

Phil 1:12-26  
Living in Christ  
*Tim Anderson 25/6/17*

Last week I gave you some of the background of Paul's letter to the Philippians.  
That he wrote it a decade after planting the church.  
That there was a strong and affectionate relationship between Paul and the church.  
But there was one important piece of context I left out, because it was more appropriate to talk about it today.  
Paul was imprisoned when he wrote Philippians.  
He's most probably in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar.  
He doesn't know what the future holds for him.  
Humanly speaking his future lay in the hands of a man who was not noted for his impeccable knowledge of or adherence to high standards of jurisprudence.  
The Roman Emperors could be a capricious bunch.  
At any moment Paul could be told he was going to be sent to the lions.  
Part of his reason for writing the letter is because the Philippians were understandably worried about him.

It quite often happens to me,  
when someone is telling me about why they don't come to church,  
they tell me they live a very Christian life.  
They're trying to tell me that it's OK that they don't come to church,  
because they are doing the thing  
that church is meant to help you with already.  
But what is a Christian life?  
That's what we find out from the apostle Paul in today's passage.  
And let me tell you,  
it's not what the person you meet in the Coles carpark thinks it is.  
So let's find out from the apostle Paul,  
what it means to live a Christian life.

"I want you to know brothers and sisters,

that what has happened to me  
has actually served to advance the gospel."  
What has happened to Paul?  
He's been put into jail.  
Not because he robbed a bank or something.  
But because he had been preaching Christ.  
He lived in a world where doing what I am doing now  
could land you in jail.  
And imprisoned was what he was.  
And what were Paul's thoughts about that?  
Well he was happy.  
He was happy because his imprisonment  
had served to advance the gospel.

That word advance is a key word.  
It's obscured in English.  
But it's the same word in verse 25.  
"I will continue with all of you  
for your *progress* and joy in the faith."  
Paul wants the gospel to advance.  
He wants the faith of the Philippian Christians to progress.  
Which is just another way of seeing the gospel advance.  
That's how the gospel advances,  
by the faith of believers progressing,  
and by people becoming believers.  
Progress of the gospel.  
Gospel advancement.  
That is Paul's measuring stick for judging whether life is going well.  
Is the gospel advancing?  
Yes.  
Then Paul is happy.

Now most of us would say that we are happy if the gospel is advancing.  
But what about  
when the cause of its advancement is your imprisonment.  
Are you still happy then?

When you are in hospital,  
do you rejoice because there is a captive audience of doctors and nurse  
who you can share your faith with.  
Or are you more interested in getting well?

When a Christian businessman is ripped off by a business partner,  
and someone sees the godly way he handles it,  
and is profoundly affected,  
does the businessman rejoice because the gospel is advancing,  
or does he rue money he lost?

When a Christian woman's husband is unfaithful to her,  
is she filled with bitterness,  
or does she rejoice in the opportunity  
to see how Jesus will be faithful to her  
in the midst of living with her husband's unfaithfulness?

It's easy to say I'm living for the advance of the gospel.  
But life throws you some real curve balls.  
It's not always easy to live for the gospel.

But, you see this is the measure of the Christian life.  
Do you measure everything against the yardstick  
of does it advance the gospel?  
Or do you use the yardsticks the world uses?  
Is it cash, career or comfort that is your yardstick  
or is it Christ?

How does Paul measure his imprisonment?  
Well his imprisonment is good  
because the whole palace guard knows that he is in chains for Christ.  
That's one way of getting the message of Jesus out there.  
Paul was under house arrest in Rome.  
That meant instead of sticking you in jail,  
you could live in your own home,  
and a guard would be permanently shackled to you for his shift.

And then when the shift changed,  
a new guard would be shackled to you.  
What does Paul see when he sees a guard shackled to him?  
Is this a restriction on his freedom of movement?  
Not at all.  
This is a captive audience.  
This guy has 12 hours and he can't escape.  
And it's a special thing for the guard too.  
Instead of having to be chained to someone  
who curses you and swears at you.  
You are chained to someone  
who tells you about Jesus and prays for you.  
It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard,  
that Paul is in chains for Christ.  
And that hasn't only had good results  
for those actually in contact with Paul.

Paul says,  
"Because of my chains,  
most of the brothers and sisters  
have become confidants in the Lord  
and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."  
How does that work?  
Ordinary Christians are looking at Paul.  
And they are saying to themselves,  
this guy keeps talking about Jesus even when he's on death row.  
Surely I can have the courage to talk about Jesus in my baker's shop  
or down at the baths.  
The example of someone actually doing  
what we thought was impossible  
is a great inspiration.  
It spurs us on to have courage.  
So overall, Paul can see many benefits to his imprisonment.

There are some downsides though.  
Not the ones you might have imagined.

He doesn't talk about missing his evening walk.  
"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry,  
but others out of goodwill.  
The latter do so out of love,  
knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel.  
The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition,  
not sincerely,  
supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains."  
How is it possible to preach Christ out of envy and rivalry?  
Well Paul is an apostle.  
Chosen by God to carry the message of the gospel.  
So in the church in Roman,  
he is looked to as a great leader.  
And no doubt there have been someone people in the church  
who have been thinking to themselves,  
"Y'know what. I think I could preach Christ as well as Paul does.  
How come he gets to be the head guy?  
I think I should be right up there with him."  
And so when Paul is thrown into jail,  
they offer the church their services as those who preach Christ.  
And someone comes up to them after church on Sunday and says,  
'That was a wonderful message, pastor.  
God really spoke to me.'  
And the answer is something like this.  
"God works in mysterious ways.  
I think he had a plan to really grow his church  
when he had Paul imprisoned.  
That really freed up the next generation of leaders  
who can really take the gospel forward,  
in a way that Paul just wasn't quite up to.  
Lovely fellow but a bit past it,  
you know what I mean."  
Preaching Christ not driven by their great love for Jesus,  
but driven by their love  
for the positions of leadership and status in the church.  
Very sad.

And a problem not confined to the first century.  
But how does Paul respond?  
Is he cut to the heart,  
that some people are trying to pull the rug out from under him  
while he's unable to speak to the congregation?  
Well if he is, it doesn't show.  
Here's his response in verse 18.  
"But what does it matter?  
The important thing is that in every way,  
whether from false motives or true,  
Christ is preached.  
And because of this I rejoice."  
If people want to erode Paul's position of influence in the church  
by preaching the gospel,  
"Praise God that the gospel is being preached!"  
That is Paul's response.  
Everything is measured by one question,  
"Does it advance the gospel?"

Paul is praising God and he's not going to stop praising God.  
He says,  
"Yes and I will continue to rejoice,  
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."  
Paul is trusting God to deliver him from his imprisonment.  
But he's not a tele evangelist.  
And that's not only because the TV is 1900 years off being invented.  
Paul trusts God for his deliverance.  
But listen carefully.  
There are two possible ways that deliverance might happen.  
"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."

Two means of deliverance - by life or by death.

He might be released from imprisonment

to serve Christ by encouraging and strengthening the church.

That would be deliverance.

He might be released from imprisonment by dying.

You can't keep a dead person locked up.

And if Paul dies then he will be delivered into the presence of God.

It doesn't matter.

Either way Paul is delivered.

What is his main concern?

It's not dying.

It that he has enough courage,

that he won't be ashamed of his conduct when he's under pressure.

He knows that the Romans have ways

of making life particularly unpleasant.

But he's confident

that they won't be able to make his life unpleasant enough

that he would turn his back on Jesus.

Where does his confidence come from?

Is it because he is Paul the great apostle -

The courageous hero of the faith?

Not at all.

In verse 19, two things give him courage.

The Philippians are praying for him.

God has given him the Spirit of Jesus Christ to live in his heart.

So if you are a Christian,

you have access to the same reservoir of courage that Paul had.

Your Christian brothers and sisters are praying for you -

or if they aren't they ought to be.

And you have the Holy Spirit living in your heart.

Paul measures everything with one yardstick.

Does it advance the gospel?

As far as his imprisonment goes,

if his courage holds out,

then Christ will be exalted in his body,  
and the gospel will be advanced.

Here's the conclusion he draws.

"For me to live is Christ  
and to die is gain."

That's it.

The last five verses of our passage are Paul tossing up which is better.  
Which he will do.

But the important conclusion is first.

To live is Christ  
and to die is gain.

To live means the gospel advances because Paul serves Jesus.

To die means he gets to be with Jesus.

It's a win / win.

Heads Paul wins.

Tails the devil loses.

Paul can't lose.

So let's head back to my friends who I started the sermon with.

You know the ones who live 'a very Christian life'.

By which they mean a reasonably moral and inoffensive life.

But what does it actually mean to live a Christian life?

It means to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Do these people who say they live a Christian life  
even have an inkling of what that means?

No they don't.

If you told them that 'to live is Christ',  
they would look at you blankly.

If you told them that 'to die is gain',  
they would question

whether you needed to be admitted to a psych ward.

Their idea of a Christian life,  
and the apostle's idea are poles apart.

But of course the Christian idea of a Christian life is Paul's idea.



To live is Christ and to die is gain.  
And Paul's idea of a Christian life is Jesus' idea of a Christian life.  
What is Jesus' idea of a Christian life?  
"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it.  
But whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it."  
That is just another way of saying 'To live is Christ and to die is gain'.  
Paul has understood Jesus perfectly well.

So what does this mean for us?  
My suspicion is that Western Christianity  
is a bit flabby round the middle.  
Somewhat like your minister.  
Well we don't need to get overly concerned about the minister's flab,  
because to die is gain.  
But flabby Christianity is no good.  
You see spiritually we need hardship and sacrifice  
to exercise off the spiritual flab.  
And so very few of us have the single minded focus  
that could say,  
'To live is Christ'.  
And even fewer of us could say,  
'To die is gain'.  
Medical care is so good.  
And the doctors are pretty good at extending our lives.  
For the medicos, death is something to be avoided at all costs.  
But for us,  
if it means being faithful to Christ,  
we won't blink at death.  
Because to die is gain.

Now as you read the passage,  
you might be like me and think to yourself,  
"Why am I so pathetic?  
I don't measure up.  
I'm addicted to me little comforts.  
I love my petty hopes and dreams."

Well part of it has to do with our situation.  
Paul could look at death without blinking  
because Paul had been shipwrecked three times,  
each time he might have died.  
He'd had a plot against his life from the Jews.  
He'd been stoned and left for dead.  
And now here he was on death row.  
Of course if you have the experience,  
you do acclimatise.  
And Paul had the experience in spades.  
Most of us don't.

So what do we do?  
Well we need to encourage one another  
to be a bit less spiritually flabby.  
We need to share stories of where we have managed  
to be a bit more singled minded in following Christ.  
Not in a spirit of one-upmanship.  
But as a way of developing a narrative of commitment to discipleship.

So if you've got a story like that,  
share it with me.  
I'd love to have these stories told in the church.  
Testimony is a powerful tool to motivate us to be followers of Jesus.

So let's remember what a Christian life looks like.  
"For me, to live is Christ  
and to die is gain."  
That is a Christian life.  
"For me, to live is Christ  
and to die is gain."