

Who are you?

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Philippians chapter 1. I don't know about you guys, I've grown excited to get back into this book each week. Get back to dive and into what the Lord would have for us here.

You know, so three questions, if you were to meet me, three questions that you'd probably ask me really quickly after meeting with me or meeting me would be, who are you, where are you from, and what do you do?

Who are you, where are you from, and what do you do? Maybe my accent would give away some of where I'm from, but you wouldn't know much about me. So you'd ask me these questions because you'd want to get to know me, or I guess I'm presuming on something there.

But you'd want to get to know me. You'd want to see if you can relate to me, see if you can understand me in some way, see if we have similar interests, right? And so we've been asked, you've been asked these questions hundreds of times.

[1 : 08] Who are you? Where are you from? What do you do? Who are you? What are you from? What do you do? These are like those questions that we have like an automated response to.

Kind of like when somebody's going, how's it going? And you expect that question, you get the wrong one, and you say, I'm fine, to what your name is, or something like that. These are the questions we've just been asked so many times.

Who are you? Where are you from? What do you do? But these are not just questions others ask of us. Inevitably, they're questions we ask of ourselves. Who really am I?

Who am I? Who am I? Am I a businessman? Or a plumber? A software developer? A teacher? An employee? Am I just someone trying to make a living? Is that who I am? You know, when you fill out the bio in something, maybe for social media or something like that, we immediately go to whatever that title is.

[2 : 05] Is that who I am? Am I a businessman? Am I a mom? I'm blessed with some wonderful kids and yet trying to stay above water, getting them to where they need to go each day.

Am I a success? Is that who I am? Someone who's overcome countless obstacles? Or am I a failure? Someone who's hurt so many people close to me and lost so many things dear to me. Who am I? These are the questions we don't just ask in casual conversations. These are the questions that haunt us late into the night. And so we're quick to find a label to describe who we are.

Maybe I'm a husband or a mom or a daughter, a brother, an employee, a student. I'm ambitious. I'm outgoing. High school, I'm most unique. Take that for what you will.

You know, introverted, something like that. But is that who we really are? This morning, as we continue through Philippians, God's going to push us to think more deeply about who we are.

[3 : 11] God's going to want our understanding of ourselves to not begin with ourselves. God's going to want our understanding of ourselves to begin with Christ. A little bit of Christ won't work.

We need all of who we are in Christ to live with courage and faith. That's where we're going this morning. So let me read. This is the Word of God. The only completely sufficient Word that you'll hear this morning.

Look in verse 18b. Beginning of that next heading. Paul says, Yes, 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'm to live in the flesh, that means 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.

[4 : 37] 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.

What a wonderful Word. Where we're going this morning is, Rejoice, for you are eternally secure in Christ. Rejoice, for you are eternally secure in Christ.

We're going to break this out in three points. The first one is, Your circumstances do not define you. Your circumstances do not define you. Paul is continuing where he left off last week.

If you remember, we ended talking about joy, about Paul rejoicing, because wherever Christ is proclaimed, he rejoices, whether it's proclaimed out of envy and rivalry and selfish ambition, or whether it's proclaimed from goodwill, from love, he rejoices.

And literally in our text, where it begins this morning, he says, I'm going to continue rejoicing. He's like, I rejoice, and I will keep on rejoicing. Though now, he turns his attention to the future, to not just where he's at, in prison, he turns his attention to the future, what may come of his life.

[5 : 57] He says, I'm going to continue rejoicing. Essentially, he says, I will rejoice, because whatever happens to me will honor Jesus Christ, and bring me joy. So look down at verse 18b again.

He says, Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. So he's rejoicing, because this will turn out for his deliverance.

So what is this? You know, when I go through these passages, I write a question mark over things that are odd to me, or things that I don't understand. So there's no qualifier there. You know, usually say, this car, or this house, or this whatever.

He doesn't say that. He just has the pronoun, this. But he's not shifted subjects here. He's still in prison, still talking about his imprisonment.

So what he means by this is, he means, his imprisonment, and whatever may come of him, is that this. Whether by release or execution, it will turn out for his deliverance.

[7 : 01] Literally, the words there is salvation. So, what's that mean? I mean, it means that this refers to something more than merely being released from prison.

It refers to something greater than that. He adds, in verse 20, says, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope.

Now, we think about hope very differently than the Apostle Paul does, or than really the word hope even means. It's not something that may happen, like we hope the Vols have a winning season next year, you know, may possibly, probably not likely happen.

You know, that's what we think about with hope, or we hope it won't rain, something we desire to happen because we want a sunny day or something like that, or something we wish to happen. I hope make good money in my life or something like that.

Paul's hope is certain. It's fixed. It's sure. He says, it is my eager expectation and hope. So, this hope, these words are kind of tightly tied together in the original language and this eager expectation, or this hope is clung to with eager expectation.

[8 : 20] It means to desire something in such a way that everything else is forgotten. It means to press forward to something in such a way that everything else is decidedly left behind.

I recently read this story about a race in 1954. Some of you sports fans probably already know about this, but Roger Bannister, a runner, United States, was the first man in the world to run the mile in less than four minutes.

If you ever tried that, that's super fast. Okay? This is March of 54. He ran the mile in less than four minutes. A month later, his record was broken by John Landy by 1.4 seconds.

So tight. Later that summer, in August, the two men were brought together to race it out. You know, we want to see who can win the mile. You know, you can't just win when your opponent's not there, right?

You got to have them both there. It's called the Miracle Mile. They were pumped. They were ready for this race. All of America was leaning in and watching. And Landy took the lead and was in the

lead.

[9 : 26] That's the man that broke the record in April of 54. And so he's in the lead. Roger Bannister is behind him. And he's racing. You know, he's pressing forward.

But then at the last moment, he turns, Landy turns to get a sense of where Bannister is. And just the movement of that turning and the way it diverted his attention caused him to lose right then to Roger Bannister who defended his title that was broken and is the fastest man or was the fastest man in the world.

And that's what the apostle's talking about here. With eager expectation, he's pressing forward in such a way that he's refusing to look back. A split second of looking back. Saul, or Lot's wife, looked back.

She turned into Saul. Right? I'm not saying that's going to happen to some of us. But nevertheless, Paul's pressing forward in such a way that this hope is being clung to with eager expectation that all this will work out for his deliverance.

So we ask, now how is this going to happen? He says in verse 20, look down as he continues. I'm holding this with eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that now with full courage as always, Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.

[10 : 47] So this deliverance, this thing he's clinging to, this thing he's looking forward to is this confidence that Christ will be honored whether I live or whether I die. Now that's crazy talk.

crazy talk. But this is not resignation. You know, when you're resigned to something, you just give up. This is not Paul sitting in prison saying, I just give up.

I just give up. I lay down my life. I don't care what happens to me anymore. I just give up. This is not indifference though, just merely not caring anymore.

Rather, what's going on here is that Paul has confidence that Christ will be honored whether he lives or dies and he has this confidence that Christ will be lifted up and that he will be filled with joy. He has confidence. Even though he doesn't know what's going to happen, even though he doesn't understand his life, he understands this will happen for the glory of Jesus Christ. He understands, I will not be ashamed.

[11 : 52] It's one of the most recurring words in our Psalms. I will not be ashamed. I will not be, my face will not be bowed low. I will not be disgraced.

I will not be let down. I will be full of courage, he says, with confidence, great joy. Now how can he talk this way is what I want to ask. And I want you to look at how he describes himself.

We're going to look back at that verse we just read. He says, now as always, Christ, Christ, Christ will be honored in my body.

Whether by life or by death, he says up in verse 19, the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will turn out for my deliverance. Do you see that?

The help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will turn out for my deliverance. Christ will be honored in my body. You see, when Paul begins to talk about himself and about his life, he begins to talk about Jesus Christ.

[13 : 01] He's talking in such a way that Christ lives in him and works in him through him. He's just a vessel in which, through which, Christ works for his glory.

So when he looks at his circumstances in prison, he's not trapped in circumstances in which he is placed. He's placed in those circumstances by Christ. So if that's true, then it doesn't matter whether he lives or whether he dies, Christ will be honored.

Now, this is incredibly profound. Underneath these verses is the truth that when someone comes to Christ, they're united to Christ.

You remember in John 17, he talks about a vine and I'm the vine dresser, you are the branch. Whoever abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. There's this union whereby the lifeblood of Jesus Christ, as Romans 8 says, the spirit of Jesus Christ who raised him from the dead dwells within us.

It's the lifeblood, so to speak, of us. There's this union. All of what he's done is credited to us. We're forgiven, but he also comes to live in us.

[14 : 12] John 14 says, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. That's unbelievable.

If anyone loves me, the father and the son will come to him and make a home. That's what's going on here. That's what Paul's saying. Galatians 2.20 says it another place.

He says, I have been crucified with Christ. A verse you probably know well. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

In the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Try that on for size. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

Now we could take all afternoon and all the coffee in the room and we could not figure, or we couldn't plumb the depths of that. John Piper tries to help us and he says, Christ is our life.

[15 : 15] Not only the guarantee of it in heaven, but the down payment of it by the Spirit now as he lives in us. He dwells in us profoundly, miraculously, amazingly, beyond calculation.

It is no longer I who live. So something mysterious happens when someone comes to Christ is that the old is gone and the new has come and anyone who comes to Christ and new creation because Jesus Christ comes and has made his home and lives in him and bears fruit in him.

But the implication or the important point what Paul's drawing out in this verse is that if that's true, no circumstance can undo the complete security we possess in him.

No circumstance can undo the complete security we possess in him. That's why the Apostle Paul can sit on death row and say Christ will be honored.

Nothing can happen to us such that we lose who we are in Christ. A lot can happen to us in this life.

We can start a business that goes bankrupt but it will not thwart the treasure we have in Christ.

[16 : 32] We can have relationships slip through our fingers and weep over the life we thought we had and we lost. But we can't thwart this relationship with Jesus Christ.

That's what he's saying. He's saying my life is not in my hands it's Christ and nothing. We can separate that. Nothing can be done by us such that we lose who we are in Christ.

sometimes we can look back on life when maybe we're in a season where we're reading our Bible and praying a lot and things were going well and we look back and we just man look we think we were so much more secure then.

This text would say you were not more secure then and you're not less secure now. When the circumstances were going great and you were in the sun of the day so to speak everything was going well you were not more secure then.

And thus the reverse is true when the clouds had set in and things are just falling apart through your fingers you are not less secure right then. That's what he's saying.

[17 : 49] One more thing nothing can be said of us such that we lose who we are in Christ. You know it's increasingly difficult to discern who we are right now because it's so easy to compare.

Back in the day you only had to be better than or you know to keep up with the Joneses you only had to be better than your neighbors or your close friends you know you had to keep your car nicer than theirs but now you got just hundreds of people over social media that they can track your every movement.

Mark Twain says comparison is the death of joy and all of us have had that sensation that death we scroll through Facebook we think man my Thanksgiving was pretty good and you see homie over here who had filet mignon you know and turkey and ham or something like that or you think my vacation was great and then somebody posts I'm so tired from my vacation to Hawaii will you pray that I can sleep well at night tonight you know or something like that and you're just like no I'm not gonna pray for you but but we get that loss that death of joy it happens this this this verse is calling us to remember who we are and remember that nothing can happen that makes us lose it if you're in Christ nothing can be happen to you be done by you or said of you such that you lose who you are in Christ and that's a promise Paul receives this as a promise that because of what's happening in the gospel

Christ will be honored I don't know the future yet but Christ will be honored that's a promise you can take you can walk out of this room and say I don't know I can't fast forward 40 more years and know what my life is gonna look like my investments in parenting or my investments in work or whatever it is I want it to look a certain way and it may not but one thing you can bank on is Christ will be honored if you are his he will be honored with your life that's what he's saying so receive it rejoice you're eternally secure in him point two your life is not about you your life's not about you that doesn't make much sense you know Paul continues to play out this future what if he lives what if he dies what's his life for what will happen he wrestles with it you know you got that in the text you saw that wrestling look down he says in verse 22b he says yet you know which shall I choose

I cannot tell I'm hard pressed between the two you know there's this wrestling going on within his heart and overarching whatever happens is this phrase in verse 21 look there with me he says for

to me to live is Christ and to die is gain now this is one of the most well known verses in Philippians to live is Christ and to die is gain it's well known it's a slogan you know you might see this on a bumper sticker or something like that and yet it's an intensely personal confession it's Paul and he's in prison trying to characterize what his life's all about he says to live is Christ now what's he mean by this is some kind of super spiritual mission statement you know you know walking in somebody's house they got to live is Christ painted on the wall you're like oh brother you know one of these guys who's all about himself or sometimes you can feel that way this super spiritual guy what he means is that life has no meaning apart from Christ no goals no successes no incentives matter apart from Christ if we have all those things and we have not Christ they don't matter they're empty all the treasures of this world just as we're saying will never satisfy apart from Christ but he's also saying life is absorbed with what Christ cares about for Paul this means being absorbed with preaching the gospel and caring for churches to live to live means to be released right freedom it means continuing to advance the gospel through fruitful labor for the joy of others to live is Christ to live is all about

[22 : 19] Christ all about what he came to do to build what he came to build and so he says in verse 22 look he says if I'm to live in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me verse 24 to remain in the flesh is more necessary why because that fruitful labor convinced of this I know I will remain and continue with it all for your progress and joy in the faith and so his confidence in prison as he thinks to the prospect of being released is this confidence that his life is all about Christ and he knows exactly what he'll do it's clear what Paul's all about now I like to eat this week's been a good week for me what a historic week now I did yeah yeah I ate way too much this week but you know I was born in the south in the south

Carolina born in a meat and potatoes kind of family there's nothing wrong with that it's a fine life for most of my life my motto was bread, meat, and something sweet finally at the age of 24 I began eating vegetables no lie yeah after I graduated college much to my mother's chagrin and that opened up a culinary world for me you know I started eating different things like salads and just other vegetables and stuff like that but a couple years after that I married a Vietnamese woman my wife Kim and wow my culinary world began to change a lot more you know I thought before that I thought Asian cuisine just boiled down to sweet and sour chicken and if you're still there today there's a whole world out there just come with me and I will show you I was introduced to Asian cuisine

I was introduced to Chinese to Vietnamese to Thai and I was hooked you know and I'd love to eat I think I've well documented that now you know I love food but there are a few things that dislike more than a restaurant that cannot make up its mind here's what I mean you go to a restaurant if it takes you very long if it takes you long to order then you're in trouble if it takes you long to know what that restaurant is all about you're in trouble if the menu doesn't make it obvious you're in trouble it should be obvious if there's nine burgers on the menu don't order the meatloaf you know what I mean like this ain't the night to try the special you know you know it's just like you wouldn't go to the dairy barn for their burgers now they may be good I haven't had one yet you would go for their dairy right that's what he's trying to say it ought to be easy to order at a good restaurant and for Christians it ought to be easy to tell what we're all about we should be easy to understand we should be easy to read you ever get get with somebody and you're like

I can't figure that guy out which shouldn't be said of us to live as Christ doesn't mean that we all have to go into full time ministry nor does it mean that we should care less about being fruitful on the job but it does mean the goal of our life should be clear to people around us it should be clear that our life is not about us it should be clear that our lives are about Christ it should be clear that your life is not about you that's what we can receive from this passage if we make our lives all about us our happiness our contentment our success or any of those things will be miserable we were made to live for something bigger and greater than ourselves and this is the most freeing news in the world honestly life is not about you regardless of what your mom said you know life is not about you it's about Jesus Christ and if you can live with your mind on Jesus Christ it will set you completely free now not all your moms told you that so I didn't want to diss everybody in the room so what's your what's your life really about

I feel like this passage wants us to ask that is it about your kingdom come or his your will be done or his I have to be honest this past week has not been all about his will be done for me it's been about course corrections hey Lord my heart strays so quickly living this way is hard living for ourselves is

easy anyone can achieve some degree of success when they're living for themselves when number one is themselves anyone they just push people out of the way and they do what they want to do but living for Christ and his purposes is hard you know it changes the way we view our money we know this from Jesus you cannot serve God and money and you don't have to have it to serve it in this way Christians should be tight about a lot of things and money is not one of them because of who we are in Christ should change it money should flow through our fingers not be hoarded up in our hearts it changes the way we view our time you know often we can view our time in set blocks this time for work this time for family this time for church this time for me my time and this works great until the kids interrupt you in the middle of the night you know or until one of your friends needs a place to stay for a few days or until you're facing something you cannot fix on your own it changes the way we view our time if Christ if we're at Christ's disposal then all my time is for Christ all my time is for the glory of Jesus Christ

[28 : 34] I wake up in the morning and I just basically say Lord help me respond to your directives to your pulls and pushes throughout the day so that I might serve you for Christ changes the way we view relationships it changes everything such as the shape of our lives and if you haven't been asked in some time what is your hope and what are you all about then you might want to think through this I say that with all the love of my own heart because I'm right there with you trying to figure this out your life's not about you don't make the mistake of the vast amount of our culture your life's about Christ you're secure in him so you should have that same joy he does regardless of what's going on point three your death will not disappoint you your death will not disappoint you so he's wrestling with these things and you know he says he'll continue rejoicing because of the certainty he has not only that his life will be all about Christ if he's released from prison but also that he will not be ashamed in death he says to die is gain to die means to be finished for God to say enough and for us to gain

Christ death is so often characterized by what we lose but here Paul wants our minds to be riveted by what we gain to gain Christ here means to be fully and completely with him to depart from this world to be finally free from all its anxieties and disappointment and to experience no separation no distance with Christ so he says down there in verse 23 I'm hard pressed 22 my desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better that is far better that's gain there's a lot of things that our culture calls gain there's a lot of things we might think in our hearts is gain but Paul says gain is in Christ and gain is in death now heaven therefore will not be a place where we're sad about leaving things behind it will be a place where we're overwhelmed by what we've gained yeah I think there's this assumption this this this kind of it's an assumption in the water you know that heaven is a place where we float around playing harps or something like that you know maybe the equivalent of some stringed instrument where we are in an endless worship service and your feet and knees may have gotten tired this morning and you're not so excited about an endless worship service you know where we do the same thing all day long you know yada yada yada doxology yada yada yada where nothing ever happens the talking heads had a song

I don't know if any of you are that acquainted with that stuff he says heaven is a place where nothing nothing ever happens tempted to sing it this is a terrible song theology is terrible it's wrong that assumption is just wrong scripture says that heaven will be the endless unwrapping of an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading it will be like Christmas because it will be an endless unwrapping layer after layer after layer of an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading imperishable means there will be no decay no breaking down no falling apart you know Christmas is all about gifts December 26 is about all the gifts that just broke you know well that won't happen in heaven there's no expiration date to the promises of Jesus Christ they will keep getting better and better be undefiled that means it will not be contaminated in any way no sickness sorrow sadness or sin will be welcome it won't be tainted by anything evil ugly vile or wicked it won't be spoiled or corrupted or polluted and it's unfading is what it says it does not fade it does not diminish it does not change not only does it never end but it never fails to enthrall and entice us to fascinate and inflame us gladden and gratify us rivet and ravish us heaven will not be boring heaven will be endless joy that's what Paul wants

I mean he wants that in our hearts that we can say death is gain now you may hear that today and you say death is not gain to me death is loss are you crazy death meant loss to me I've lost too many people to say death is gain I have to Paul's begging us to dream with him he's begging us to see heaven the way it is C.S. Lewis wrote so many books but one of them one set was the

Chronicles of Nornia this magical land called Narnia just incredible books that we're reading together as a family at the end of the last battle the end of the last book regardless of which way you read them this is still the last one in all the ways he says this for to us this this is the end of all the stories and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after but for them it was only the beginning of the real story all their life in this world all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story in which no one on earth has read which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before it that's what's going on that's what Paul wants us to think about when he thinks about Christ that's why he says death is gain because he's not leaving for a boring place he's leaving for a place where the story gets better and better forever and ever heaven's going to be like that every day better and better filled with adventure and worship and work whether you like it or not friendships and laughter and most of all more and more of Jesus more and more of seeing him more and more of knowing him more of finding out the mystery why would you come to seek those who were lost so that we might be with you and relate with you for eternity heaven will not be long enough to unpack that mystery and that's what he's saying death is gain because we get to be with the most wonderful soul in the universe

Jesus Christ so I gotta ask you do you view your life this way what would it take for you to view your life this way to live knowing your circumstances cannot define you to live knowing your life is not about you to live knowing your death will not disappoint you you must view your life this way this is not optional Christianity this is must Christianity that's what I call you to because I love you because you need this you know Paul penned these words from prison after so many hardships just months before his death and I dare say each of us is one fallen call away one decision away one medical diagnosis away from something that could drastically change the rest of our lives

[36 : 54] I dare say we'd find ourselves in a prison like Paul where life simplified and what I want to ask you is what would you believe in that moment Tim Keller says it like this no matter what precautions we take no matter how well we put together a good life no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy wealthy comfortable with friends and family and successful with our career something will inevitably ruin it something's going to spoil it what Paul wants us to do is he wants to know he wants to ask us when we're there will Christ be enough when we're there will Christ be enough is he really all we want is he really all we know we need who are you

I don't care about the labels but I want to know that you know who you really are what's your name what do you care about Sinclair Ferguson one of my favorite authors tells a story of interacting with one of his students from the far east as I got to know one another more he said Timothy what's your real name no one in the far east named Timothy right he said Timothy yes I said then referring to his native language but what's your real name once again he replied Timothy realizing he was leading me on a bit I tried once more and asked what name did your parents give you

Timothy responded with an oriental name so I concluded that's your real name right you just chose Timothy so it would be easy for westerners like me to say no he said Timothy is my real name then he added that's the name I was given when I was baptized Ferguson writes I found his words deeply moving the name he was given at his baptism was his real name it was name that reminded him of who he was in Christ a sinner saved by grace and so too with us it doesn't matter what our name is it doesn't matter what we do for a living it doesn't matter if life has been one success after another it doesn't matter if it's been repeated failure it doesn't matter what happens in the future it doesn't matter what circumstances may strike our life it only matters if we're in

Christ and if we're in Christ we're completely secure nothing can happen that can shake that do you believe it is what he would say to us rejoice for you are for we are completely secure in Christ who loved us and sought us and died on the cross for us so that we might know him and know his grace and enjoy it for eternity let us pray father in heaven thank you for these precious words that are worth a lifetime of study thank you for all the realities that they unpack the truth that if we are in Christ we're a new creation the old is gone the new has come new desires and new loves and new goals and new aspirations we pray

God that you would help us now that this desire this truth these things would shape our lives and direct them whatever might come Lord protect us we pray from temptation from the lies of the enemy so that we might live and cling to Christ all our days anticipating an eternity of being with him we thank you and we praise you in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information

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