

We are in the sixth week this morning of a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which I am calling “To live is Christ and to die is gain.” a line from last week’s passage. Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul sometime between 60-64 AD to a church in Philippi that he had a deep affection for, which he had started about 10-15 years earlier. This morning we will be in verses 27-30 of chapter 1, but I want to set the context first. Paul has expressed his affection for this church, prayed that they would have a wise and discerning love, and let them know that even though he is in prison unjustly, that God is doing good things, and for this he rejoices. Let’s pick it up in verse 20:

***Philippians 1:20-30** - I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted 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 go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. ²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

Paul is in prison, unjustly persecuted by the Romans. He isn’t sure if he will get out, and so in verses 20-26 he is considering the possibilities of what it will mean to live or die, and concludes that even though death would mean gain, for he would be with Jesus, the one he has been living for, he knows that as long as he is here, he will continue to love and serve the Philippian church. He continues in verse 27 to say that no matter what happens, he wants them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does this mean?

In order to answer that question, we first need to answer the question, what is the gospel of Christ? The best place to go to answer that is 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul defines it:

*1 Corinthians 15:1-8 - Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and **then to the Twelve**. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

The gospel, the euangelion, the good news, which Paul says saves us, is that Christ died for our sins. What does that mean? God created us to enjoy a relationship with Him. We sinned, rebelling against God, breaking that relationship, and as a result, we deserve eternal separation from a holy and perfect God. No one is good enough to bridge that gap on their own. But God made a way for us to be restored to a right relationship with Him through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Romans 3:21-24 - But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

That is the gospel, the good news. All have sinned and fallen short, but we are justified – declared not guilty – freely by His grace, the free gift of God. We are given His righteousness – made right with God. We are adopted by Him as His children. And we are regenerated – a new heart, new Spirit, eternal life. You did not earn this. You did not work for this. He did the work. He sacrificed His life. He offers you eternal life.

This gospel is the story to which all other stories point. This is the **love story** about the one who knows everything about you but will never reject you but whose love heals your past and makes you a better person. The gospel is the **rescue operation** where you are saved from the evil one who has captured and enslaved you by an act of sacrificial heroism that saves the day. The gospel is the story of **supernatural power** indwelling you through the spirit of the God. The gospel is the story of **good triumphing over evil, victory snatched out of the jaws of defeat, love that is eternal, death that is not the end, and happily ever after**. This is what we believe. This is what Jesus has done.

And when this story becomes your story, that is when you find salvation. When Jesus dying on the cross becomes Christ dying for your sins, then you have found God. When the love of God becomes the love of God for YOU, then you are saved. Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, give your life to Him today.

This is the gospel, the good news. Calls to mind the end of Saving Private Ryan, when Tom Hanks' character says to Matt Damon's character, "Earn this." You have been saved at the cost of another's life. You did not have to do anything; salvation was achieved for you. Now live a life worthy of that gift. So, if that is the gospel, then what might it mean to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? Clearly his concern is that their life would match their words, that how they live would line up with what they believe. There is nothing more damaging to the gospel than people who claim to be Christians but whose life contradicts what they claim to believe. And he also calls them to live the same way whether or not he is there. That is a call to integrity, that you would be the same person in all situations, whether you are alone or at church, at work or with your family. To that end, Paul focuses on two main things in this passage.

1) Strive for unity with sacrificial and selfless love

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Paul wants them to live a life worthy of the gospel, to live lives that are consistent with the message they believe and are preaching. The first thing he wants to hear is that they are standing firm in one spirit, striving as one for the faith of the gospel. He will go on in the next section to go deeper into this plea for unity:

Philippians 2:1-4 - *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain*

conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In other words, if the gospel means anything to you, then be like-minded, be one, do not be self-centered, looking only to your own interests, but consider others better than yourselves and look to the interests of others. Strive for unity with sacrificial and selfless love.

Paul is deeply concerned that they would be united – be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit and purpose. **This is especially critical in today's world, which is obsessed with dividing people into categories** – male and female, cisgender and transgender, heterosexual and homosexual, white and BIPOC. But Paul's concern is that all those barriers that divide people out in the world would come down in the kingdom of God. Verse 27 in the Greek implores them to live as citizens of the heavenly kingdom here in Philippi. You are Christians first, and your skin color or ethnicity or sexuality second. You are united in Christ before you are divided by anything else.

Paul wants them to strive for unity with sacrificial love. Remember who Jesus is and what He did. Jesus was God, but willingly gave up His heavenly status, becoming like one of us in order to save us. If He would condescend like that, who are we to refuse to lay down our pride and selfish interests for the sake of our brothers and sisters? When we were sinners, Christ gave His life for us. So how can we reject a brother or sister when they sin against us?

Jesus put it this way:

Matthew 18:21-35 - *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to **repay the debt.** ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ **But he refused.***

*Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back **all he owed.** ³⁵ **"This is how** my heavenly **Father** will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

This parable tells us that when we refuse to forgive, we are like a servant who thinks he is a king. We have forgotten the great debt that has been forgiven us.

As citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we are to not let any worldly divisions come between us as brothers and sisters. We are to look not only to our interests but to the interests of others, considering others better than ourselves. And we are to be quick to forgive as we have been forgiven. Paul knows how critical this is, because if the church can not unite in love and humility, then how can we stand a chance against attacks from those outside the church?

***Philippians 1:27-28** - Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.*

How can a team win when it is fighting itself? How can a military unit defeat the enemy when they are divided themselves? And how can a church family advance the kingdom of God when it can't even love each other? But the reality is that unity is hard to achieve. We are all filled with self-interest that divides us because our selfish desires battle against those of other people.

***James 4:1-3** - What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Unity takes individuals who are willing to lay down their selfish desires and love sacrificially in order to honor Christ, because He did that for us. True love is sacrificial. It lays down comfort and self-interest regularly to elevate the other

above ourselves. We can do that because He did that for us. Nothing worth doing comes about easy. It includes suffering and sacrifice. It takes tenacity. It takes struggling together. **Where do you need to strive for unity with sacrificial and selfless love today?**

2) Prioritize God's honor over personal reputation and comfort

Prioritize God's name over our own name.

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

All throughout chapter 1, Paul has been a model of prioritizing God's honor and the gospel over his own personal reputation and comfort. And now he calls them to do the same. Paul wants to see them standing firm, striving for the faith of the gospel without being frightened by those who oppose them. He wants them not only to believe in Christ but to be willing to suffer for Him, to put Jesus' honor above their own personal reputation and comfort. And he alludes to how they saw him go through similar struggles, some of which we read about in Acts 16, during his initial time in Philippi:

***Acts 16:19-24** - When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." ²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be **stripped and beaten**. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

Paul was familiar with suffering as a result of his faithfulness to Jesus, and he encourages them to remain faithful despite the opposition they are facing. He knows that Jesus prioritized God's honor and our salvation over his own personal

reputation and comfort, being willing to suffer and die for us. And now, if we are to follow Him, we can expect to face opposition and to suffer.

John 15:18-21 - *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.*

Matthew 5:11-12 - *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus prioritized the honor of his Father. Paul prioritized Christ's honor. He knew that he owed his entire life to Jesus, that he had been rescued from death and given eternal life. He was loved, and he wanted to bring Jesus glory through his life. Even if that meant suffering at the hands of people who did not share his beliefs.

I am a people-pleaser. I want the faith to be palatable. I want to smooth off the rough edges and not offend anyone. But there is no getting around the offense of the gospel if we are to be honest. Jesus is counter-cultural. Jesus claims to be the only way to God. He claims that apart from Him we are separated from God. He claims that no one is good enough on their own. He calls us to holiness, to perfection. There is right, there is wrong. And we aren't the ones who get to decide the difference. He calls us to let go of every idol, to choose him over money, power, family, comfort, or anything else.

If you are faithful, you will experience opposition. You will be a part of the grand drama between God and Satan. But your willingness to prioritize God's honor over your own reputation and comfort is a sign that your faith is genuine. And their opposition is a sign of their destruction.

This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God.

1 Peter 1:6-7 - *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--*

*of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved **genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Remaining faithful under opposition and suffering proves the genuineness of your faith. You don't just jettison Jesus at the first sign of trouble or disapproval from others. You are willing to remain faithful and prioritize His honor over your own personal reputation and comfort, because He suffered and died for you.

Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Are your actions matching your words? Are you living with integrity? Are you the same person at home as you are at church, the same person when you are alone as when others are watching? Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Strive for unity with sacrificial and selfless love. Prioritize God's honor over personal reputation and comfort.

We are not trying to earn favor with God. We have been given salvation, eternal life, free of charge, at an enormous cost to Jesus. Bring Him glory and honor because of who He is and what He has done for you, for us, loving Him and others because He first loved you. Amen.