

A Shared Cause

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- [0 : 00] Let's ask again for help from the Lord. Let's pray. Faithful God, you who began a good work in your people, send your spirit now to enlighten our hearts.
- ! And as we open your word, let our love abound more and more with knowledge, insight, and discernment, so that we may recognize what matters most.
- And bear the fruit of righteousness for the glory of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Let me just check the mic, is it okay?
- Alright? Yeah, great. Now, I wonder if you have a kind of life mantra, a short saying that quietly shapes the way you live. Some people do.
- Steve Jobs certainly did. His was simple. Stay hungry. Stay foolish. Stay hungry. Stay foolish.
- [1 : 06] He picked it up from a magazine he read as a young man. On the back cover of its final issue was a photo of an empty country road, and underneath it was that farewell message.
- Just four words. Stay hungry. Stay foolish. Job's took that to heart. It shaped the way he lived. It explains why he dropped out of college so he could take classes that fascinated him, like calligraphy.
- It explains why, after being fired from Apple, he didn't retreat, but started again, founding companies like Pixar. It explains why he was never content with safe or comfortable work, only work he truly loved.
- That single line became a kind of compass for his life. His mantra explained his choices. And years later, in his famous commencement address at Stanford University, that's what he wished for the graduates, too.
- Stay hungry. Stay foolish. Stay hungry. Stay hungry. Now, here is the question I want us all to sit with this morning. What should be the Christian's mantra?
- [2 : 28] What conviction can hold our life together? Because when we open Philippians 1, we discover that Paul did indeed have a mantra, something that held his life together.
- You see, when we open Philippians 1, we don't just meet Paul at a moment of success or freedom. We meet him in prison.
- His future is uncertain. His reputation is under attack. His life is on the line. And yet, he doesn't seem flustered.
- On the contrary, he is pretty composed. Joyful, even. It's like he is absolutely clear on why he is here on earth and he is fully leaning into it.
- And when we patiently dig into this passage, we begin to discover why. Because tucked away in verse 21 is a little sentence that stands out.
- [3 : 35] One that operates as his life mantra and makes sense of everything he says and does. It goes like this. For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.
- And just as Steve Jobs wanted others to adopt his mantra, so does Paul.

He wants us to understand that to live is Christ is the constant refrain of every Jesus follower. But what does that actually look like?

What does a life shaped by that conviction sound like when circumstances are hard, when freedom is gone, when death is a real possibility?

If this is going to be our mantra, we need to know. So to answer that question, Paul now invites us to watch his life.

[4 : 45] And that's what we'll do. This morning, we'll walk through this passage in two halves, verses 12 to 18, then verses 19 to 26.

And each time, we will ask, where is Paul's focus? And by the time we are done, I hope we don't just understand Paul's mantra, we will make it our own.

We will all say, this is our common cause. So let's start with verses 12 to 14. Paul is in prison.

That's clear in verse 13. And Roman prisons were not all the same. Yes, some prisoners were simply confined at home. But others were thrown into these dark, filthy cells.

One so unventilated and overcrowded and crawling with rats, you wouldn't wish it on your worst enemy. In short, prison wasn't just miserable.

[5 : 49] It could be deadly. It was clearly the last place you could imagine anything good happening. So if this is where Paul is, what would you expect him to say to his friends?

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me is such a horrible thing. What has happened to me requires your urgent support.

What has happened to me has brought our mission to a dead end. That's what I might have said, which is why verse 12 comes as such a shock.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. Think about that.

When Pastor Raymond Corr was abducted and presumably thrown into a secret cell somewhere, is that what any of us would have said? When the leaders of prominent underground churches in China were detained recently, is that what we would have concluded?

[6 : 58] I think not. So why does Paul think so differently? Because verse 13 looked at the effect of his imprisonment.

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. You see, now that Paul is in jail, who are his ever-present companions?

Answer? The palace guard. The elite Roman soldiers. They were the ones guarding Paul round the clock, and since they would rotate on four-hour shifts, Paul likely got to know quite a few of them.

And like it or not, if Paul wants to talk to them, they have to listen to him. Ironically, although Paul is their captive, these guards are actually his captive audience.

They've got no choice. And after a while, they all know what Paul is about. He only has one subject, one focus, one person he really wants to talk about.

[8 : 12] Jesus. He really is in chains for Christ, but not in the way we first thought. His chains serve to advance the gospel.

And for Paul, that is what is most important. Not whether he's in prison or not. Did you notice he almost never mentions that detail?

It's almost as if the setting is beside the point. What does it matter whether he's in a synagogue or public hall or jail?

As long as the gospel can gain a hearing, that's what matters. And here is what's even better. Paul now has access to the very people who would never step foot in a church.

I'm talking about those tough as nails, battle-weary, cynical soldiers who definitely are not showing up on a Sunday morning.

[9 : 15] But now they get a daily sermon. And guess what? Against all odds, some of them do respond. Later on, 4 verse 22 mentions that some in Caesar's household do believe.

Now this probably wasn't what Paul had in mind when he originally mapped out his evangelistic strategy. But as long as the gospel is advanced, he takes it as a blessing.

But that isn't the only fruit of Paul's imprisonment. For look what has happened to the church. Verse 14. Verse 14. Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Now, reading that verse, perhaps we don't fully realize how incredible that is. You see, don't forget who is in the opposition.

This is Rome we're talking about. This is an empire with the most ruthless and efficient military in the world. This is a kingdom that has no hesitation in putting down anything it deems a threat.

[10 : 37] So you would think that all the Christians would now shut up given that they have moved against Rome. And yet, the opposite happens.

Why? Because, as these believers watch Paul declaring, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain? As they see him walk the talk, they become confident in the Lord.

After all, if the gospel is true, what can Rome do that Christ cannot overturn? What does Paul, or any believer for that matter, have to fear if Christ himself has conquered death?

They've begun to see the gospel not as just some theoretical statement, but as something they can take to heart. And so some of them step up.

Since Paul can't go around speaking about Christ anymore, they do it in his place. Others have simply been inspired by him. Seeing Paul willing to suffer for Christ, even to the point of chains, have given them courage.

[11 : 51] His imprisonment hasn't silenced them. It strengthened their resolve. No wonder Paul is delighted. His perseverance in imprisonment has made the Lord real to them and has made them ever more bold to advance the gospel.

So my brothers and sisters, let's pause here and ask that bigger question. where is Paul's focus throughout? It's outward, isn't it?

He's not focused on his own suffering, but on what's happening beyond himself. In particular, he's focused on the outward advance of the gospel.

the gods are hearing, the believers are emboldened, and in both cases, Christ is being proclaimed to the world.

That, for Paul, is what matters most. That's the cause he lives for. That's what living for Christ is all about. What about us?

[13 : 06] Is that what we live for? You see, my friends, in this series, one of my aims is to help you understand what it means to be a Christian. And Paul is clear.

To be a Christian is to say to live as Christ, and to say to live as Christ is to be fully committed to making Christ known whatever our circumstances.

It is to have our perspective so changed that even our trials can become potential gospel opportunities. Now, that is not to downplay those same trials.

Paul, I'm sure, didn't enjoy prison. But, because his mantra is to live is Christ, he's reframed his entire situation as a platform for the gospel.

And in fact, that's what my friend, Marianne, who works for Scripture Union in West Malaysia, does as well. You see, Marianne is visually impaired.

[14 : 14] To get around, she has to rely on grab. But instead of seeing her ailment as a thorn, she sees it as a blessing. Because it means that she often gets into the most interesting conversations with her drivers.

Now, recently, one of her drivers, seeing her condition as she got into the car, sympathize with her. She said, oh, lady, maybe it's better to be blind. That way, you don't have to see all the bad things in this world.

To which Marianne immediately replied, sir, blind people face terrible things too. The world is broken for all of us, but I'm thankful because I once was blind, but now I see.

The driver was startled, oh, you mean you're not blind after all? To which Marianne replied, ah, that's actually a line from Amazing Grace.

Do you know what that is? And that opened the door to talk about the gospel, one of many such conversations she has had. For Marianne, her blindness has become a common way in to tell others about Jesus.

[15 : 32] Like Paul, I'm sure that this is not her original evangelistic strategy, but because her mantra is, to live is Christ, she never grumbles, but lets her impairment open doors for the gospel.

And those stories challenge us, don't they? they should force us, firstly, to ask, am I most concerned about the outward advance of the gospel?

Has experiencing Christ's love in my life made me want to share that love with others? And then it should also force us, secondly, to ask, what has God put in my life that might serve as a platform for the gospel?

It might be something that you haven't thought of before, something you've previously seen only as a burden, like post-imprisonment or Marian's blindness.

But if you pray, perhaps God will show you what that is and how he can use it redemptively.

[16 : 51] But if we make our lives all about the advance of the gospel, wouldn't some people not like that and maybe try to stop us? Might not that result in some opposition?

True. But even if opposition comes, we don't have to worry because the Lord will make sure the gospel will advance. That has been the testimony of church history again and again, hasn't it?

more than half a century ago in China, the communists said no missionaries can come in and try to crush the church.

Today, it is estimated China will be the most Christian nation in the world by 2030. In Cuba, Fidel Castro tried to do the same.

And yet, the number of Methodists skyrocketed from 6,000 to 50,000 by the end of his era. In Iran, as we heard earlier, the current regime has harshly persecuted Christians and done all they can to keep out the Christian message.

[18 : 04] And yet, some researchers estimate more Iranians have come to Christ in the last few decades compared to the previous 13 centuries combined.

You see, whenever people try to wipe out the gospel, it often has the opposite effect. That's what verses 13 to 14 show us because that is when God loves to work and make the gospel come alive amongst his people so that they will be bold like never before.

And that's why, in the end, it is actually no risk to make the gospels advance our shared costs. Because while, yes, there might be ups and downs, and yet, as Paul himself says later in 2 Timothy 2, God's word ultimately cannot be chained.

And do you notice how utterly committed Paul is to this cause of proclaiming Christ to the world? He is so committed he doesn't even care if it comes at the cost of his own reputation.

Because in verses 15 to 17, we discover that not everyone who is preaching Christ is doing so with pure motives. Indeed, verse 15, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry.

[19 : 31] Now, it is important to be clear at this point. These guys are not false teachers. Paul says they really do preach Christ. the gospel they preach is the real gospel.

But they have impure motives. Perhaps they are preaching Christ because they think that's the best way to make a name for themselves. Perhaps they are in ministry because they want to be the most important person in the church hierarchy.

They have the selfish ambition of some sort. And it is not just that they want to build themselves up. They also want to tear Paul down.

Did you notice in verse 17 that in preaching Christ, they are hoping to stir up trouble for him? It's not clear exactly what they were hoping to do.

Perhaps they wanted to rub salt into the wound that somehow by preaching all the more while Paul was stuck on the sidelines, people would slowly stop thinking about him and start turning their attention to these new voices instead.

[20 : 48] Or perhaps they thought their preaching would make things worse for Paul. That drawing attention to the gospel might only bring him harsher treatment from the authorities as he awaited trial.

Paul doesn't go into the details, but he does make clear he knows their true motives and he knows they are tainted. And yet, once again, his attitude comes as a shock.

Because what does he say? I'm so angry. I'm really frustrated. so happy. No, verse 18, he says, I rejoice.

Because what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. You see, once again, Paul's life mantra determines how he reacts.

Because his biggest desire is to see the gospel advance in the world, he is happy when he sees that happening, even if he becomes collateral damage along the way.

[22 : 05] Imagine being one of Paul's friends. You say to him, Paul, these guys are destroying your reputation. Hey, you want me to go and sort them out? And Paul's reply to you would simply be, Hey, no worries.

Isn't it great that people are all hearing about Jesus? That they will know that they can be set free from their sins? That they might know the one who can fix all creation? That's his outlook.

That's how he lives. Now, don't get the wrong idea. He isn't endorsing envy and rivalry. Next week, he will begin addressing exactly those kind of issues.

But for him, whenever even bad things like false motives advance the gospel that is still something to rejoice in. So let's pause once again, and this time ask ourselves, if what happened to Paul happened to me, is this how I would react?

And what does my reaction reveal about who or what I am really living for? Paul? Because here's the thing, if someone regularly attacked our reputation, or tried to rub salt into the wound, I think most of us would be mad.

[23 : 35] We'll be on the phone, we'll be on social media, we'll be defending our name. But Paul doesn't have a name to protect, he only has a king to proclaim.

him. You see, when your mantra is to live as Christ, you become dangerously free.

You become a person who can't be insulted because you don't have an ego. You become a person who can't be stopped by prison because your message is for everyone.

You become a person who cares more about Christ being known than about being known ourselves. I was recently challenged by something John Hanna, a well-known church historian, once said.

He shared that his greatest ambition was to raise children who would have a strong enough sense of worth that they could be called to work as missionaries in a remote village somewhere and not ever be known because their overriding aim would simply be to proclaim Christ to the world, not anything else.

[25 : 00] That's what we're getting at when we say our life mantra is to live is Christ. to be able to celebrate whenever the gospel is advanced, even if it's happening at the church down the road and not ours, even if it's happening in the ministry over there and not in our ministry over here, because what matters is that the gospel is being advanced.

so, we've seen Paul focus outwards, towards the world, hearing Christ proclaim, no matter the cost to him.

Yet, if we keep watching his life in this passage, we discover his focus doesn't stop there. So, as we move into the second half of this passage, let's keep asking that question.

where is Paul's focus now? And, if I were in his shoes, my focus would be on my immediate future.

You see, Paul isn't just in prison, he's also facing potential execution. He's waiting to face a Roman judge, and when he does, he has no idea if that will be his last day on earth.

[26 : 27] So, how does he face this rather grim situation? Once again, Paul surprises us. Look at the end of verse 18.

He rejoices. He's happy. Why? Does Paul have some sort of morbid death wish? Well, he tells us in verse 19, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Now, that is an interesting word, deliverance. Does that mean Paul thinks he will be rescued from prison after all? That there's actually no chance he will be executed?

A couple of commentators think so. But most likely, Paul isn't talking about physical rescue. He's talking about something deeper, ultimate vindication.

Why might I say that? Because Paul is being deliberate in his choice of words. In verse 19, he is echoing something Job once said.

[27 : 43] Now, you might know, throughout the book of Job, there's this guy called Job, obviously, and he's been suffering through no fault of his own. But every once in a while, in the midst of his pain and confusion, he will express his confidence in God.

And he says in Job 13, verse 16, this will turn out for my deliverance. In other words, even in his suffering, Job trusted that in the end, when he stands before God, the Lord will vindicate him.

And Paul now picks up on that same exact phrase in Job 13 and applies it to his situation. Like Job, he is a righteous man suffering unjustly.

And like Job, Paul is confident he will ultimately not be put to shame. His story will not end in defeat, whether he dies or not.

Indeed, verse 20, he believes that whether he lives or dies, Christ's greatness will be clearly seen. He is deeply confident that God will bring vindication.

[29 : 04] Now, isn't that incredible? survival? How can a man be so indifferent to his own survival? How can he be equally okay with a prison release or an executioner sword?

And how can he be so confident God's purposes for his life will be accomplished? It's because he has done the maths. He's looked at both options and he has realised that for him, there is no such thing as a losing move.

If he is released from prison and lives, then, well, to live is Christ. He can keep loving Christ and serving Christ.

That's verse 22. And if he is executed, then, well, to die is gain. because if he is in Christ, he will go to be with Christ.

That's verse 23. And one day he will rise again as Jesus did. It really is a no-lose situation.

[30 : 19] Well, no wonder verse 21 has become his life mantra. I mean, how can you intimidate a guy like that? If the Roman judge lets him go, he will preach to the world.

If the Roman judge sentences him to death, he will be with his king. Every move he makes is a winning one. Well, that's what happens when Christ becomes your saviour and your lord.

When you say, to live is Christ, even death is gain. So, verse 21 is perfectly formulated.

it. But notice how if you changed it in any way, it will fall apart. And here, let me quote a Philippian scholar named Brandon Zerlip at Lange because he puts it so brilliantly.

He says, notice, if you swap out Christ for anything else, the equation crumbles. So, let's say, to live is popularity and prestige.

[31 : 28] You can lose that and if you do, it's gone. It's terrible loss. So, if you lose popularity and prestige, then to die is great loss.

Or say, to live is pleasure or wealth, then death is terrible loss. Even if, apart from Christ, Christ, you said, to live is friendship or family.

Well, apart from Christ, death is loneliness and separation forever. To live is Christ, to die is gain. As it stands, it is unbreakable.

But if you swap out Christ for anything else, death is not gain. It is perfectly balanced. But if you take out Christ and try to put anything else in it, it fails.

As it stands, though, it is stronger than gravity, it is stronger than death. To live is Christ. Therefore, I can also say that to die is gain.

[32 : 42] God is God's focus. God's focus is God's focus. Is it on his prison?

His uncertain future? The threat of death? No. His eyes are fixed on Christ. And while in the first half of our passage, Paul's focus was outward, here in these verses, his focus is upward on the Lord, on the risen Christ, on the one who holds life and death in his hands.

And when your focus is shifted there, everything changes. Your present life and even your death takes on a completely different meaning.

because you are no longer measuring life by how much pleasure you are currently experiencing, but by what God is doing in and through you.

And not only that, your decisions change too. Because when Christ and the gospel become the filter through which you live, comfort and self-interest no longer dominate.

[34 : 01] Have a look again at Paul in verses 22 and 23. Paul now lets us in on his inner thoughts and he is saying, you know what?

Honestly, I would prefer to go die and be with Christ in heaven. But, if I continue living, I can keep serving Christ here on earth.

And so, what do I choose? Verse 24 tells us, he will keep living because in the end, it is not about him.

In verse 25, he says he will continue to live for your progress and joy in the faith. That is the labor he is referring to, the work of helping others grow in Christ so that the church, the people he loves, can experience the joy and maturity that comes from God's gospel.

And I know I have said this a few times in the sermon already, but let me say it one more time. Isn't that just incredible? Because let's be honest, our natural instinct is to look inward.

[35 : 26] When we face a big decision, our first question is usually, what's in it for me? Which path makes me more comfortable? Which choice secures my future?

But Paul says, if for me to live is Christ, then my upward focus will shape my outward choices too.

It will cause me to ask what is best, not for myself, but for Christ's work and for the people he loves.

And notice how this is all rooted in the gospel. Paul isn't trying to be a good man or forcing himself to be selfless. He lives this way because, verse 19, Christ's spirit is at work in him.

Because Christ has made him a new creation with new desires and new priorities. And isn't that such a wonderful thing to live for?

[36 : 34] You see, whenever we choose to live consistently for ourselves, we are not actually nice people to be around.

You know that, don't you? Being with people who are so preoccupied with their own wants and their own needs can suck the energy right out of you. But imagine, if your goal in life is for people to leave your presence feeling more joyful in Jesus, whatever circumstances they are facing.

Now, wouldn't that be the most worthwhile use of your gifts and talents? Wouldn't it be amazing if you arrive at heaven's door one day and Jesus is there and all around him are people saying, oh, look, it's you, it's the guy, the guy who made me more happy in Jesus.

That's what Paul labored for. That's what it meant for him to say, to live is Christ. Not just an outward focus, but ultimately an upward focus.

where he and his fellow believers could encourage one another to keep gazing at Jesus and say, isn't he wonderful?

[38 : 00] So, here we are, brothers and sisters, at the heart of Paul's letter from prison. In verses 12 to 18, we saw his focus turn outward to the gospel advancing in the world, no matter the cost to his freedom or reputation.

And then in verses 19 to 26, we saw it turn upward, fixed on Christ, where life means serving him and death means being with him.

And notice how these two directions are inseparable. The upward gaze fuels the outward mission. people. And together, that's what it means to say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

It's not just a slogan, it is a life, a shared cause, a liberating truth that enables us to pour ourselves out for Jesus and his people.

So let me ask you one final time, where is your focus today? Is it on Christ?

[39 : 18] Upward? Outward? And sideways towards those he loves? If not, today is the day to refocus.

perhaps you've never truly made Christ your life mantra, or maybe you have let other things, comfort, reputation, success, creep in as the center.

Well, come to him now, confess it, receive his forgiveness, and let his spirit work in you, the same confidence Paul had. And for all of us who named Christ as Lord, well, let's comment this week, and this year really, to live it out.

Take verse 21 with you, print it out, put it on your dashboard, make it the lock screen on your phone, and whenever you face a choice, or a trial, or a difficult person, or an unexpected opportunity to share Christ, ask yourself, if Christ is my life right now, how does that change the way I respond?

Then go for it, and let Christ be the biggest cause we live for. Let's pray. pray. I'll give us a few seconds, maybe just to let Philippians 1 sing into us, and then I will lead us in responding to God.

[41 : 13] Heavenly Father, as we come this morning, Father, we want to feel the wake of your words. Please, Lord, by your spirit, would you indeed help us to hear the challenge, if indeed we need to hear that challenge.

Help us to consider our own lives carefully and honestly, to ask ourselves whether it is indeed true that for us to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Father, we thank you so much that even when we know that we sometimes stumble, we don't always live as we should, and yet in Christ, you offer us much grace, and so Father, we pray that we will receive your grace, we rely on your spirit, and indeed we would make that our life mantra, that we would want to work for the progress and the joy in the faith of others.

So, Father, please help us to consider how we can do that in our own lives, specifically this week, whether in work, with our friends, with our family, wherever we may be, help us to live for you.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.