible, not just here, but throughout the whole of the scripture, it's very obvious. I hardly need to say this, but there is of course a lot increasingly in our society. There are so many that would say, well, death is the end of it all. There's nothing else beyond death. Or if there is something beyond death, it's all good. It's kind of an unconscious enjoyment, a kind of soul sleep, something in which we're going to experience peace and there's nothing else but that. No, the apostle is saying to actually leave, to depart this world is to positively enter into the conscious enjoyment of being with Jesus, being with Christ. And that's something that we have to frequently remember.

What does our comfort come from? Well, our comfort comes certainly from the Holy Spirit in our lives, in this world, ministering comfort to us, continuing to give us encouragement amongst the difficulties of life. But our ultimate comfort is what is going to be home for us as Christians, that we're going to depart this world, that we're going to sail out from the key side of this life where we've been tied since we were born. And we're going to sail out into that ocean of eternity to be with Jesus, which is far better.

We're going to pull up our tent pegs and we're going to go home. Is that the prospect for yourself? If Christ is yours, then it is. If Christ is not yours, if you haven't yet come to Christ, if you haven't put your trust in him, then this is not true of you. The end of your journey in this world will not be a sailing out to be with Christ, a pulling up of the tent pegs to go home. You know what the alternative to that is. So, God through the gospel is addressing you tonight and saying, be sure, be sure that you're ready for the end of your course in this world. Be sure that when the end of your journey in this life comes, that you will go to be with Christ. Trust in him. Believe in him. Place your life in his hands. Give yourself over to him. Serve him. Love him. Trust him.

Because at the end of that, you will go to be with him. You will look forward to being with Jesus forever. Ever. Everlastingly. Actually. Restingly.

And of course, the contrast to that, you know, from Scripture is actually there also in the lecture of chapter 3, verses 18 to 19. Just to mention it in passing.

[25 : 15] For many of whom I have told you, now tell you even with tears, they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame.

With minds set on earthly things. But, contrastingly, our citizenship is in heaven. And from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body and be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things for himself.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I long and love, love and long for, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. Stand firm in the Lord.

So, there is the departure that he's talking about. That's Paul's difficult choice. He knows himself very well. What's best, ultimately, is to be with Christ. But as we see, he's prepared, if you like to put it this way, to postpone that if it means that he will still be of benefit in the Lord's service for these beloved Philippians.

He has a high view of what eternity will be for him. But he also has a high view of living to be with, to be in this world for Christ for some time to come.

[26 : 34] So, what conclusion does he come to? Well, he says, 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.

Now, that word convinced is interesting. It's not that Paul has suddenly had a flash of revelation from God that has convinced him that this will be the outcome, that he will be set free, that he'll continue with his apostleship.

It's a word that actually includes the idea of weighing up the options, looking at the evidences, thinking about things deeply as well as praying about it, and then coming to a conclusion.

And this is the conclusion he's come to after he's weighed up all the options, after he's considered things deeply, after he's assessed them properly, prayed over them, no doubt. This is what he's concluded.

He's come to this conclusion, I know that I will remain and continue with you all. Now, you could expand that out because very often when you're waiting on the Lord to take important decisions in life, you don't get a flash of inspiration, a flash of help from heaven that makes it so clear to you so that a text jumps out and really attaches itself to your brain.

[27 : 49] Very often, God will really want you to think, to think prayerfully. There's nothing unspiritual about applying your mind to evidences that you have before you, whether you're thinking of a job or moving home or whatever it is or even entering into the ministry of the gospel.

There are certain practicalities that one has to think of that you have to actually think through, that you have to pray over, that you have to then actually reach a conclusion about as you think of them along with other options, other pieces of evidence as well in your life.

And this is what Paul has done. He's come to this conclusion, having thought about it in that way of assessing things. And the conclusion is that he would stay and still be with the Philippians for a time, however long or short.

I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. What a wonderful description that is itself as the reason why he would remain in this world, why God would still give him continuing ministry with these Philippians.

If he's going to go to be with them again, this is the whole purpose of it. He's not to please himself. It's so, for your progress and joy in the faith. The two aspects of that are so important.

[29 : 07] Keep them together. Don't ever let them fall apart. To make progress in the faith, but also progress and joy in the faith.

I know we can't always have the kind of elements of joy and delight that we would want to have. Paul's in prison here and yet he's rejoicing. He's rejoicing hearing that the gospel is being preached, even if it's with wrong motives, as we saw.

And many other Christians through the years have found that the most difficult times in life were the times that they enjoyed the Lord's presence most.

Samuel Rutherford put it something like this, When I am in the cellar of affliction, I always look for the Lord's choicest wines.

When I am in the cellar of affliction, I always look for the Lord's choicest wines. There's always something there that will vivify and feed the soul.

[30 : 11] And here is Paul, this is why he's saying, I've come to the conclusion that I will remain in the flesh and remain with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

That's what the preaching of the gospel is committed to. That's the purpose of the gospel. Not only in presenting the gospel so that God will bless it to bring people to know himself, to be converted, to start following him as we saw this morning, but also to feed the souls of those who are on the way already for your progress and joy in the faith.

You see, these are things that must grow in our experience. We're never static as Christians. We're either going backwards or else we're advancing.

And you notice he's saying, in the faith. Not in faith. Paul's personal faith or the Philippians' personal faith, believing.

What he's saying here is the faith. The faith that is God's truth. The truth of God. The gospel, you might say as well. And so it's most advantageous to the Philippians that he actually remains for this reason.

[31 : 21] Now, I need not tell you that we live in days when there is much departure from the faith, sadly, even on the part of visible churches in the world.

And you can see that in different ways, different conclusions, decisions that have been come to, whether it's in terms of relationships, of marriage, of gender, whatever. but you know yourselves that there has been and is a departure from the faith, from the Bible's solid teaching about these things.

And John, in his writings, especially in his second letter, John, second John chapter, second John verse nine, should say, everyone, he says, seeing, watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for but may win a full reward.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

In other words, he's saying, don't think that just because people say this teaching is progressive, has left behind this kind of Calvinistic stuff and the things that great theologians in Scotland actually once proclaimed and once stood for and wrote about.

[32 : 42] People like Thomas Chalmers, Rutherford, Dixon, all of these people from the illustrious past of the church in Scotland, but not just from the past, even up to the present day.

There are people who still present the truth as it is here in the gospel in its purity and continual writing. These matters for our benefit hugely because if we go on ahead of that, ahead of what Jesus has given us, even if we say this is being very progressive, this is really in touch with the needs of the age.

You can't just keep things the way Jesus taught or Paul taught forevermore. Well, John is saying that's not progress. Whoever goes ahead of the teaching that you have in Christ does not have God.

It's one thing to be actually it's one thing to be praised in the eyes of men whether they be ecclesiastics or otherwise. It's one thing to be praised as another thing to have left God behind.

And that's what you never want to do. So we have to be true to Jesus himself. We do not shape the Bible by the culture of the day because that is not progress.

[34 : 06] It's regression. What we do is we take the Bible as it is and hopefully meaningfully and cogently and patiently and longingly and lovingly apply it to the culture of the day and seek to turn the culture of the day of its unbiblical towards the teaching and the light of Scripture itself.

He says this is for their progress and joy in the faith. And he says so that by me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Let me just say that in a brief word. By Paul coming to be with them again in Philippi something wonderful is going to be facilitated by that and it's for them to it's that they will have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.

Through Paul's return through his contribution again to their progress and joy in the faith that again is going to open up for them ample opportunities to glory in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? To glory in Christ Jesus. You could say also can mean to boast in Christ Jesus to be proud in Christ Jesus.

[35 : 23] I mentioned the word pride earlier a word that's been debased so much in our thinking as a people as a nation. But if you take it in the best sense of the word proud a parent is proud of the achievement of a child that achieves something and I know it's always difficult for us just to think about the word pride and to think about being proud without that sinful connotation to it.

But what it really means is just simply that we will have ample cause to be proud in Christ Jesus because that's what we are tonight as Christians.

We're proud of him. We're proud to promote him. We're proud to speak about him. We're proud to speak to him. We glory in Christ Jesus. We say about him and about life in a relationship with him that trusts in him that follows him that commends him to the world outside.

I'm proud of my saviour. I'm proud of being able to do this for him. Not proud in a sinful sense as if I've achieved something or if it's gone towards some in some way meritoriously towards my own salvation.

It's nothing to do with that. It's just the fact that Jesus Christ is everything. We've given the title to these two studies tonight and last week's. It's all about Jesus and it is.

[36 : 50] It is. It's all about Jesus. And if our Christian life is not all about Jesus, then it's not the kind of Christian life that the Bible commends to us.

I know that there's more to the Christian life than Jesus himself, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. But it is all about Jesus because he is the one to whom all the praise will flow as well as to God the Father.

He is the one who must have, as Paul put it elsewhere, have the preeminence. So here is Paul's difficult choice and here is Paul's conclusion.

And for you and for me tonight, it's presenting us with this wonderful characteristic, this defining characteristic, not just of a Christian but of a Christian church.

Indeed, it's there as you see in Philippians, just give me a minute again to open it up, it's there in Philippians chapter three where Paul is countering there those who are making life difficult for these Philippian Christians.

[38 : 05] Christians in chapter three and verse three where he's saying, using very graphic language, he's saying, look out for the dogs, look out for evil doers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh, for we are the real circumcision.

Now he's not being sinfully proud about this, he's just saying this is the fact. We are the true Christians Christians who worship God, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.

That is our great privilege tonight, to glory in Christ Jesus, not just to bring him glory, but to glory in him, to be proud of him, to be proud of speaking about him, to be proud of commending him to the world, because he himself must have that glory and preeminence.

May God bless these thoughts on his word. We're going to conclude singing now from Psalm 71, Psalm 71 singing this time from the Scottish Psalter, page 311, and we're singing verses 14 to 18, sorry, 14 to 17.

Four verses from 14, but I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more, I will thee magnify. 14 to 17 of Psalm 71, again we stand to pray, to sing.

[39 : 42] But I with expectation hope and yet with praises more and more, I will thee magnify.

thy justice and salvation my mouth approach shall show in all the day for I that all that the others do not know.

And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord and thine own righteousness in thine alone I will regard.

God for even from my youth O God by thee I have been taught taught and hither to I have declared a wonder thou hast drawn The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more.

Amen. Amen.