

# Live for the gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's prepare our hearts. Let's again ask God for his help. Father, I pray, Lord, that I will not be someone who will preach out of envy or rivalry, but rather, Lord, I will be one who will preach out of goodwill, out of delight, out of love, love for you, and love for the gospel, and love for the people.

I just pray, Lord, that indeed this morning we would take what we hear to heart, that it would really impact our lives and our perspective, that we might live differently, that we might live to glorify you as we have just sung.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Two weeks ago, we started with this question, what is the gospel? After all, this is a series on gospel centrality, and you can't make something that you don't know central.

And we saw two weeks ago that the gospel is a trustworthy saying that says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The King of Kings has entered into the creation that he himself made, that he proclaimed as very good, and with great compassion, came to rescue us from continuing to make a mess of our own lives and of the world, and he died and rose again to secure our pardon, to take us away from our self-centeredness, to make us into new people, and empower us to live God-centered lives in the renewed world that he wants to restore to us.

And then last week, we began exploring this notion of gospel centrality. What does it mean to be gospel-centered? And we saw that it's to grasp that we need the gospel to empower our entire Christian lives, rather than just see it as something we use to get into heaven.

[ 2 : 08 ] The gospel is not like a ticket to a concert, where as soon as you hand it over to the ticket person, and you're in the concert hall, then you can throw away the ticket, since it no longer serves any purpose.

Rather, it's more like an engine in a race car. The moment you discard the engine, you cannot jalan at all. And so we have to live from the gospel.

And so we keep the gospel central when we remember that we have now died and are raised with Christ. We're in Christ. That's the identity we've now been given.

We belong to him. That's our status. So we live in light of who we are with Christ as Lord. We are not just saved by faith, but sanctified by faith.

Not trying to do good in our own strength, but out of our union with Christ, who gives us all that we need. As Tim Keller is fond of saying, the gospel is not just the ABCs, but the A to Z of the Christian life.

[ 3 : 19 ] We live from the gospel. But that doesn't exhaust what it means to be gospel-centered. There is still more.

You see, gospel centrality is not just about making the gospel the engine, but also the ultimate goal of the Christian life. It's about making the gospel the number one priority in everything we do.

That's what we're going to see today. To be gospel-centered, we must live for the gospel first and foremost. So travel with me this week to a Macedonian city, a Roman colony called Philippi.

And imagine yourselves in the shoes of the Philippian church. Like our own church, they have a mission partner, one whom they love very dearly.

That mission partner, of course, is the Apostle Paul. And just like we get periodic updates from people like the Roses or Genevieve Wong or Pastor Jimmy Lomasse, they too look forward to hearing from Paul from time to time.

[ 4 : 34 ] And they now receive his latest letter, the one we know as Philippians. And what a joy it is to read the first 11 verses. There, Paul gives thanks to God for them and for their partnership in the gospel together.

He misses them deeply and he prays that the Philippians would continue to grow in love, knowledge, and discernment so that they might be pure and blameless for the glory of God. What an encouragement. But there is also a sense of foreboding. Twice in today's passage, in verses 12 and 19, Paul talks about what has happened to me.

So what has happened to Paul? What are his current circumstances? It's hinted at in the opening verses of Philippians. In 1 verse 7, he talks about how the Philippians fill him with joy whether he is in chains or not.

And looking through today's passage, in verses 13, 14, and 17, we know that he is definitely in chains.

[ 5 : 55 ] Most likely, he's somewhere in Rome, in prison, after sitting under house arrest for a number of years. Something we know from the end of the book of Acts.

He's faced difficulties, of course, before, of course, including another imprisonment, mobs, and even a shipwreck. But this time around, there is a chance Paul might be executed.

Later on in 2 verse 17, he talks about the possibility of him being poured out like a drink offering. So when you know that, what do you expect to hear from Paul as he begins to describe how he's doing?

What do you expect his letter to sound like? Perhaps you expect to hear about prison conditions, the bad food, the harsh guts, the other heartless prisoners.

You expect to hear about how this situation has affected him negatively, how he hopes for his impending trial to go positively, how all of this has impacted ministry adversely.

[ 7 : 12 ] But we get almost none of that in 1 verse 12 to 26. Instead, we discover someone who is gladly and gratefully living for the gospel.

We find someone who understands that he is a sinner saved by grace, with an inheritance that will never fade or perish, and has therefore been set free to make Jesus his all, no matter what.

And Paul wishes the same for us. He desires that we experience the same freedom and delight in living for the gospel. So Paul is going to show us three ways that can happen this morning.

So again, make sure your Bibles are open to Philippians chapter 1 so that we can see them. And here is our first way. Firstly, live to proclaim Christ no matter what.

Notice, what is the first thing Paul wants his readers to recognize? Verse 12. Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has, what, actually served to advance the gospel.

[ 8 : 29 ] That's not what you expected, was it? You would have thought he would have written instead, what has happened to me is a bad thing. What has happened to me is a discouragement.

What has happened to me is a setback for the gospel. But instead, he says, far from being a setback, what has happened is great for the gospel.

His imprisonment is not an obstruction, but an opportunity. How so? Well, Paul says, what is the result of me being put in prison?

Verse 13. It's become clear throughout the whole palace that and to everyone else, I am in chains for Christ. You see, who were the palace guards?

They were the emperor's own elite troops, mostly stationed in Rome. There were 9,000 of them and at any given time, at least one of them would have guarded Paul.

[ 9 : 34 ] And since there are so many of them, no one person has to guard Paul 24-7. they would have rotated on a basically four-hour shift.

So you can just imagine the conversation each time Paul has a new guard. Oh, hello. So, yeah, new prisoner. What are you in for? And immediately Paul replies, ah, glad you asked.

You see, I'm in here because I believe Jesus is the king who has come in to bring in his new kingdom and save sinners. And off Paul goes sharing the gospel.

And what can the guard do but listen? After all, he can't walk away from his posts and keep rotating through the guards and soon all of them would hear about Jesus.

You see, you can shut Paul up in prison but you can't shut his mouth. After all, end of verse 13, Paul is in chains for Christ.

[ 10 : 47 ] He doesn't think that he's in prison because Caesar put him there. Rather, he believes he's in prison because God deliberately put him there to give him another gospel opportunity.

And as the commentators note, that phrase for Christ can also be translated in Christ. So that means it doesn't matter where Paul is, whether in prison or in his living room, because wherever he

is, he's in Christ.

And if he's in Christ, then people cannot help but know about Christ wherever he is. you see, if Paul was not in prison, these guards might have never heard the gospel since they moved within their own tight-knit circles.

But as a result of Paul being put in prison, a whole group of non-Christians who would otherwise never have heard about Christ now have an opportunity to hear about him.

Indeed, it might not have just been heard by the guards, but eventually by the other prison staff as well, the cooks, the cleaners, and so on.

[ 12 : 16 ] As they whispered among themselves, have you heard about prisoner 123 and what he's been saying? So through Paul's imprisonment, the gospel is advanced.

And for Paul, that is what matters most. And I want us to pay special attention to Paul's mindset here.

Remember, he's literally in chains and he could have so easily looked at his circumstances and moan about it. God, I'm in prison.

Why? Why? Why like this one? But what happens when he puts on a pair of gospel centred spectacles? Instead of complaining, he looks at his situation and he says, sure, I'm chained to my guard, but this guard is also chained to me.

So I've got a captive audience. I've got a chance to proclaim Christ. Do you see how when you look at life through a gospel centred lens, that changes your perspective fundamentally?

[ 13 : 43 ] It certainly changed Paul's. Instead of thinking about himself, he's thinking, oh, is there something here that could advance the gospel? is there something here that means unbelievers could hear the gospel?

So let me just pause here and ask, do you look at life through such a gospel lens? When you look at your circumstances, do you just see chains, roadblocks, hindrances?

Or do you see your chains as chains for Christ? Perhaps right now you're looking at certain people in your life.

They could be family, they could be friends, they could be co-workers, and you can't help but say, oh, I wish they were not here.

All they do is make my life hard and miserable. All they do is multiply my problems. Why are there in my life?

[ 14 : 54 ] Why am I chained to them, so to speak? But could it be that God is actually prodding you now to think about them in an entirely different way?

Could he want you to say instead, you know, I am not chained to them, rather they are chained to me. You see, they can't get rid of me so easily, they are my neighbours, they are my family.

And so, if they have to be near me, and I am in Christ, then what an opportunity it is for them to actually hear about Christ.

What an opportunity it is for them to watch my life, and watch my lips, and see Christ there. But that's how God wants us to think.

Because the gospel-centered life is ultimately not about you, or about me, it's about Christ. It's about his gospel.

[ 16 : 04 ] That's why Paul doesn't talk about prison conditions, or any of the other stuff you have expected him to talk about. For him, the thing that matters most is the advance of this life-transforming gospel amongst unbelievers.

Is that what matters most to you? Is that the filter through which you see your life's circumstances? It certainly is Paul's filter.

It's why in verse 14, he rejoices that the believers have become bolder as a result of his imprisonment. After all, that means the gospel gets proclaimed all the more.

It's why verse 18, he rejoices even when some of his rivals want to undermine him while he's out of action.

Though preaching the true gospel, they had bad motives. But Paul says, verse 18, what does it matter? As long as Christ is preached.

[ 17 : 18 ] That's the kind of mindset Paul has. He lives to proclaim Christ no matter what.

Now, of course, it can be hard. Sometimes we look at our job situation or our home situation or our health situation and we think, how can God work through them?

They are tough. And so you feel limited in all sorts of ways. And yet, those very limitations, those very circumstances are the ones God has placed you in.

And so he can still use you to proclaim Christ like Paul. Now, I might have mentioned him before, but a few years ago at my old church in London where my brother still is, there was a Singaporean named Elliot So.

He was a bright young man in his early twenties, with his entire future ahead in front of him. But one day he became very breathless and he was soon diagnosed with stage four sarcoma, cancer.

[ 18 : 40 ] And he began battling his cancer bravely for the next nine months before finally passing away in September 2019. Now, before he passed on, he wrote this incredible message.

You can find it in full online, but some of which I will read it out to you now. And it's appearing on the screen. This is what Elliot writes. It saddens me that I have to say goodbye to everyone that I have known and been close to.

And while you can be sad for me, I hope it will not affect you negatively in any way. Because I have been experiencing great joy amidst all this suffering for the past nine months.

And then just a little further down, he says, after going through nine months of suffering, I can say that tasting the bitter metal taste in your mouth from the chemo poison is truly horrific.

I would really not want any of my friends to experience it. It's like licking a melted AA battery in an alarm clock. But what is worse is the thought of hell and how the friends I care and love, who are not reconciled with God, are heading there.

[ 19 : 58 ] It truly breaks my heart that if it did happen, that they would be tasting far worse chemo poison for eternity. And I really don't want that to happen.

I have no worries about the future or whether I'm healed or not because I know that there are far greater things after death for me. I don't know if you'll respond positively or negatively to this, but it's out of genuine love that I really have to share this with you.

I really hope you would take time to consider it. And then he shares the gospel in his message and then towards the end he says this. I have tasted poison and I really don't want my friends and family to taste it for eternity.

This has been a strong burden in my heart for many years and it's because I love my friends and family that I really want them to reconcile with God.

I would rather have my friends listen to the gospel and make a decision to accept Jesus in their lives than for my cancer to be healed.

[ 21 : 14 ] Do you see how Elliot used even his cancer diagnosis to proclaim Christ? He saw it as the most important thing. He wanted to live for the gospel even in his illness.

If you are a non-Christian here today then I hope you realize that's how precious Christ is to true Christians. And he didn't just want non-Christians to hear about Jesus, he wanted the Christians to live for the gospel too.

This is what he also wrote, it's not on the screen. To Christians, he wrote, my desire for you is for you to continue prioritizing gospel work over all other worldly things.

And doing that involves commitment to faithful Bible teaching to shape our mindsets and to continue standing firm in our faith in Jesus. And as a result, he had the same impact as Paul in verse 14.

And because of my chains, or in Elliot's case, because of my illness, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

[ 22 : 35 ] How incredible is that? Prison and cancer led to bolder evangelism. That's the impact of a gospel-centered life.

Here is someone who lived to proclaim Christ no matter what. Is that how you live today? So that is one way.

But we now come to a second way. Secondly, live to magnify Christ no matter what. In verses 18 to 21, Paul now looks not just to his present circumstances, but towards his future.

And just as he rejoices in his present situation, and in verse 18, he will continue to rejoice even as he looks ahead.

Why? After all, he has much to be uncertain about. He does not know what will happen when he finally stands before a Roman judge. And as I'm sure we all know, uncertainty can breed anxiety, can't it?

[ 23 : 54 ] Perhaps this morning, you're anxious about what lies ahead in the future. You're anxious about something at work, or something to do with your family, or a relationship.

Perhaps you're even anxious about matters of life and death as you battle health issues. And that is where Paul is at.

He's facing the prospect of being condemned and executed. But as he faces this uncertainty, as he faces this prospect of death, what does he say?

What is his confidence? Verse 21, For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Let that sink in for a moment. This is probably one of the most famous verses in the Bible, but perhaps familiarity has dulled its impact.

[ 24 : 59 ] But Paul boils down his entire life to this very essence. He's saying, when I live for the gospel, when Christ is at the center of my life, when I live to magnify him, then no matter what, I win.

Because when the gospel is at the center, that means life is Christ to me, as I more fully know and serve him day after day.

But death is also Christ to me, when I shall finally see him face to face and enjoy him.

You see, here's the deal. Anything that you live for that is not Christ will eventually be taken away from you. What are you living for currently?

Is it your work or career? Is it your family or children? Is it your pleasure or legacy? And are you living in such a way that Christ is simply a means to an end, a stepping stone to the thing that you are really living for?

[ 26 : 25 ] Back in verses 15 and 17, there were some people who were preaching Christ out of envy and rivalry and selfish ambition. In other words, they were not looking to live for Christ but simply using him for the advancement of their own selves.

They went to church, they even evangelized others, but they were not gospel-centered because something else was at the center of their lives.

But here's the problem, whatever you put first other than Christ will not last. At the moment of death, it will be taken away from you.

It will be gone. You lose it all. But if Christ is first in your life, that's a different story. When you die, you don't lose Christ.

You gain more of him. that's what Paul is getting at in verse 19. You see, he's facing uncertain circumstances, but there is one thing he's absolutely certain of.

[ 27 : 42 ] What has happened to me, he says, will turn out for my deliverance. What does he mean? Does he mean that he's actually certain, after all, that God will take him out a prison?

The clue is when we realise that Paul is actually quoting the Old Testament. He quotes the exact Greek rendering of Job 13, verse 16.

In Job 13, Job is responding to his friends who have been telling him that his sufferings are a result of his sin. But Job says, when he stands in God's courtroom, on the final day, he will be vindicated. That's the deliverance he's talking about. And Paul is saying very much the same thing. He says, I'm suffering now, I'm in prison, I might not get out, but that's fine.

Or if it was Elliot who was writing it, he might say, I'm suffering now, I'm in hospital, I might not survive cancer, but that's fine. Because all this is part of my journey to God's courtroom, where I can stand confidently, knowing that no one can accuse me, because I have Christ as my advocate.

[ 29 : 11 ] And that's why verse 20, I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, because Christ has taken it all away.

that's why verse 20 again, he will have sufficient courage, so that now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

If it is true that to live is Christ, and to die is gain, then it makes perfect sense to magnify Christ above everything else.

it makes perfect sense to live for the gospel no matter what. So, will you live for the gospel in this way?

Will you make Jesus the center? Imagine now that there is a camera that could follow you 24-7. It can even broadcast your inner thoughts, and this is being broadcast on the internet.

[ 30 : 16 ] If a viewer followed you throughout the week, what would they think is at the center of your life? And you and I know that far too often, the answer will not be Jesus.

Our hearts are not oriented in the right way. And so at this point, remember the gospel again. Remember that in Christ, God is not here to condemn you for your wandering hearts. But, he is here to say, come back to the true path. Magnify Christ, because nothing else can deliver you and give you as much gain.

As an older commentator, John Eady puts it, make the God of Christ, the love of Christ, the power of my life, the will of Christ, the law of my life, and the glory of Christ, the end goal of my life. Live to magnify Christ no matter what. Then thirdly, live to serve Christ no matter what.

[ 31 : 51 ] In verses 22 and 23, Paul continues to ponder on the two possible outcomes his life could take. And what is important to realize here is that he's not contemplating an actual choice he can make.

It's out of his control whether he will live or die. Rather, he is describing an inward dilemma. He is verbalizing to us the two directions that his heart is torn in.

On the one hand, dying is very attractive. Verse 23, I'm torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

So do you see how much Paul desires Christ? The best part of the gospel is not simply that we will be in a new creation, safe from hell. It is that we will be in Christ's presence fully.

And Paul has worked so hard, it wouldn't be a surprise for him to entertain the thought that, actually, going to rest with Christ would be the best option.

[ 33 : 06 ] But on the other hand, if he gets to live, it's also very attractive. Why? Well, look at verse 22.

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. He likes living, not just because he gets to take a few more breaths in this world, but because he gets to serve Christ.

Now, here is the mindset of a gospel-centered life. Serving Christ is why he lives. And in the end, how does Paul decide which is better?

He likes both paths, to die is gain, to live is Christ. But which will he ultimately go for? Look at verses 24 and 25.

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.

[ 34 : 23 ] This is how Paul thinks. He says, In the end, my overriding priority is the advance of the gospel.

I want the gospel to be proclaimed amongst unbelievers, but I don't stop there. Just as much, I want the gospel to progress in the lives of my fellow believers.

Do you see that in verse 25? That is why Paul wants to keep living. He wants to serve Christ, and he serves Christ by serving his fellow believers.

He puts their growth in Christ first. He doesn't ask, What is best for me? Rather, he asks, What is best for you?

If one way is better for you, even if it's worse for me, I'll go that way. Because that is what Christ did.

[ 35 : 34 ] Just because I'm close to death, doesn't stop me from wanting to serve. And so, my brothers and sisters, here's how you know if a church is a gospel-centered church.

Are the people in the church ultimately concerned about each other's spiritual growth? Are they concerned that we are making progress in the faith and grief when we are not?

Do you make decisions based on what is best for Christ and his church? Or make decisions simply based on what is most convenient for you?

Well, let me encourage us today to desire and work for the progress of your brother and sister's walk in Christ.

Have you taken Bible overview before, and you know that it would be very good for a particular friend to take it? Persuade them. Do you see a brother or a sister making some unwise decisions that you know will hinder their walk with God?

[ 36 : 49 ] Well, don't stay quiet. Make an appointment to have a gentle conversation with them. And don't let the age gap stop you. Don't let the fact that you are over 60 stop you from being interested in the teenager from our youth group and to encourage him or her.

And don't let the fact that you are 20 years younger than an older person stop you from correcting that person if it is really necessary. Because as you do so, you are not just working for their progress in the faith.

Look at verse 25 again. You are working for their joy. Because it is when people make Jesus Christ their very centre, that they can find joy independent of their circumstances.

Just like Paul. It is for your joy that I went into full-time ministry in the first place. Why I bother to take time to study and to preach the word.

And this is what church should be all about. Church is not about recruiting people so that we can have more church activities. No.

[ 38 : 12 ] Church is about a commitment to help one another know Jesus more and more and experience his joy more and more.

As verse 26 puts it, it is to help each other better boast in Christ and Christ alone. You see, what does it mean to live a gospel-centred life in the end?

Here's what it means. It's to live to proclaim Christ no matter what. It's to live to magnify Christ no matter what. It's to live to serve Christ by serving his people no matter what.

It's to make the gospel the number one priority above everything else in your life. It's to live for the gospel. Do you see that's what Paul cares about?

He doesn't care about imprisonment. He only cares about the advance of the gospel. He doesn't care that his rivals are preaching the gospel to undermine him.

[ 39 : 25 ] He only cares the gospel is proclaimed. He doesn't care whether he lives or dies. He simply cares that Christ be exalted either way. He doesn't care that he doesn't get to be with Christ just yet if that means he can help others grow in Christ.

He lives for the gospel. So let's do the same. And as we finish well let me introduce you to a big word that I learned recently.

It's called pussy lanimity. P-U-S-I-L-L-A-N-I-M-I-T-Y. That's quite a mouthful to say isn't it?

And it simply means smallness of soul. If you have pussy lanimity you are someone who is satisfied with the status quo and you never grow, change or are challenged because you avoid getting committed to anything that would call you to sacrifice, goodness or love.

You want God to love you but you don't want to be changed by him. And that's why your soul is small because you are someone who shrinks back from all that God has called you to be.

[ 40 : 49 ] And so my call at the end of this sermon is don't go down that path. Don't be such a person. Yes, living for the gospel can be scary at times, hard at times, incredibly challenging at times.

But God has so designed it that when you live for the gospel your soul grows rather than shrinks. So enlarge your vision.

Don't live for the trivial stuff that gains you nothing in the end. Live for the gospel.