

What Shall I Choose?

Philippians 1:19-26

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PD Mayfield

As we continue to explore our series looking at "Our Joy in Christ," please turn with me to Philippians 1. We're going to be looking at verses 19 through 26 this morning. Last week, pastor Dan Passerelli—that's hard to say. Pastor Dan Passerelli. He highlighted Paul's question in the previous paragraph, what does it matter? "What then?" This week, Paul has another important question in this paragraph that we're looking at this morning, "What shall I choose?"

So read along with me from Philippians starting—I'll read a little bit of verse 18 for context and then going through verse 26.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Pray with me.

Our Father in heaven, we ask that you would truly—as you say you are, as you promise to be, you are present by your Spirit in your word. May we see and taste that you are good, that you are kind, that you are gracious that we might see Jesus from your word this morning and be nourished in our faith. May we grow in our joy and experience a deeper faith as we trust you. Help me, the teacher. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

In his own words, author and speaker Simon Sinek describes himself this way. He says that he's "an unshakeable optimist who believes in a bright future and our ability to build it together." Sinek likes to study patterns found in great leaders and great organizations, and he explores the way they think, the way they act, the way they communicate. He became quite popular back in 2009 with a TED Talk discussing how great leaders inspire action.

Perhaps few of us actually have the experience of inspiring others, but most of us if not all of us know what it's like to experience being inspired. We like watching the underdog in the news or in our favorite movies. We are captivated when a person turns their life around. We are moved by the self-sacrifice and compassion that another person might have to help someone in need. Simon Sinek talks about this pattern of inspiration, and he calls it the golden circle.

Let's look at a common way that a business might communicate not using the golden circle. They may often begin with what? What is the product that we are selling? Then they ask the question, how? We go out, and we sell this product to our customers. And then finally they ask the question, the why. Maybe they say to make a profit. Maybe they say to help people with the product that they're selling.

Simon Sinek wrote an entire book describing how leaders in organizations that inspire actually

invert that narrative. They speak about it in a different direction. They start with the why. In fact, he writes that, "All organizations start with why, but only the great ones keep their why clear year after year." The challenge then is whether it is in business, school, or life, that we often don't know our why. And if we do know our why, perhaps it's not very clear, or we lose sight of it.

The passage today from Philippians shows how Paul starts with his why. He knows it. It is clear, and he doesn't lose sight of it. So he doesn't directly say it. So what is his why? You see, he sees the world, he sees his circumstances, he sees his successes, his failures, his strengths, his limitations, all of these things, he sees for the glory of Jesus Christ. He longs to see the glory of Christ, and he desires others to experience Jesus fully. And it's because Jesus is our why that we can rejoice in Him through all things. The previous paragraph, verses 13 through 18, is a lot of kind of talking about his past circumstances or the near past. But here he shifts in verse 19 to a lot of words that describe the future. "I will rejoice." A lot of future tense words. He rejoices in Christ through all things. Specifically, today, we're going to look at how Paul's rejoicing in Christ through his circumstances, his decisions, and motivations.

So first, look with me at verses 19 and 20. Where do we see Paul rejoice in Christ? We see him rejoicing in his circumstances. Verse 19, "For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." This letter of friendship that Paul is writing to the Philippians does what is very common in such letters. We begin with our greetings, and then it moves into sharing about what's going on in our lives. I'm from Oklahoma. Often, our people, particularly my mom tells stories about her mom, where there are just these daily letters of, "Well, we drilled three acres of wheat today. We got a quarter inch of rain." Just, "This is what is going on in our life, and this is what I'm sharing with you." Very common ways of writing letters to one another.

So when you look back at verses 12 through 18, we see that he's preaching Christ. And he's noticing that others are preaching Christ out of rivalry and pretense while others are preaching boldly out of love and truth. And in verse 18, Paul asks this question, "What then?" Implying, "What does it matter?" And to Paul, what matters is that despite what may be the person's motivation that Christ is proclaimed. And in that, he can rejoice.

Even more than rejoicing. In the events of these past circumstances, then Paul shifts, and he says he will rejoice in future circumstances. Look with me in two areas, verse 19 first. Paul will rejoice because he hopes that he will be delivered out of his circumstances. Paul can be confident because he knows that they have been praying for him. He can be confident because he trusts that the Holy Spirit is helping him.

But more than that, he goes on in verse 20, where he says that he will rejoice because he will honor Christ despite his circumstances. You see, his one pursuit—whether it is by his life or by his death, his one pursuit is to honor Christ. As he is in prison, he is wanting to be released. It is a good desire. It's not only a desire to end that suffering, but there is something that he has been talking about in the advancement of the gospel that to be released would also be a vindication of the gospel, his defense before those hearing his case. He's praying for such things. But he leaves it open-ended as well. He can simultaneously trust that he will be delivered, and yet he leaves it ambiguous that such deliverance might also come by circumstances that he might not want, his very own execution on behalf of Christ. So whether he's released or whether he is executed because of the gospel, both outcomes are for his deliverance, the former being in this momentary life and the latter being in the eternal life to come.

A friend of mine from college stopped believing Christianity when he was young. When he was younger, his grandmother had an illness that he prayed to God to heal her and allow her to live. And

upon his grandmother's passing, his sadness and grief turned toward anger at God, who seemed to either not have the power or have the care to heal her. And this is a very common story in people's spiritual journey. Perhaps it's aspects of God that you wrestle with. Perhaps you know someone. Perhaps you are experiencing it right now.

Here in the text, we see how Paul holds together in tension two things. We could eagerly anticipate God to change our circumstances. It is good to want Him to do so. It is a desire that you don't have to minimize. It's not a desire that you have to repress or hide away. It is good to call upon the Lord and ask Him to deliver you from your circumstances. And at the same time, it's right to trust Him and to seek Him in prayer. It's good to invite others to pray as well as you're trusting the Spirit to be present with you, to be a comfort to you, to be an encouragement to you. The Lord knows what we need and is faithful and good to provide what we need. And yet there are times when those answers to prayer are not what we thought they might be.

But we can take courage. This other aspect of this is to take courage that we might still honor Christ even if our circumstances don't change. Just because He may not provide what we want or how we think it should be done doesn't mean that He's not providing what we actually need or working in us to depend upon Him for our deepest needs. These moments test our faith and also become opportunities for our faith to grow as we lean upon Jesus and continue to seek the help from the Holy Spirit.

You see, it's easy to rejoice when it's easy. It's easy to rejoice when everything's going your way, when you get what you want when you want it. But what do we see and what does our heart do when we don't get what we want? Let us rejoice in Christ because He's more glorious than what we see in our circumstances. And Paul holds these things together in tension of what he hopes to be in the future but what he holds fast of what might be his future because he's not looking at his circumstances first and foremost, but rather he is trusting Christ in his circumstances.

If you move on into verses 21 through 24, we see how he continues on why he can be rejoicing and when he does this rejoicing, and here in this section, he's rejoicing in his decisions. Verse 21 easily sums up Paul's why. His very purpose is crystal clear. Such focus helps him reflect upon two things, one being his desires, and two being potential outcomes. When he says in verse 21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," this sums up Paul's heart for Christ. And as we see his desires, the passage describes how he's hard pressed, and he wonders aloud, "What shall I choose?"

Now, Paul is giving us a window into his mind as he processes two possible outcomes. On the one hand, if he will be released from prison, then he can continue in his work, or he will be executed. Here he is saying less about how power to control those circumstances or those outcomes and the power to choose what those outcomes may be, but more so about what his preferences would be if it were up to him. He's letting the Philippians know a little bit kind of in his mind and his heart. He's modeling something to them as he shares what's going on in his heart. He's playing that game. Maybe you know it. He's playing the table game, "Would you rather?" How a person answers a would-you-rather question exposes a lot about the desires of your heart by forcing you into a decision between two extremes or two often even random things that don't make any sense. For example, would you rather have hands for feet or feet for hands? I'll let you think on that for a second and visualize that. Which would you rather? Neither. Right? But that's not the game. Would you rather have the same meal every day for the rest of your life or a different meal every day with no repeats? I get around that last question because I just say sandwich.

As he's exploring his desires in these two would-you-rather kind of hypotheticals, he's on the one hand saying he would rather die and be with Christ, which he says he thinks is far better for himself. But on the other hand, he wants to be free and continue to live and work with his friends and partners in

gospel ministry, which he thinks is more necessary for them.

My wife and I enjoy this show called *Shark Tank*. And each conversation starts the same way. A person walks into a room with about four or five investors, which are called the sharks. And the person is making a pitch. He or she is presenting something that they're doing with a startup business or a product or service. And they're looking for a partner. They're looking for an investor that might be able to advance their business. And on the other side, the sharks are seeing if it's a good idea. Would they want to work with this person? Is it worth their time? Is it worth their capital?

So in negotiations in something that you want, you are wrapped up with your desires and the hope for anticipated outcomes. Sometimes pitches fall flat all together. Sometimes the pitches are inspiring because the person and the story that they're telling about why they're doing it or what they're doing. But really it doesn't go anywhere because it maybe isn't a fully fleshed out idea or it's not a good product. Maybe it's not a good business venture for the sharks at this time. But they like the person, and they're intrigued by the story. And then sometimes it all comes together, and the person giving the pitch is well received. The business is a good idea, has a good model, and a good deal gets negotiated.

So in these experiences and these negotiations, you're watching different outcomes happen. You're seeing a lose-lose situation where neither side gets what they're seeking, and no deal is struck. Sometimes you see a win-lose negotiation happen where somebody makes out better than the other person by getting more than they give up. But the best deals are when it's a win-win, when common ground is met and both sides are in a better position than before starting to negotiate. Everybody in that moment shaking hands and hugging, they're rejoicing when that good deal is made.

You see, for Paul, his desires are completely set upon Christ, and the outcomes that he faces are win-win. This allows him to face either way because his outlook on every moment of his life is viewed through the gospel of Jesus. And it's important for us to have this same lens to see as followers of Jesus. You see, this outlook puts life and death in proper perspective. You see, Paul does not teach that his death is gain in itself, like a Greek tragedy or some sort of Roman honor. Paul does not teach that his desire to be released is merely a way to escape or avoid suffering. The gain that Paul is talking about, it is redirecting the meaning and purpose of suffering or deliverance in terms of the glories of Christ. If suffering and glory are not in their proper place in relation to Jesus, then we show our hearts to be enslaved to whichever desire drives us to do the one or the other. Some of us are more compelled to drive towards hard things that bring about grit, or as the saying goes, "No pain, no gain." And others of us will do everything in our power to avoid the pain but still want the gain. But in their proper place, we experience freedom because it is true glory that's satisfied in Jesus Christ alone.

This brings us to this last point as we look at the passage this morning, verses 25 and 26. How? How do we rejoice in Jesus? Well, it's in our motivation. Verses 25 and 26, "Convinced of this"—he's coming to—he's shown us his mind, and now he's showing us his decision. "I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again." This is a win-win situation. Paul trusts the Lord will use him in the lives of others. He wants to remain there to serve.

But for what end? Look at what he says. It's for their progress, for their progress in joy and in faith. This word "progress" is the same word that is used in verse 12, where he talks about the advance of the gospel. Paul speaks of the advance of the gospel referring to the scope of the gospel reach. You open up the Book of Acts, and you see the gospel spreading from Jerusalem to Judaea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And here Paul is in Rome at that time almost to the edge of the earth, so to speak. He had certain high hopes to make it to Spain as well, we learn. But this advance, this gospel reach to others, we see it happening in the guard, even in the household of Caesar. And it's growing. It's expanding. It's

reaching folks.

But here, "progress" is the same word, but Paul is referring to the depth of the gospel's roots in them. "The gospel of Jesus advances in the lives of others who believe"—I'm sorry. "The gospel of Jesus advances in the lives of others who yet do not believe," so reaching the scope of the gospel and the progress, "and the life of the person who already believes in the depth of the gospel." Both are advance. Both are progress. His joy in their progress as they trust in Christ, as they anticipate with excitement what it means to share glory, the glory of Christ together.

Paul is longing for every moment of his life to be for Christ because all of his life is from Christ. As he thinks back on his life of what he set himself up to be, what he sought to be in the esteem and the respect of his community, what he thought were the ways and the pathways to relate to God, his world was rocked by Jesus. And what he thought to be the case of what God was doing in the world to bring about redemption of all things and the resurrection to come at the end of the world, he is shocked to learn that redemption is made and experienced in the resurrection in the middle of time with the death and resurrection of Jesus. All of Paul's life is through the lens of Jesus Christ.

And here he is modeling what it means to consider one's motives. Because remember in verses 17 and 18, "Some preached boldly out of love. Others preached out of rivalry." Here, he is modeling what it means to have a motive that is for Christ. Whether it's pretense or in truth, "What then?" Well, Christ is proclaimed. Whether life or death, what shall I choose? I choose Christ. I choose life because to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

One writer said this.

"Paul has learned by the grace of God to see everything from the divine perspective. This is not wishfulness but deep conviction that God had worked out his own divine intentions for the death and resurrection of Christ, and that by his Spirit he is carrying them on out in the world through the church, and therefore, through both himself and others."

Paul was brought into God's redemption and His purposes for what it means to participate in that mission. To live for Christ is to trust Him for the whole of your life. And to live a life reflecting Christ in you is to engage prayerfully and intentionally for a life that reflects Christ through you to others. This motivation is not to be from a place of self-righteousness, meaning that if you die to yourself enough, if you give of yourself enough or more, then Jesus will be more proud, or Jesus will be more loving or more accepting to you. No. This motivation does not come from a place of self-righteousness, nor does this motivation come from a place of vanity, that if you love others enough then people will love you more, that your esteem and reputation will exceed and excel. No. The gospel speaks against self-righteousness as well as vanity. The gospel of Jesus helps us to avoid both of those false motives. The gospel gives us guardrails.

And here are a couple of examples. If we were to think about the gospel of Jesus as guardrails keeping us from falling into counterfeit glories. That's always in the mind of Paul, the glory of Christ. Often, we lose sight of that glory, and we fall for counterfeit glories. Even to use some of the language that he uses in the passage but personalizing it. "My labor will be fruitful. My death will be glorious. I will be esteemed, or I will be needed by others. I love Jesus so much that I don't actually have time to love you. I scoff at heaven because I prefer this world apart from Jesus. Or I scoff at heaven because I prefer my relationships more than Jesus." If you want to reflect on where you currently stand on thinking about the glories of Christ, think about the profound truth of if it came to being in heaven with Jesus or your most precious loved one, and that precious loved one wasn't there, would you want to be there?

The gospel of Jesus also helps us from having misplaced perspectives, a misplaced perspective of being too spiritual, so heavily minded that you become no earthly good. It keeps us from having a misplaced perspective about being too physical, that you are so consumed with this world and its needs that you forget to place your hope in what is to come, the eternal life that we have in Jesus and the final restoration of all things. And this gospel of Jesus protects us from a misplaced perspective that's too self-seeking, that neither do we care about God nor care about mankind because you are just so self-absorbed with what you need or want.

Paul is writing from a place where he is mesmerized by the gospel of Jesus. And from a place of the gospel working in us through Him, we are to imitate Christ as He grows our heart's affection, as He grows our motivation to serve and to sacrifice for the benefit of another person. We value sacrifice. We're inspired when we see it in other people, and we're maybe hesitant to do it ourselves. But to hold that in with the gospel, that Jesus dies for you so that we might die on behalf of other people, not in a salvific way. We don't atone for people's sins. But we believe the gospel so that we might live the gospel, that we might embody the gospel, that we might demonstrate the gospel, that we are the very hands and feet of our Lord Jesus to a watching world.

But how do we do that? I just would kind of submit this to you that it is a life of preparation and practice. It is practicing and failing. It is forgetting and remembering. It is the formational life of the Christian that follows Jesus because you don't just wake up and think this way or act this way. Paul isn't rising to the occasion because he's in prison, but he's falling back on the foundation that he has in Christ before that moment. And so it is with us, that we might be moved in our affections before we have to think about our decisions so that we might lean on Him and seek the Holy Spirit to help us as we make those decisions for His glory.

It's how you view every moment that lends of glory or humiliation, that lends of success or failure. This formation is prayer. This formation is studying God's word. It's singing. It is communing with each other. It's sharing the stories of where we're struggling. It is experiencing the joys of where we're sharing in each other's victories. These things form us as a people that we sharpen our faith and strengthen our hope. We could easily require someone to be in a place of belief of practice that took us years to come to our own understanding and our own practices. This life that Paul is presenting to the Philippians is to be lived in community. And we're all at different stages, but we're all resting in Christ, the newest believer to the oldest believer. This doesn't start with, "I will die for you," but it says, "Come and be with the one who died for you and be changed by His love."

Do you remember at the beginning how Simon Sinek described in his own words that he is "an unshakeable optimist who believes in a bright future and our ability to bring it together"? How do you face your circumstances with such optimism, with such joy? Perhaps you don't. But it takes having a greater hope and a surer confidence. You have to have a strong and clear why, and I believe Jesus is that strong, and sure, and clear why.

Hugh Latimer became a Roman Catholic priest in 1515 and was well known for refuting the new ideas of the Reformation. However, later on in his life, he became persuaded by others who were refuting his Roman Catholic beliefs in light of those Reformation ideas. And he, too, later became someone who taught justification by faith, the sovereignty of God, believing that God is kind, and generous, and faithful, and loving, and that He gives His Son for you, these things by grace alone through faith alone. And due to these new beliefs over his life, he was put on trial for those beliefs. And just last week October 16th was a celebration. October 16, 1555, he and another man Nicholas Ridley were executed in Oxford. Latimer is quoted as having said to Ridley as the fire was lit, "Play the man, master Ridley. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as our trust shall never be put out." He went on to say, "It may

come in my days old as I am or in my children's days, the saints shall be taken up to meet Christ in the air and so shall come down with him again," as he quotes from 1 Thessalonians 4. His hope was in Christ. He was compelled by the fact that to depart was better to be with Christ, but yet to remain was fruitful labor for Christ in the present.

You see, one of the main things that he was put on trial for was he was an advocate for translating scriptures in English. The first English translation, the William Tyndale Bible, had just been banned. And yet the hope of glory, the love of truth compelled him forward, a hope shaped by Christ. This is what gives you power to endure sufferings. This is what gives you courage to experience the darkest of your moments, even death. That place, my friends, is the place of the gospel. It is joy defined by Christ. It is joy that's pursued in Christ. And it is joy that is experienced from Christ.

And so when Paul is asking, "What shall I choose?" he is not saying what he can choose of his own ability or his own merit, but yet he is reflecting upon what he would choose for what is glorious. And out of those two outcomes, both are glorious because they are rooted in Christ. He models to look at one's desire and have it formed in Christ for the glory of Christ. And so instead of rivalry or pretense, he desires Christ above all. He wants other Christians to experience an advancing faith and a deeper joy. His lens is only to see Christ. He only longs for that glory that is defined through Christ.

Do you hear the theme? Do you hear the repetition? May we not lose sight. He is not, brothers and sisters, a happy-go-lucky, whatever happens happens attitude. But this is a complete joy and a complete dependence on Christ being proclaimed in the spoken word of the truth of the gospel and that lived out in our very lives. So what Paul wants to choose he chooses as an outcome he cannot lose because all is Christ, and all of Christ is all of gain.

May all of our lives, even our deaths, be viewed through such gain. Brothers and sisters, it is a win-win. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we give you thanks in praise for your glory, the very hope of the gospel that gives life. Your Spirit speaks newness, breathes fresh wind, fresh fire into your people. We pray, Father, that your gospel will bring joy and delight and beauty and love and sacrifice, that we might even share and participate in your sufferings as a witness of how much your glory shines bright upon us. Help us in these ways, Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.