

The Christ-Centred Life

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Philippians, chapter 1, starting in verse 1. Please follow along on the screen or your Bible. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy. Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart. For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

[1 : 51] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

This is the word of God. Amen.

Great. Thank you so much, Ellen, for delivering that so powerfully and joyfully. I think that's really important, even as we read scripture and as you're reading at home, to read it actually out loud, because I think there's something about hearing it verbally, even if it's your own voice.

[3 : 04] So that's what we do with a Sunday after a Sunday. We want to hear God's word come to us. That's his word. This is just an addendum to that. This is just us trying to apply it. So today we're going to begin a new sermon series, as Kevin mentioned.

We're going to start on Philippians. And this is, we're really looking forward to this series. We're really excited about this, because we think it'll be really encouraging and challenging for us in this season of just unpredictableness and just chaos and fear.

And what we do often when we start a new series, we want to give you a bit of background, a little about the occasion for how this book, this letter was written.

So let's just dive into that right now. The background is that Philippians was a letter, an epistle, written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi.

That's why it's called Philippians. And Philippi was a Roman colony. You'll see on the map there that, you know, in the ancient times, Rome was the center of Western civilization.

[4 : 12] And they colonized Philippi and declared it as a colony of Rome. And so the citizens of Philippi, this was really special to them, they were treated basically as if they were Roman citizens.

They had all the exact rights, the privileges that any Roman citizen would have. And understandably, they took great pride in that citizenship. And with Rome being, you know, the center of the world at that time, being a Philippian, therefore, you would probably see yourself as being pretty high up in the known world.

And this was reflected in the deep connection between Rome and Philippi in terms of how Philippi adopted the cultural norms of Rome and their devotion to the imperial cults, which was the worship of the emperor and the emperor's family.

And Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison, as we would have noted when we were reading. And this was most likely either imprisonment in Rome or Ephesus, what you'll see on the map as well.

And one specific reason for Paul writing this letter is that the Philippian church had sent one of their members, a messenger named Epaphroditus.

[5 : 27] They had sent him to come to Paul in prison with a gift to encourage him, to bless him. And Paul, in turn, was responding to this gift. And he wanted to update the Philippians on what was going on with him, what was happening in his life.

And so before we dive into the actual text itself, I want us to pause and linger a little bit longer on this reality, this sense that Paul was in prison.

And many of us, if you've been in the church for a while, if you read through the Bible, you probably heard that Paul was a guy who was probably, seems like he was in prison more often than he was out of it.

As he was ministering, as he was going on missionary trips, he faced opposition and usually ended up in prison. And I think sometimes for us, that can, if you've heard that enough, it become a little bit numb to that.

I know for myself, I've heard this idea of Paul in prison so often that I can often just kind of gloss over that fact. And I don't know how much you, listening right now, how much you have experience with prisons.

[6 : 34] But the reality is, if we kind of step back and think about it, it is actually a serious thing, right? It's a serious thing in all ages to be in prison.

And especially in Roman times, what we know that imprisonment was particularly seen as being shameful and dishonoring to the person, and also to his relations and his relatives and his family.

Friends and associates would actually be pressured to abandon the person who's in prison. Roman prisons were no walk in the park.

And if you can imagine Paul perhaps there, whether he maybe had been in house arrest, maybe he was in chains, was no walk in the park. And the real thing is that Paul's situation was probably even more serious than a person in prison because what seems likely is that Paul is actually in prison awaiting trial and perhaps awaiting execution, a death sentence.

So that's also hanging over his head. And lastly, when we think about Paul's situation in prison, we would consider looking at his situation that he was being imprisoned for something unjust and that he was simply being charged or punished for preaching the gospel, for living out his faith.

[8 : 02] And so, church, if we can even begin, in 21st century Hong Kong, begin to put ourselves in Paul's shoes, to imagine ourselves in that cell or in that jail block or under that house arrest.

Imagine what this perhaps death sentence is like hanging over us. It becomes even more astounding, I think, and astonishing that the passage we just read just seems to overflow with joy, with rejoicing, with positivity.

Take a look at this. Verse 3, Paul thanks God. Verse 4, he prays with joy. Verse 8, he yearns for the Philippians with affection.

And verse 18, Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed. And it's interesting that the words that we translate as joy and rejoice and thank, they all actually come from the same root word in Greek.

And that root word we translate as to rejoice or to be glad. So when we say that Philippians is a letter that's full of joy, really this theme of rejoicing is running throughout the entire letter.

[9 : 19] It's saturating it. And so this really begs the question that I've been kind of pondering, and I hope you are too, is how is it that Paul can be so joyful in such a horrific, sad state?

And I was imagining if I were in his situation, I don't think I would be anything like that. I think, I wonder, you know, if I would just be kind of passively moping and moaning and groaning and feeling sorry for myself, feeling sad and pathetic.

And as far as I know, no one in Watermark has been put into jail for speaking about Jesus, as far as I know. But we may know people who have actually been persecuted and imprisoned for that.

And what I do know definitely is right now, in this moment, many of us are anxious. We're worried about our liberties, our freedoms.

We're worried about our future. We feel maybe even figuratively imprisoned in some way. And this has been a year in Hong Kong and the world that seems profoundly lacking in joy, hasn't it?

[10 : 36] We've been facing political challenges, viral challenges, and experiencing all the toil and the toll on our physical and our emotional and our spiritual health.

We're seeing many parts of the world right now wrestling and reckoning with racial injustice, with racial discrimination and systemic discrimination.

And so the question that is being begged is, how can we have joy when everything seems to be falling apart, when everything seems to be breaking and hitting the fan? When I first read that, and I think even when Ellen was reading to us just now, at first glance, it seems like Paul is maybe just like some super Christian.

He's like the Marvel superhero of the Bible, you know, captain, disciple, or whatever, that he, man, he can, this guy is awesome, he can be in prison, he can have joy, he can be rejoicing.

And just like a superhero, you see those traits and you see how amazing, and you're like, wow, you kind of aspire to be like that, but you think in the back of your head or maybe explicitly, I could never be like that.

[11 : 44] You know, Paul, he can rejoice in prison. He can have the joy of Christ no matter what's happening, but me, I don't think I can do that if I'm honest with myself.

But friends, as we look at the passage today, as we look over again and dive into it, I believe that we'll see that joy is possible not just for Paul, but for all followers of Jesus, of which Paul is really just one.

He is a follower of Jesus. And I hope that we'll see that in this passage, it'll show us that lasting and overflowing joy comes only from a life that is centered on Jesus Christ.

Lasting and overflowing joy can only come from a life that is centered on Jesus Christ. So how can this happen? Let's look at the text.

The first thing we want to look at is Paul's identity, his identity in Christ. Look at these opening verses with me. Verse 1, Paul's greeting to the Philippians tells us something very important that we can just quickly gloss over, is that he and Timothy, Paul and Timothy, are servants of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 00] This is what Paul starts with. This is who he is. This is the person who is writing to the Philippians. I am a servant of Jesus Christ and I write to you.

And everything in this letter flows out from the fact that Paul is a servant of Christ. And the implication of this is that Jesus is Paul's master.

Servant and master. And that means that everything, Paul's purpose, his success, his validation, everything is defined by Jesus because he serves Jesus, his master.

Jesus, the one who created Paul. Jesus, the one who is God in human form. As we sung, the name above all names. The one who died for our sins.

The one who resurrected to conquer death. The one who loves us unconditionally. And so when we think about Paul's identity, think about your identity.

[14 : 04] When you wake up tomorrow morning, what is the label, the identity that will get you up? What is the thing that will drive you? What is the thing that you are thinking about when you wake up and you're getting ready to work?

Is it that you're a father or a mother and that you are serving, you're a servant to your child? Is it that you're a husband or a wife and you're a servant to your spouse?

Is your identity that you're single and unmarried? Is it that you're pro-democracy or pro-establishment? Is it that you're the managing director of your company or that you are a domestic helper from the Philippines or Indonesia?

Is it that you're Chinese or Filipino or white or whatever racial background you are? Is it the label that you are COVID-free and you're healthy?

Is that what drives you and what defines you? And none of these identities, don't get me wrong, none of these are necessarily bad. It's not bad to be COVID-free. It's not bad to be a father or a mother or anything.

[15 : 14] But church, these things make terrible masters. They make terrible masters because if you are defined, for example, by your political views, you will never experience true lasting joy unless your party wins, unless you can destroy destroy and depreciate those who hold contrary views.

Until you can prove them wrong. If you're defined by where you sit and stand on the corporate ladder, you will be enslaved to those who have the power to promote you or to fire you or to determine your bonus.

And if you're saying to me today, and I say this to myself sometimes, well, I serve no one. I serve myself. I am my master. Well, the challenge there is you are master to yourself in name only, but ultimately you'll be mastered by your desires.

Whatever you believe will give you happiness. Whatever you believe will give you joy. You will be mastered by that. And so it's interesting. It's important to note that after introducing himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul mentions Christ 10 more times in this short little passage.

Jesus is his reference point. Jesus is the defining feature of Paul's life. The defining feature of this letter, of this introduction.

- [16 : 37] Jesus is his master. And unlike all those terrible masters we looked at, Jesus is unlike any of those human masters. Because even though he is God, he humbled himself.

Jesus said to us, I came to serve, not to be served. I can imagine, I can imagine this one question that Paul asks in every circumstance.

What does Jesus think about me? Jesus, what do you think about me? You're my master. Friends, is that the question that you ask yourself every morning when you go to bed?

Have you asked that question before? If you ask that, what do you think Jesus would say to you right now? I want to do something a little different right now.

Let's just take a pause right now. And I want you to actually take a minute, close your eyes, look out the windows, help yourself focus, and just ask God that question.

- [17 : 43] When Jesus looks at you, what does he think? What do you think he thinks? What do you think? What do you think he thinks? Or is that the way he thinks that NASA is a gun?

Mickey kind of thinks like a lab that can't be such a ■■■ngut, it's a weapon that can't be twice for his place. Let's go forward to seeing more I've thought about this a couple times.

I've kind of done this exercise in my head, and I still often feel a mixture. Because I think in this performance culture, instantly I'm thinking about, you know, where am I falling short?

How can I do better? Will I be a good father? You know, am I being a good husband? Am I performing well to people like me?

And if you are a Christian this morning, if you're a servant of Jesus, I hope what you hear, and if that's not what you heard, listen to this really clearly.

- [19 : 24] I hope you see and you hear that Jesus is saying that he loves you. Verse 6, that he has begun a good work in you, and he will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

That he has deep affection for you. Verse 8. Verses 10 and 11, that he wants to fill you with righteousness and goodness and purity.

There might be other things that God is, through his spirit, is challenging you with and encouraging with you. But if that is not the first thing, the foundation of what you think about when you imagine Jesus speaking to you, then church, we really need to reorient ourselves.

We really need to go back to this and see that Jesus is the one who loves you unconditionally. He wants to work in your life. He accepts you, not because of what you've done.

He's adopted you, not because you were cuddly and cute and beautiful and wonderful, but simply because he loves you. Is that the Jesus you know? Is that the Jesus that you hear when you ask God that?

- [20 : 45] And if you're not a Christian this morning, do you care about what your creator thinks about you? Do you care about the fact that God loves you and wants all these things for you?

He wants to work goodness out of your heart. He wants to adopt you. Will, the question is, will you accept him? Will you follow Jesus today? Will you follow Jesus today?

He writes this. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And that word for partnership is actually more commonly translated as the word fellowship. Fellowship. So that sense of the Christian community, the support that Paul has received from the Philippians.

The Philippians. The Philippians are his brothers and sisters in Christ. They are his spiritual family. And so in the midst of Paul's suffering, he remembers their partnership from the first day until now.

[22 : 19] And so each and every one of us who are following Jesus, we have had people who have walked with us, who have encouraged us, who have been deeply impactful in our spiritual journeys, just like the Philippians were to Paul.

Maybe it was the person who was to Paul. Maybe it was the person who first told you about Jesus. Maybe it was a friend who supported you through a time of trial or doubting or something like that. Maybe it was a community who supported you in a mission trip or some kind of project.

And this is a reminder, I think, for us to remember in all times, to rejoice, to give thanks for those who have been our partners in Christ, who have supported us.

And not only to remember them as Paul does, but to pray for them, to petition for them, to love them through your prayers. So I want us to take another moment right now.

Again, close your eyes, be still, and think of someone who has walked with you, who has invested in you. Give thanks for them.

[23 : 33] Pray verses 9 to 11 over them. And imagine, don't just quickly think about a person, but remember what they did for you. Remember how God worked through them.

Let's do that right now. Let's do that right now.

Let's do that right now.

God, we thank you for these people who have worked in our lives, who you have used. Like Paul, we pray that their love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, that they may prove what is excellent to be pure and blameless for the day of Jesus.

Lord, would you fill them with the fruit of righteousness? Let them know that you are with them. God, thank you, Lord, for walking with us through these people, Lord.

[25 : 39] Amen. A part of who you are is literally because of these people, this person, this community that God put into your life to partner with you, to walk with you.

Isn't that amazing? Isn't that worth rejoicing over? That at all times we can remember the faithfulness of God through the partnership that he gives us in his people.

Rejoicing in the fellowship that we have in Christ. Thirdly, what gave Paul great joy was the fact that the Philippians were partnering with him in the gospel.

Not just partnering with him in general, but in the gospel. And that's the proclamation of Christ. And that's the third source of joy. And it's amazing that Paul has this perspective to see that his imprisonment has actually served to advance the gospel.

So that the Imperial Guard and a whole other bunch of people, they now know that the reason that Paul has been imprisoned is because of serving the cause of Jesus.

[26 : 57] Because of living for Jesus. And not only that, but his imprisonment has been emboldened. Has emboldened other believers to speak out about Jesus.

And he says that some are preaching Christ out of rivalry and envy. But note this. Because they still preach Christ, Paul says this.

Whether in pretense in truth. Verse 18. Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice. Here's a man who's in prison because he's been proclaiming Jesus.

And he knows that these other guys are trying to hurt him. Trying to afflict him in some way because of their envy, their jealousy. But it's this overriding interest. What gives him joy is that Christ would be proclaiming.

Doesn't matter if he's doing it or somebody else is doing it. And so we already remember. We know that Paul's identity is in Christ. We know that he remembers that his partners have been with him through all of this.

[28 : 03] And what they've done for him. So it makes perfect sense that Paul would want his savior, his master to be proclaimed. He would want to tell everyone about Jesus.

You praise and you value what you care about, right? You know, if my friend has done something amazing. If my best friend has just climbed Mount Everest or something phenomenal.

I want the world to know about it. And if my enemies recognize that. Man, that's even better, right? If they're proclaiming that, that's even better. And so if that's the case, how much more, how much more would we want to proclaim Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior?

And so we've seen how Paul finds his identity as a servant of Jesus. We've remembered how he recalls his partners in the gospel of Jesus.

How he remembers his fellowship. And we know, we've seen how he rejoices when he knows that Jesus is proclaimed. But how do we truly experience lasting joy?

[29 : 11] How is a Christ-centered life truly so unshakable and unchangeable in the tides of coronavirus and pandemic and whatnot?

And the final thing is this, is that this passage gives us one really important clue. And that's the phrase, the day of Jesus Christ. Verses 6 and 10.

The day of Jesus Christ, Paul says. And we're reminded here that Christianity is ultimately a worldview that points us to the future.

Yes, the past is important. Jesus has come. He has died. He has resurrected. He who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion.

And that points us to the future. And theologians call this, if you're into it, they call that Christianity an eschatological faith. It is a faith that really values the end times, what is to come.

[30 : 12] And that day of Christ is the day when Jesus returns to bring final judgment. It's the era where he comes, the time where he comes to bring complete restoration to all of creation.

That's what we look forward to. That's why Paul expresses this confidence that he will bring us to completion. He will continue working in the lives of the Philippians.

And so for all who trust and follow Jesus, that day of Christ, that is our security and joy. That's the Jesus that Paul wants to proclaim.

It's not in a vacuum. It's constantly with this hope, this expectant joy that Christ will return. That's the Jesus whom he serves. Remembering the day of Christ helps us to remember that the present today is not the end.

These 80 or so years that we have on this lifetime is not the end. The day of Christ points us to the everlasting life that we'll have with God.

[31 : 18] We're all dying, metaphorically. We're dying to get out of this pandemic, aren't we? To be able to move on to bigger and better things that we haven't been able to do.

To finally be able to breathe without a mask in this hot, humid Hong Kong summer. To be able to have parties with our friends and families.

To be able to gather as a church without all this fuss and all this logistical challenges. To be able to visit your loved ones in their homes, in the elderly homes.

Maybe overseas. I'm dying to be able to travel and see the world again. I can already feel the joy imagining that.

Imagining returning to that. But church, we have, in the day of Christ, we have so much more going for us than to get through a pandemic.

[32 : 24] And what if I could 100% guarantee you, snap of my fingers, tomorrow COVID-19 would be history. Eradicated. Eradicated. Well, yes, that would be amazing.

But that wouldn't stop us from aging and dying. That wouldn't heal our souls. That wouldn't give us purpose and meaning that we yearn for deep in our hearts.

That wouldn't help us to know the God who created us. That would not give us access to unconditional love, acceptance, and everlasting life.

And yet, in the middle of this blasted, frustrating pandemic, those things are accessible to us right now because of Jesus.

And instead of just looking forward to a normal life after the pandemic, we can look forward to a world where there is complete joy.

[33 : 24] Complete fulfillment. Complete fulfillment. In your work. In your relationships. In all of life. A world with no suffering. No sickness.

No political fear. No medical fear. No brokenness. No divorce. No pain. No evil. No suffering. No transparent. But in our life. And when you stop and imagine and think about that kind of reality, does not that prospect fill you with a sense of profound joy?

That that is possible in the day of Christ. And all of the things that Paul did in prison, we can still do now.

in the midst of these difficult times we can still do that let's look at them one more time we can rejoice in these things that your identity is a servant of Jesus Christ that you can give thanks for those who have partnered with you who have invested in you who God has brought to you and you can rejoice in the ability to proclaim Jesus Christ right now and as we rejoice in these things they will lead us to the day of Jesus Christ you know in Philippians Paul has seemingly lost everything he may even lose his life that's the specter that hangs over him but you wouldn't be able to tell by the way the tone that he writes to the Philippians and that's because Paul's joy comes from Christ and that is a joy that cannot be stripped away not by imprisonment not by quarantine not by a pandemic not by authoritarianism he's not just waiting to feel joy but because Paul is centering his life on something unshakable he is choosing to rejoice to rejoice is an action it's a verb it's active and he is choosing to rejoice and Paul knows that Jesus is the most important thing in the universe and he knows Jesus will return on the day of Christ to make things all things right

Paul is a man who knows his savior Jesus and may that be so in our lives and in our church let me pray for us that this would be real in our lives Father we come before you right now humbled to know that you are our master that you would become a servant to serve us so Lord in the light of eternity God give us a grandiose vision a sense every morning that I'm not living for 18 months down the road I'm not living for my deathbed even but I'm living for eternity I'm living for a new creation God when you make all things new where death is no more and God Lord would that give us a focus today a focus on Jesus a centering on Jesus that he is the one worth proclaiming he is the one worth celebrating

[36 : 47] God help us to remember through the rest of this day all your goodness all your blessing to remember every single person who you've put in our lives who have poured into us who have sacrificed for us God let us give thanks and count those blessings today Jesus we confess Lord where we've been so wrapped up Lord in our present comforts Lord and we say to you once again Lord would you be the Lord of our lives again would you remind us Lord that you have so much more in store for us than getting through this pandemic Lord may we not waste every opportunity today at home online to proclaim your name Jesus

Lord may we not waste this pandemic may we not waste our quarantine God because you are worthy Jesus have your way Holy Spirit work in our lives we pray in your precious name Amen Amen