

Philippians Week 1 - To Live is Christ

Introduction

Paul is a prisoner in Rome, writing to the church he and Timothy planted in city of Philippi. Luke and Silas also had a leadership role in Philippi.

Philippi was first a Greek settlement. Then it was taken by Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon. Philippi was then taken by Rome. Rome promptly declared its inhabitants to be Roman citizens, and populated the city with retired Roman soldiers to ensure loyalty to Rome.

The result was a lot of Romans among Greek culture, with a mixture of Greeks and Romans living there. You'll notice a lot of Greek and Roman names as you read because of this.

Letter of Friendship

Philippians follows the format of a "Letter of Friendship", unlike letter of instruction like Galatians or 1 & 2 Corinthians. This letter is of a different style, tone, and format.

He is writing to tell thank them for a gift they sent through Epaphroditus who got sick. He is writing to affirm that he has received that as a friend. He is writing to affirm their friendship, to report his condition, and to encourage them in their friendship with God.

He is tells them how he is doing, that he misses them terribly. **But what he really wants them to know is that he has found the secret to contentment, and wants to share it with them.**

Perhaps the most important fact we need to keep in mind as we read Philippians is that Paul is in a Roman prison when he authors this letter. Roman prisons were typically just holes in the ground, or converted stone cisterns. The prisoners' clothing and food was provided by family, not by the prison. It would have been damp, cold, dirty, and dark.

Paul's Greeting

READ Philippians 1:1-14

Vs 6 - Are you sure of this regarding your brothers and sisters in Christ? This is what we must do for each other. We must carry faith for them, that God will finish his work in them. **So often we do not. We only see how far they have to go, not how great the God is who saved them and promises to complete them.**

Vs. 7-8 - Paul's affection for them as *friends* is obvious here. It overflows. He can't contain it.

There is no "professional distance" here. He is vulnerable enough for the Philippian church to hurt him. This is fueled by their partnership with him in the gospel, as well as his distance from them, and their gift to him through Epaphroditus.

This is how we should feel about each other!

“With the affection of Jesus Christ” - Paul is expressing the affection of Jesus through him. *As meaningful as it is to know that Paul holds them in his heart, it is far more so to know that Jesus does the same. Jesus yearns to be with us.*

Vs. 9-11 - PRAYER - these next 3 verses are a prayer for the people of Philippi. Let’s receive it that way, much like our pastoral prayer each week.

I’ll read it to you, receive it as a prayer.

Vs. 12-14 - Despite the difficult circumstances, God is getting glory and the gospel is advancing because of Paul’s imprisonment.

Christ Proclaimed

Now that the opening salutation is done, Paul has exposed his heart of affection for the Philippian church. This is his driving motivation for writing this letter, and it serves as the continuing motivator as the letter goes on.

Now Paul begins to transition into the content of what he wants to say.

READ Philippians 1:15-18

Here we get a hint that there is the threat of disunity in Philippi. We do not know who these people are that are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, but Paul addresses the question right from the beginning.

He doesn’t shy away from calling a spade a spade. However, he is careful to show how to respond - rejoice that Christ is preached. Undoubtedly, if Christ was not being preached they would get the “Galatians treatment”. Here, he doesn’t do that. The gospel is going out, and that’s the point. Even if it’s for the wrong reasons.

NOTE: this is the rubrik Paul uses to determine the value of things. Is Christ being proclaimed? Then it’s valuable. Even his imprisonment. Even people opposing him. We will see in the next few verses, that this is also what gives his own life meaning.

To Live is Christ

READ Philippians 1:19-26

The central thought here is found in Vs 21, “for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

There are two parts: 1) the meaning of life, 2) the meaning of death

The meaning of life is to give honor to Jesus (vs 20). We exist to magnify the glory of Christ. To proclaim him and worship him.

The meaning of death is, that to be dead is to be present with Christ. Your death is about Jesus. In that way, death is better than life UNLESS being alive (in the flesh) is at the will of Jesus who has made you his ambassador.

At no point does Paul leave room for life or death being about us. But he also doesn't separate life, or death, from his joy.

If he stays, it means fruitful labor for him and working for the joy of his friends. If he dies, it means getting his greatest desire: to be with Christ.

This is not begrudging service!

Paul's confidence and hope in the face of such persecution and possible death, comes from the way he has been living his life up to this point. He has counted his life as nothing in and of itself. His life's only value comes from proclaiming Christ and worshipping Christ. That's. It.

Paul isn't living for anything that can be destroyed by death. He isn't clinging to his life in the flesh, which is the only thing death can take.

Die Like You Live

A healthy attitude about death begins with a healthy attitude about life. Materialism, selfishness, covetousness, pride, bitterness... they all produce the rotten fruit of the fear of death. **Fear, anxiety, or worry about death is a strong indicator that your treasure is piling up in the wrong place.**

Live Like You're Going to Die

There's also a point to be made in the other direction. Paul's ability to endure this present pain with joy stems, at least in part, from his belief that to be with Christ is gain **OVER ANY POSSIBLE PRESENT GAIN TO HIM PERSONALLY.**

In other words, his hope for personal relief is in his death. He isn't holding out hope that this present pain will end. He thinks it might. But his joy and his hope for relief is in his being with Christ after his death. **He openly acknowledges that he'd be better off dead. But it isn't about him!**

Your heavenly citizenship determines your earthly one.

So how you live, will inform how you feel about your death. And how you view your death, will inform how you feel about your life - especially regarding your joy in suffering.

Conclusion: How Then Shall We Live?

I imagine they must have asked, through Epaphroditus, "can we do anything for you, Paul? How can we help you?"

This is Paul's answer. This is what they can do to best encourage him.

READ Philippians 1:27-28

STAND FIRM - BE UNIFIED IN PROCLAIMING CHRIST

This is first point in Paul's "secret to peace". **Live your life for the glory of Christ by proclaiming him to each other, and put your hope for comfort and ease into your eternal future with Jesus.**

Are you afraid of death? Do you refuse to talk about it?

Are you living your life for yourself? Are you piling up your treasure in the wrong place?