

When Life is Christ, and Death is Gain

Philippians 1:20-21

BI: True gospel urgency naturally naturally flows from a heart that treasures Christ above all else.

LTS: Matt. 6:19-34

Read Phil 1:12-21

Gospel Urgency

Five weeks from now (Feb. 16-18) we will gather together for our very own mission conference. Speakers for that event will include Shannon Hurley from Uganda; our own Damon Cupp also from Uganda, and Eric Zeller from Dubia. Living Hope Bible Church will also be joining us (some of whom will be assisting with worship). We plan to meet for a couple hours Friday evening, three hours Saturday morning, followed by services on Sunday morning and evening.

The theme of the conference is “Gospel Urgency.” This is an important theme for our church because, in all candor, Calvary is really quite strong in discipleship, but we tend to be rather weak and ineffective at sharing with our friends, coworkers, and family members the only hope available for their eternal salvation. And if that appraisal is true; that we tend to be weak and ineffective with the gospel, then something needs to happen in our church and in our lives personally to effect change. So we have enlisted the help of some trusted brothers as we begin in earnest to plead with the Spirit of God to change us and make us into men and women who resolve to live with a real sense of Gospel Urgency and become strong and effective in Gospel ministry.

Paul’s Shameless Gospel Ministry:

Over the past few weeks I have been helped by the Apostle Paul in my own thinking about why we tend to be weak and ineffective with the gospel and what its going to take to change that. One thing is indisputable about Paul: He was fearless about proclaiming the excellencies of Christ. He said in Rom. 1:16 *“I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.”*

Part of our problem as American Christians is that we tend to fall prey to what might be termed misplaced shame. There are things we ought to be ashamed of (pride,

materialism, gossip, slander, sexual sin, lying, godless entertainment, lovelessness, gluttony) but we experience little shame over such Christ-belittling attitudes and actions. On the other hand, there are things we ought *never* be ashamed of (moral purity, holiness, the Scriptures, the Person and Gospel of Jesus Christ) but we find ourselves paralyzed by fear when we have opportunity to hold these virtues high. This is misplaced shame. And it is a kind of shame that followers of Jesus should never give into.

Paul was not ashamed of the things that are precious in the sight of Jesus. Most importantly, he (unlike us) was never ashamed of the gospel. And he knew full well that people would NOT always love him for saying that Jesus is the only “*way, truth, and life [and] no one comes to the Father but through Him*” (Jn. 14:6). Those are inflammatory words for many, many people in His culture and in ours. But He was NOT ashamed. Why? What made Paul so bold with the gospel?

Philippians 1:20-21

The answer, I believe, is revealed right here in Philippians chapter 1:20-21. You remember the context. The Philippians sent to Rome a letter of concern for Paul because he had been put in jail. They probably thought, as we might, that this would be the end of his ministry. But Paul’s perspective was different. The way he saw it, this new turn of events was from the the Lord. God was putting him into the only place where Paul would have direct and continuous contact with Roman Soldiers.

Because of his imprisonment, many in Ceasar’s household had come to faith in Christ. And many of the brothers found within their hearts a new boldness to proclaim the gospel without fear... just like Paul. As we learned last week, , Paul interpreted his trouble differently than we often do. We tend to measure a circumstance according to how much comfort it either provides or takes removes. Unexpected car repair – that’s bad. Unexpected check for \$1,000– that’s good. Being diagnosed with a disease – that’s bad. Medicine that makes you feel better – that’s good. Loose your job of 20 years – that’s bad. Offered a promotion at work – that good. But Paul didn’t value his circumstances by the currency of comfort.

Rather, he valued his circumstances according to whether they enabled him to proclaim the excellencies of Christ.

If circumstances were pleasant and people were responding to the gospel – that was good. If circumstances were threatening but gave him opportunity to proclaim Christ – that also was good. If being arrested and put in prison enabled him to offer the gospel to soldiers – that was good. If his imprisonment empowered others to

proclaim the gospel, that too was good. In every case Paul found reason to joyfully maintain his gospel urgency But how?

I want to offer two reasons from the text that answer this question.

I. Gospel Urgency is Sustained by Believing we will be Delivered.

Read 1:19-20

1. Paul was fearless with the gospel because he knew that no matter how difficult the trouble, God would deliver him. God Himself would rescue him.
2. Remember, now, Paul is not writing this from Seminary. He isn't sitting in his plush senior-pastor office with a cup of coffee in one hand and Logos Bible Software in the screen. No, he is in a dank Roman prison cell chained to two soldiers. He is in prison, but his hope and joy are intact. His gospel urgency has not waned. Why? Because he knows that one way or another God will deliver him.
3. Paul knew his O.T. He knew the promises of God and the reputation of God as His people's Deliverer. In fact, as John MacArthur observes, the phrase "*this shall turn out for my deliverance*" is a verbatim quote from the book of Job (Job. 13:16).¹ Talk about a man who had his share of trouble! There has scarcely been a man on earth who has suffered like Job, but he was convinced that God would deliver him. God would either rescue him out of his temporal trouble by relieving the problem or he would rescue him by permanently by taking him to glory.
4. In the O.T. we see this confidence again in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3:17). Against the threats of King Nebuchadnezzar to throw them into the fiery furnace, these three young men declared, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king."
5. This is what Paul has in mind here. He knows that whether he lived through ordeal of prison or was made to face the executioner, he will be delivered.

(Read 20)

- A. Notice – "*I will be NOT at all ashamed,*" and "*with full courage...*" Paul refused to be ashamed of the gospel.
- B. That is, he did not allow fear of man to rule over his God-appointed

¹ John MacArthur, *Joy In Spite of Death* (sermon online at <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/50-9/joy-in-spite-of-death>)

opportunities to speak of the excellencies of Christ, but exercised faith-besotted courage instead.

6. Beloved, if we are going to develop a church-wide sense of gospel urgency we have got to become expert in overcoming our fears.

A. If you are the kind of person who *lives* upon the acceptance of other people and *dies* on the alter of their rejection, you are going to have a serious problem cultivating Gospel Urgency in your life.

B. The only biblical way to combat such fear is to cultivate faith in God's promises and love for Jesus that overwhelms fear.

7. I confess, at times I can allow myself to be ruled by fear, so I am preaching this sermon to ME as well. We recently erected a heavy-duty, professional grade basketball goal in the church parking lot both to serve our own young people and to attract outsiders who love basketball and may not know the Lord.

This past week I heard a ball bouncing in the office and I looked outside and there were a couple of young college-age guys playing ball. And I thought, somebody ought to go out there and share the gospel with them! And then I went back to my study (I know! Pitiful, right?).

A couple days later I stepped outside and there they were again. Two college-aged young men with their shirts off looking all buff, fit, and intimidatating playing ball. They've got the their truck out there with their doors open playing loud music. And I thought, where's Keith when I need him? All the while I'm studying this passage in Philippians.

Then on Tuesday, they came back again, and I thought of this passage in Phil. 1; "*That I will not be at all ashamed but with full courage now as alwaus Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*" So I walked over and when I got within 20 feet of them, one of them threw me the ball and said, "Let's see a three pointer!" So I did, and the ball launched up in a beautiful arch and came down and bounced off the inside of the rim. So close! And they said, Hey, not bad! So I introduced myself and we got into a conversation about basketball, and family, *and the*

gospel. Both of them happily engaged in the conversation and one of them really seemed to get the message.

I came away for that interlude saying, thank you Lord. Sharing the gospel isn't always that easy, but I got to see your faithfulness to your word today. And because of that my heart is filled with a joy I would not have known if I had made another excuse for my fear.

8. The point is... Paul Maintained His Gospel Urgency by trusting that God would deliver him, weather by life or by death.

II. Gospel Urgency is Motivated by believing life is Christ and death is Gain.

1. Notice with me the interplay between verse 20 & 21.

- Verse 20 mentions “life” and “death.”
- Verse 21 uses the words “live” and “die.”

- verse 20 speaks of Paul’s goal;
- Verse 21 speaks of his Motive.
 - a. Paul’s Goal is to “*honor*” (or exalt, make large, or glorify) Christ in his body come what may!
 - b. Paul’s motive, is the unshakable belief that Life is Christ and Death is Gain

2. You see, on the one hand Paul knows there is a possibility his trial before Ceasar may result in his acquittal and release. He might actually live through this ordeal. On the other hand, the judgment might still go the other way. He might be found guilty of sedition and sentenced to death. Regardless, however, Paul has the same resolve. *If I live, I live for the Lord. If I die, I die for the Lord. So whether I live or die I am the Lord’s.*

3. There were two life-dominating principles that governed the apostle Paul. First, he believed the fountain real life – the best life – is Christ alone. In one sense Paul really did live for his *Best Life Now*. It's just that he knew the best life a believer can have in this world is a life of intimacy and fellowship, and service to Christ though it cost him everything.

Read Phil. 3:7-8

- A. Notice the word “*gain*” again in this verse.
- B. Life for Paul was about knowing Christ, and growing in a deeper and more personal and experiential knowledge of Him, and laboring with Him with the gospel.
- C. What is LIFE for you, Paul? Answer: “*To live is Christ.*” And I do gladly let go of everything else for the joy of knowing and serving Him.

4. The second life-dominating principle that governed Paul was this: “*Death is gain.*” Normally, when we think of death we think of loss. Not Paul! Why? Because for Him Life is Christ. But in this life EVEN Paul had *limited capacities* for knowing Jesus, and fellowshiping with Jesus, and worshiping Jesus. The only place in the universe where one can fully and ultimately know Christ is in His very presence. Therefore, death is the door to ultimate gain. When we see Jesus face to face,

- Sin will be eradicated,
- Holiness will be perfected.
- Temptation will be trampled.
- Disabilities will be discarded.
- Pain will be replaced with Spirit-wrought wellness and strength.
- The fog will lift, the light will shine, and we will be truly alive.
- More than all of this, our ultimate desire will be fulfilled for we will know Christ even as we are known.
- All we will know forever is joy - unspeakable joy - because we will finally and forever be with the One who owed us nothing but gave us everything when he gave up heaven to live among us and die in our place so that we might be reconciled to God.

5. You want to know how Paul maintained his gospel urgency even in jail? Its because for him Life is Christ and death is gain.

6. What is life to you?

- If living is entertainment, then dying is loss
- If living is money, dying is loss
- If living is a beautiful house, dying is loss

- If living is a comfortable retirement, dying is loss.
- But if living is Christ, then dying is gain

7. Do you want to cultivate gospel urgency? Remember this: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” So treasure Christ. Cultivate a deep affection and desire for Christ. And as the Spirit of God to wean you from everything that interferes with cultivating a desire to know him more.

True gospel urgency naturally naturally flows from a heart that treasures Christ above all else.