

To the Philippian Church: To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain (Philippians 1:12-26)

Philippians: Joyful Unity in the Gospel

Zionsville Fellowship | Scott McCullough | June 7, 2026

Good morning! It is good to be with you and open God's Word together. Kids, I am especially grateful to have you with us this morning. Today I am sharing about God's very important purpose and mission for the apostle Paul. Paul's mission and purpose was to share the good news "that Jesus came to save sinners." And God allowed Paul to be in jail for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with some very important people. Just like Paul, it is our special purpose and mission to share the Gospel of Jesus with others too, even in hard places and in tough times. I challenge you kids to remember or write one thing from today's lesson that you can share with your family. And at the end of service, Mrs. Kate will share a recap with you and maybe have a special treat.

Please join me in turning to the book of **Philippians, Chapter 1**. If you don't have a Bible, there are copies below the seats in front of you. Feel free to use them and take one with you if you do not have a Bible. You will find **Philippians Chapter 1 on Page 980**.

The theme of our series in Philippians is, "**Joyful Unity in the Gospel.**" As we work through Philippians, we will see that our ultimate source of Joy is Jesus, and our belief in His Gospel is ultimate thing that unites us all as His followers and as His church.

Last week, Ryan Hallahan kicked off our summer sermon series in the book of Philippians. He walked us through Paul's greeting to the Christians at Phillipi and shared the back story for how Paul planted the church in Phillipi. Paul had planted the church, and they had been faithful partners with Paul in advancing the Gospel. He has a deep affection and appreciation for them as we heard last week.

This week, we will focus our attention on Paul's update to the Philippian church about his current circumstances in prison, and how God is using his imprisonment as an opportunity to advance the Gospel in Rome. The members of the church were concerned about Paul being in prison, awaiting trial, and possibly facing death. This week James Faris reminded me that Drew is going to be in Rome this Summer. Imagine if Drew was imprisoned in Rome and facing trial that could lead to a sentence of death. We would be consumed with worry for him and constantly praying for him. So maybe consider that as our context as we look at **Chapter 1 verses 12 to 26** this morning.

Join me and follow along as I read **Philippians 1: 12-26**.

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word (the word of God or the Gospel) without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,²⁰ 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.²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

This is the Word of the Lord, let us pray together:

There are two movements in today's passage. In **verses 12 through 18**, we see Paul's account of how the Gospel has advanced through his imprisonment and through the teaching of others. In **verses 19 to 26** we see Paul looking to the future and his desire to continue the mission of advancing the Gospel and the church for the good of others and the glory of Jesus.

I. Paul's joy in advancing the Gospel through his imprisonment and through the teaching of others (verses 12-18)

1) First, how God used Paul's imprisonment to accomplish on of Paul's goals; to advance the Gospel in Rome.

We know from **Romans Chapter 1**, that Paul had a desire to visit the Church in Rome. His desire to go to Rome was likely due to:

1. His love for the Christians in Rome and his desire to encourage them.
2. It was part of his missional strategy. To share and advance the Gospel in the most influential city in the world.
3. He had a divine calling. The Holy Spirit placed in him a desire to go to Rome on mission.

However, I am not sure imprisonment was Paul's plan for making his visit to Rome. He was under house arrest, most likely chained to a Roman guard 24 hours 7 days a week. He was not chained to any guard but the Praetorium or the Imperial Palace Guard. The very guards that would have presence with Ceasar and high-ranking Roman officials.

And for what reason was Paul in prison?

In **Acts Chapter 21**, Paul is arrested in the temple in Jerusalem accused of defiling the temple by allowing Greeks to join him in worship. As he stood accused before the Jewish council in Jerusalem, violence broke out so he was sent to Felix the Roman Governor in Caesarea. There he sat in prison for two years. Eventually, a new governor, Festus, replaced Felix in Caesarea. Shortly after Festus became governor, the Jews brought Paul's case before Festus. Paul pleads his case before Festus in **Acts 25** and is ordered to be taken back to Jerusalem for trial under the Jewish council. Knowing that would mean certain death, Paul appeals to Ceasar for justice as a Roman citizen and to Rome he goes.

His journey to Rome was long and difficult, you can read about it in **Acts 27 and 28**. He suffered a great storm at sea, starvation, a shipwreck, and a snake bite. Despite the hard and long journey to Rome, Paul continued in faith and joy in Christ. He ministered to others and advanced the Gospel during his journey.

The point is, Paul did not have a direct flight from Jerusalem to Rome. He was falsely accused, held in prison without trial, and suffered a long and dangerous journey just to be imprisoned again for two years in Rome. It was a hard and difficult path to the place he longed to be.

And what is Paul's attitude after all these events, specifically his imprisonment in Rome? He says in **Philippians 1:12**, *"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel."* And in **verse 13**, he even says, *"it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to the all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ."* He is not only at peace with what the Lord has allowed him to endure, and we will see in moment that he is even joyful about his circumstances and how the Lord has worked through them.

Paul is acknowledging that it was God's good purpose and will for him to endure hardship and imprisonment.

1. His adversity accomplished a mission priority to advance the Gospel in Rome. Imprisonment is what brought him to Rome.
2. His imprisonment created a captive audience with the Praetorium Guard. This allowed him to advance Gospel within the walls of Caesars palace even while on house arrest. For two years, Paul had a captive audience in the Palace Guards. They were chained to him as he spoke of the Gospel and dictated Gospel saturated letters like the one to the Philippian church. Paul knows that Jesus is Lord overall including Ceasar and the Roman Empire. Paul was penetrating the heart of the Roman Empire by evangelizing the Palace Guards.
3. Paul's imprisonment inspired others to become more confident in faith and boldly proclaim the Gospel without fear. **Verse 14**, *"And most of the brothers (referring to other teachers in Rome), having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the Word (the Gospel) without fear.* Steve Lawson in his commentary, *Philippians For You* says, *"One believer on fire for God can embolden thousands with new courage."*

I am sure Paul would have preferred not to be in prison. But Paul's Imprisonment was God's good purpose for Paul to advance the Gospel in Rome, to bring others to Jesus, and to glorify Christ.

- 2) **The second thing we see in the first movement is Paul rejoicing because others are proclaiming Christ in Rome. Paul has great joy over the advancement of the Gospel through other pastors and leaders in Rome, verses 15 to 18.**

However, the some of the other pastors, teachers, and church leaders did not have the proper motives.

In **verse 15**, Paul says that *"some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry."* I am not sure if you are aware, but preachers, pastors, and elders are human. That means pastors can be jealous. Jealousy is one

of the base expressions of human fallenness. We can be envious of others' gifting, envious of others' influence, envious of facilities or church size, envious of others' opportunities. Pastors struggle in the flesh like all of us.

If you were a preacher in Rome, it would be easy to be jealous of Paul who is arguably the greatest missionary evangelist to ever walk the earth. Paul had so much influence and garnered so much attention. What do we do to others who cast shadows over us? We find delight in bringing them down a notch or two and especially find delight in kicking them when they are down. Some pastors were taking great delight in Paul's unfortunate circumstances. Calling Paul's imprisonment as "*God's judgment*" against him and making it clear they were the ones preaching Christ "*correctly.*"

Sadly, rivalry in the pulpit and among church leaders is a real thing. It can be divisive. It is discouraging thing to witness. Pastors should be rebuked and corrected when appropriate and receive it in humility. However, rebuke and correction aimed at pastors for the sake of tearing them down is not God honoring or healthy to the church.

But on the other hand, Paul says "*there are those who preach Christ out of love and goodwill.*" Praise God for pastors and church leaders who lead and preach out of deep love and affection for Christ and others. It is true blessing to be under the leadership of someone who loves you and loves Jesus even more. I am thankful to be under such men at ZF. I look forward to being with them each Monday night to read scripture, pray together, and discuss things of importance to Christ and His church.

Paul's conclusion? He says yes, "*there are those who proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.*" However, "*whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.*"

What wonderful, Spirit filled maturity Paul had to distance himself from the pain others would inflict on him. To be able to process the sharp words, attacks, and criticism appropriately. And to ultimately rejoice that Christ is proclaimed.

Dr. James Montgomery Boice, Presbyterian pastor, theologian and author says this of Paul while reflecting on this passage, "*Paul's suffering was neither corrective or instructive. It was simply a suffering permitted by God so the Gospel might spread to others.*"

II. Now on to the second movement in verses 19 to 26. Paul looks to the future and his desire to continue in his mission of advancing the Gospel and the Church.

He ended the first section rejoicing in Christ being proclaimed and begins the second movement rejoicing knowing that he will be delivered from his current circumstances. **Verse 19**, "*Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.*" Paul knows that he will either be released from prison or he will be delivered in death.

He had a deep certainty in the Lord's sovereign purposes for his life. Steven Lawson in his commentary *Philippians For You* says, "*Paul can lay his head on the pillow of the sovereignty of God – and sleep well on it.*" Not only was he ok with his circumstances, he rejoiced in them. If Paul's life were a collection of

random circumstances, then there would be no joy. He knew there was purpose in everything that happened to him.

What were his means of remaining so steadfast, so confident, so sure in Christ? The prayers of Philippian Church and Spirit of Christ himself. It was the Holy Spirit who provided power and peace for Paul - to remain steadfast in the face of imprisonment and possibly execution. It was the Holy Spirit who caused him to remain in hope; a certainty that God would work Paul's circumstances for Christ's glory.

We see Paul's certainty and confidence in Christ in one of the greatest verses in all of scripture. Paul writes in **Romans 8:28**, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* This is one of the most wonderful and comforting promises in all of scripture.

Also, Paul was confident that he would not be put to shame as he stood before Caesar in defense of his faith in Christ. He says in **verse 20**, *"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."* The Presence of God would be with him as he stood before trial.

Paul had everything necessary for enduring his imprisonment and his upcoming trial. The prayers of the saints and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, this allowed him to:

- Remain confident in his deliverance either in life or death
- Have courage in standing before Caesar in defense of Christ and his faith in Christ
- Know that Christ will be honored in him whether by life or death

Then Paul makes an amazing statement in **verse 21** which is the focus of this whole passage, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Paul is saying Christ is his life. To know Christ, to have faith in Christ, to experience the presence of Christ, to be able to share Christ, to suffer with Christ, to honor and glorify Christ. Later in **Philippians 3:8** Paul would write, *"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ."* Paul had singular-minded unwavering devotion to Christ.

And then *"to die is gain."* Paul knew that death was a means to be in the very presence of Christ, and that to be in the presence of Christ is far better than remaining in this life. If Paul is executed, then the goal of his life is achieved; he will have finally gained Christ. Death will be for Paul, the ultimate gaining of his lifelong passion; being face to face with Christ.

Paul wants his friends in Phillipis to know, that if need be, he is ready to die for his faith in Christ. If he is executed it will result in greater gain for him, for he will be in the immediate presence of Jesus. Charles Spurgeon renown 19th-century British Preacher once said, *"The best moment of a Christians life is their last one, because it is the one that is nearest to heaven."*

Paul does not have a death wish nor is his motivation to avoid his difficult circumstances. He is just viewing death properly through the lens of faith in Christ. For those in Christ, *“to die is gain,”* to be with Christ. It is his settled outlook on life.

In **verses 23 and 24**, Paul reveals a bit more of his heart when he says, *“(but) I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”*

It’s as if he is walking a path that is becoming narrower. I have never been to Antelope Canyon in Utah, but I have seen the images and perhaps you have to. It is a deep sandstone canyon that becomes so narrow at points each shoulder is touching a wall at the same time. It gives you the feeling of being pressed by both sides. I believe this is how Paul is describing the conflict within him as he says, *“feel hard pressed between the two”* To die and be with Christ or to live and continue on mission?

Paul finally comes to a decision in **verse 25** (like he really had one at all). He will deny himself his greater desire to be with Christ for he knows it is the Lord’s will that he remains on earth and continue his mission.

In **verse 25**, Paul says, *“Convinced of this, I know I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.”*

Then Paul closes our text today by sharing, *“so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you.”*

Paul is not saying he himself should be the cause for the Philippian church to glory in Christ, but that they may have cause to glory in Christ for what Christ is doing in Paul’s life. Specifically, Christ working through Paul to advance the Gospel and Christ working for Paul’s potential release from prison. If Paul is able to see them again, it will be because Christ has ordained and allowed it, and that will be cause for much celebration and joy. All glory for who Paul is and the work he has accomplished is by Christ and for the glory of Christ.

As we close today, I want to share a few things we can take from Paul’s update to the Philippian church and apply to our own lives.

1. **Our adversity, suffering, and trials have purpose.** As I scan the worship center, I see many of you who have suffered greatly and those who are in the midst of suffering. You’re suffering while devastating and difficult in the moment is not in vain. Like Paul, God allows our suffering for accomplishing His good purposes. Here are a few ways God uses our adversity for good:
 - a. **Adversity can strengthen and refine our faith in Christ and cause us to be unwavering or steadfast.** In **James 1:2-4** we read, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Sounds a lot like Paul. Each wave of adversity that crashes against us makes us stronger and more equipped for standing against the next wave.

- b. **Our adversity takes us to places we would never go on our own.** Adversity took Paul on long and perilous journeys; it landed him in prison. And in those places and times, God was able to use him for advancing the Gospel and encouraging other saints. Adversity takes us to hospitals, nursing homes, funerals, broken homes, prisons, and dark places in the city. There we have the wonderful opportunity to *“honor Christ the lord as holy always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you,”* **1 Peter 3:15**. Our adversity can allow us to take the light of Christ and Gospel into dark places.
- c. **Our faithfulness in facing adversity encourages and strengthens others.** Other saints in Rome were inspired by Paul to have confidence and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel. They witnessed his faithfulness during imprisonment and under the threat of death and were inspired.

I am so encouraged and strengthened by the testimony of Ben Sasse (Sass). Ben is a former politician and University administrator who has stage four metastasized pancreatic cancer which is a death sentence. He is also a faithful follower of Christ who is using his adversity and public platform for strengthening and serving others, and for glorifying Jesus. In a recent TGC article, Ben explained he is living with certain death leaning on a puritan precept and admonition from the apostle Paul. The precept is *“redeem the time.”* The quote is based on **Ephesians 5:15**, *“Look carefully how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*

Ben says, *“redeem the time in my theology means it is a great blessing to be able to live a life of gratitude to God by doing stuff that tries to benefit your neighbor.”* Paul and Ben’s testimony and the testimony of so many others suffering adversity in Christ give us confidence and boldness. It testifies to the power and reality for Christ and the Gospel.

- 2. Some minister with bad motives and others with good. God can use both, but **motives matter in ministry and in our participation in the church.** *“It matters not only what we do, but how we do it.”* Motives are important in fueling our words and actions, and they matter to God. It is important that all we do and say in life in ministry is for the glory of God and not ourselves. We also must be careful not to tear down others through unholy criticism. That is tearing down others out of envy, jealousy, or pride. *“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* Glory is given to God when we minister and participate in the church with good and pure motives.
- 3. **(Lastly) Can we, like Paul say, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain?”** Paul makes it clear his sole passion and purpose is Jesus. To seek Him, obey Him, serve Him, worship Him, love Him, to enjoy Him, and glorify Him above all else. And then when his life ends, to be with Him and enjoy Him forever in His presence. Do you and I share the same perspective? I have been confronted with

this question all week as I prepared for today. You and I have many responsibilities to fulfill that are good and honoring to the Lord, but our ultimate purpose is to live Christ. To seek Him, to obey Him, serve Him and others in His name, to treasure Him above all else, and to make His name great. And then, once we have spent our lives for him, or if our lives come to a tragic end, to face death not with fear but with great joy. All because Jesus conquered sin and the fear of death on the cross. Death in this life is to be with Christ in the next, and that is far better.

Close in prayer.