FBC Service Sunday March 8, 2026, Philippians 1:19–26 ESV

“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 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 labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 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 behalf.

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 cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."

Unashamed and Unafraid – A Life That Cannot Lose Vs 19-26

Philippians 1:19-26 contains a winner’s philosophy of life. It’s remarkable because it was written by a man in a Roman jail chained to a soldier 24 hours a day. He is on trial for his life with no certainty that he will ever be set free.

Yet the tone of this letter is not despair, it’s radiant with confidence and even joy.

He says that he’s depending on two things:

Scripture Verses 19-20

Unashamed Courage

He was encouraged by the prayers of his friends, and the work of the Holy Spirit on his behalf.

From verse 20 we learn the content of his prayers:

A. That he might never do anything that would bring him shame.

B. That he might never lose his courage.

C. That he might always magnify Christ Jesus.

What was Paul's secret? It was not stoicism. **It was not denial**. It was something far more profound. Paul had discovered that when Christ is truly your life, death loses its power over you. And when death loses its power, you are finally free to live.

This morning, we want to look at four great declarations from this passage and ask: What do they mean for modern believers navigating a world that increasingly pressures us to be quiet about our faith?

Unashamed and Unafraid: The Bold Declaration (v. 20-21)

"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."

This is a statement that defines a life. The word **"ashamed"** here carries the idea of being put to shame, being silenced, or shrinking back in the face of opposition.

Paul is not talking about mere embarrassment. **He's speaking of the moment when standing for Christ costs you something real.**

Notice his confidence is not in himself, it's rooted in two things: the prayers of the Philippians and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In our introduction, Paul says something deeply personal.

He does not want to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Romans 1:16. Peter.

Perhaps like me you want to ask, "Why in the world would anyone be ashamed of the gospel?" If we are honest there is a tendency for all of us to show at times our reluctance to speak up for Jesus.

Paul knew the message of the gospel might not be received enthusiastically, but he refused to be ashamed of its life transforming message.

He is facing the power of Roman authority. He's surrounded by elite soldiers. His life hangs in the balance. He could soften the gospel message and protect himself by staying silent.

But his eager expectation is this: "I will not shrink back." **Not then. Not now. Not ever.**

A Courage That Is Consistent Verse 20b

He wants "full courage." Not partial courage. Not convenient courage. Full courage.

Notice the phrase: *"now as always."*

Paul's courage is not situational. It's consistent. I wish I could say I was always this way, but in my heart, I know it's so much easier to speak among my fellow believers in Christ, and much harder to speak in a secular setting and face criticism.

But from the pages of God's precious Word, Paul says, "now as always."

The consistency of which he speaks is what magnifies Jesus in our lives.

We live in an era of social, cultural, and in many parts of the world, physical pressure to be silent about Jesus. The forms of shame have changed, but the temptation is identical to Paul's:

Will we speak the name of Jesus in our workplace and communities, or will we go silent to preserve our reputation? We live in an age of social media where the pressure is simple: 'Keep your faith private, or be labelled as intolerant, bigoted or racist.

Will we hold to biblical truth in our families and communities, or will we shrink back to avoid conflict? Think of our children and grandchildren.

A silent Christianity produces a fragile faith in the next generation.

Hear the Spirit's call through Paul: Do not be ashamed of Christ.

Be bold wherever the Lord has placed you.

My brothers and sisters, let us never apologize for belonging to Christ, and steadfastly refuse to water down the gospel to make it more acceptable.

If Jesus was not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, should we be ashamed to call Him our Lord?

Paul's eager expectation was full courage. Not recklessness. Not combativeness. But the kind of unhesitating, unashamed boldness that says: whatever happens to my body, Christ will be glorified in it.

What This Means for Us Today

Paul's counsel is a call to prayer. Ask the Spirit of Jesus Christ to supply the boldness you lack.

This is why verse 21 makes sense: *"For to me to live is Christ…"*

There are some verses in Scripture that are so powerful they stop us in our tracks**. Philippians 1:21 is one of them:** *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

The Most Personal Verse in the Bible "To Me to Live Is Christ" (v.21)

This is one of the most compressed, explosive statements in all of Scripture.

If you want Paul's secret of success in just one sentence, here it is from Philippians 1:21, *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* Many of us learned this verse as children in Sunday School.

We've heard it and recited it and memorized it over and over again. And well we should.

I cannot think of any greater joy than to hear God's people say sincerely, *"For to me to live is Christ."*

This verse reveals why Paul did what he did, why he said what he said, and how he found the strength to endure incredible hardship.

This is not a slogan. It's the settled conviction of a man who has lost everything but Christ and discovered that Christ is enough.

Paul writes chained to a Roman guard, awaiting trial before Caesar, uncertain whether he will live or die.

And yet instead of fear, we hear confidence. Instead of despair, we hear hope. Instead of self-preservation, we hear surrender.

From that prison, Paul shows us: His definition of life. His view of death. His purpose for remaining.

And in doing so, he confronts every believer on the face of the planet with one piercing question:

What does it mean for us to live for Christ?

Before us is Paul's personal mission statement. **Notice how personal this is. "To me…"**

Paul is not making a general theological statement. He is describing his own heartbeat.

Most people — honestly and understandably — live for something.

Augustine famously wrote that the human heart is restless until it rests in God. The tragedy is that we settle for lesser lords: The uncomfortable question is this**: What do we actually live for?**

What drives our daily decisions, our anxiety, our hope?

The path "*to live is Christ*" is not effort, it's encounter. Spend time in the Word and in prayer. Not to complete a religious duty, but to meet the risen Christ and be remade by that meeting.

Paul does not say:

"To live is ministry." "To live is influence."

He says, "To live is Christ."

Paul's identity is not rooted in what **he does** for Christ — **but in Christ Himself.**

How do we live "*to live is Christ*" practically, in a society that has little time for God?

Begin each day conscious that you belong to Him and ask him to be Lord over all its events.

You live for Christ when you live a Christ centred daily life, honouring the Lord in your home and community. When you forgive someone who hurt you. When you resist temptation privately.

Practically, this means viewing life as fruitful service to God.

To Die Is Gain: The Staggering Conclusion (v. 21b)

"...and to die is gain."

This second half of the verse only makes sense if the first half is true.

Earlier Paul writes, *"Whether by life or by death."* **Here's the key to his amazing success:**

He wasn't afraid to die. **Can we say the same thing**? Of all the fears that grip the heart of modern man, none is greater than the fear of death.

We hide it. We medicalize it. We distract ourselves from it.

But anxiety about death reveals what we truly worship.

To those whom this world is everything, death is the ultimate loss.

But if Christ is everything to you, death is ultimate gain.

Paul explains this in verses 23-24: "*My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*"

He doesn't say death is good in itself. It's gain because of what awaits: union with Christ in its fullest form.

The New Testament is careful to affirm both the tragedy of death (it is an enemy, the last enemy — 1 Cor. 15:26) and the triumph over it in Christ.

Many who read Philippians 1, wonder how death can be a **"gain"** for anyone.

In his sermon on this text Alexander MacLaren gives the following answers:

1. We lose everything we don't need, we lose the world, the flesh, and the devil. We lose our trials, our troubles, our tears, our fears, and our weaknesses.

2. We keep everything that matters, we keep our personality, our identity, and our knowledge of all that is good.

3. We gain what we never had before, we gain heaven, the saints, the angels, the presence of God, and Jesus himself.

Christians should not fear death, for death is the vehicle that takes us home to God.

As I was preparing this sermon, I came across a most encouraging thought: **"A Christian Is Immortal Until His Work on Earth Is Done."**

Think about that for a moment. Death cannot touch you until God is through with you.

Your days are in God's hands. Nothing touches you apart from His permissive will. When your work is complete, He will call you home — **not one moment sooner.**

If God is God, you will live as long as the Lord intends, and then you will go home to heaven. In that sense, every Christian life is always complete.

Death, the great human enemy, becomes gain. Why?

Because death brings Paul into fuller communion with Christ.

Paul's Conviction The Two Goods 24-26

"But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me"

Remain in the Body. In the end Paul concluded that he wouldn't die just yet but would be spared so that he could minister to the Philippians. Even though he preferred to die so that he could see Jesus, he put aside his own preferences for the good of others.

Here are three positive benefits that would accrue to Paul by postponing his own death:

1. He would experience more of Christ in his life. v 21

2. He would have fruitful labour to perform. v. 22

3. He could help the Philippians grow spiritually. v. 24-26

Paul is saying, "I can't lose either way!"

If I die …it's gain for me!

If I live …it's gain for you!

This is remarkable: Paul frames his continued willingness to live not in terms of his own needs but in terms of service to others. He can weigh life and death in terms of usefulness to the body of Christ.

How do you stop a man like that? You can't! Go ahead and kill him. He'll die with a smile on his face. Put him in prison. He'll preach to the guards. Put him in jail at midnight and he'll start singing Amazing Grace.

Run him out of town, he'll plant a church in the next one. Stone him and he'll use the rocks to build a sanctuary.

Bringing It Together: What This Passage Demands of Modern Christians

1. A Christianity That Costs Something

Paul's boldness was not cheap. He was willing to honour Christ in his body, whether by life or death.

This calls us to examine whether our faith has any skin in the game.

2. A Christianity That Is Integrated, Not Compartmentalized

"To me to live is Christ" means there is no secular zone. Work, family, recreation, politics, relationships, all of it falls under the lordship of Christ.

The modern tendency to have a **"faith compartment"** alongside a **"real life"** compartment, is fundamentally incompatible with Paul's vision.

3. A Christianity That Offers Real Hope to a Dying World

The world around us needs to witness a community of faith that faces suffering and death without despair. It needs to see that what we profess on Sunday mornings, is just as real in our everyday lives.

When the world sees Christians who genuinely believe *"to die is gain,"* it will ask questions that the gospel of Christ alone can answer.

4. A Christianity That Is Rooted in Prayer and Community

Paul's confidence was sustained by the prayers of the Philippians. He did not live or minister in isolation.

The boldness required to be unashamed of Christ in a hostile world is not an individual achievement. it is a communal gift.

We need each other to pray, to encourage, and to model this kind of Christ-centred living.

Conclusion: The Invitation

Paul discovered in a prison cell that when you have nothing but Christ, you discover that Christ is enough. And more than enough. He is gain.

The invitation this morning is simple but costly:

To be the person who can truly say: *"to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."*

That kind of life cannot be shamed.

Because Christ is worth more than life itself, the believer can face every circumstance, suffering, uncertainty, **even death**, without shame, with boldness, and with joy.

Can You Say It?

Paul discovered something in a prison cell that most people never discover in an entire lifetime.

When you have nothing but Christ…you discover that Christ is enough.

And when Christ becomes enough, something remarkable happens.

Fear begins to lose its power. Fear of reputation. Fear of criticism. Fear of suffering.

Even fear of death.

Because the believer who can truly say, *"For to me to live is Christ,"* has entered a life that cannot ultimately lose.

Here is the quiet but searching question the Spirit of God places before us today:

Can you say it? Not recite it. Not admire it. But say it from the centre of your life.

"For to me to live is Christ… and to die is gain."

If you cannot say that today, the invitation of the gospel is simple and glorious.

Come to Christ.

Lay down the lesser things you have built your life upon. Trust the One who died for your sins and rose again. **Discover what Paul discovered long ago:**

That a life centered on Christ is the only life that cannot be shaken, cannot be silenced, and cannot be defeated. **Because Christ is worth more than life itself**.

And when Christ is the centre of your life…you will never be ashamed.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come before You humbled by the truth of Your Word. We thank You for the testimony of the Apostle Paul, who in chains could still say with confidence, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Forgive us we pray, for the times we have been silent when we should have spoken, hesitant when we should have trusted, and ashamed when we should have stood boldly for our Saviour.

Lord, by the help of the Spirit of Jesus, form within us the same courage that filled Paul's heart. **Grant that we may live unashamed of the gospel.**

Teach us what it truly means to say, *"To live is Christ."* Let our thoughts, our words, our decisions, and our priorities reflect that we belong to Him. Until that day, keep us faithful. Use our lives for fruitful labour. Let our witness encourage others and bring progress and joy in the faith to those around us.

And now, as we go from this place, may we walk in boldness, live in holiness, and love our Saviour more deeply each day. We ask all these things in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.