

Study In Philippians Part 2

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you've ever heard of Oswald Chambers, but he was a Scottish minister and evangelist about 100 years ago. And he once wrote a very helpful quote, that crisis reveals character.

In other words, our true selves are often revealed in a crisis. You might think of a cup that's full to the brim, and when it's jolted, liquid spills out and you see what's inside.

And Jesus says the same thing when he says, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. So anger spills out of an angry heart. Compassion spills out of a compassionate heart.

The same way as bitter water only spills out of a bitter cup. Crisis reveals character. But I think we can add two things to that though, that we'll see in our passage tonight.

The first is that crisis also reveals our concerns. What's most important to us, what we most care about, it reveals our ambitions. COVID reminded lots of people who were caught up in the hamster wheel of the corporate world that actually being with family was what was more important to them.

[1 : 10] Or being in nature was more important to them. And that's why you've got loads of people coming over during COVID and getting houses on Lewis. But crisis also reveals our convictions. Underneath our concerns, underneath our concerns, what do we live for, what will we prepare to die for?

Underneath all of that are convictions. Foundational and fundamental convictions, whether we realize that or not. Convictions of what is of greatest worth. What are we prepared to live for, what are we prepared to die for?

If family is what's most important to us, then we'll be willing to give up everything, even our lives for our family. On the other hand, you see people give up their families if they think that going up in the career ladder is the most important thing for them.

Because they see success or maybe wealth or something else was of greatest worth. Crisis reveals our concerns and it reveals the convictions that are underneath.

And if that's true for us, that was equally true for the apostle Paul. We know from these verses that Paul is writing from prison, probably in Rome. And as we read through Acts, we see that Paul is there because he appealed to Caesar.

[2 : 25] So when he was in Jerusalem, he was wrongly accused by some of the religious leaders there. And there were these false accusations and an attempt on his life.

And one thing led to another and Paul appealed to Caesar to get justice. And so that has led to many months of Paul traveling across from Jerusalem all the way to Rome, where he's now in prison, waiting the outcome of a trial that could be life or could be death.

And in this time of crisis, Paul's concerns and underlying convictions are clearly seen. In fact, Paul's very clear about them deliberately because he wants the Philippians and us to imitate him as he imitates Christ. He wants us to share his convictions and concerns.

So we're going to look at them first, his concerns. Paul has one concern and that is the advance of the gospel to the glory of Christ.

Just a health warning, this first point contains four parts, so it's going to be longer than our second point. Think of it, you know, yeah, you get the idea. Paul's concern, we see Paul's concern in the way he responds to various aspects of the trial.

[3 : 41] So the first situation we see is prison. Look at me how he responds to prison itself in verses 12 to 13. He says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

So that has become known throughout the whole Imperial Guard and to the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. Now, I wonder how you would respond if you found yourself in prison.

I don't know what will be your greatest concern as you wrote a letter to your friend, whether you'd ask for more clothes or warm blanket or maybe for them to hire a lawyer for you to get you out of there.

Paul asks for none of these things, does he? And amazingly, his greatest concern is the advance of the gospel. In fact, he's so concerned with the advance of the gospel that because he sees that happening through him being in prison, he rejoices.

He's not there crying himself to sleep in prison, he's rejoicing because he sees that through his imprisonment, the gospel advances rather than imprisonment, muzzling him and stopping him being able to speak of the gospel.

[4 : 47] It's actually given him fresh opportunities and he says he's been able to use the, he's been given opportunities to share the gospel with the whole Imperial Guard.

Now, if you know a little bit of history of the Roman Empire, the Imperial Guard or Pre-Otterian Guard was the elite unit of Roman soldiers and they had a bunch of privileges and they served as the personal bodyguard to the Roman Emperor and sometimes the personal assassin depending on whether they liked the Emperor or not.

But one of their privileges or, no, not privileges, one of their worst responsibilities was guarding the Imperial prisoners and often by being chained to them. And I remember my old minister used to illustrate this often to describe the scene of Paul waking up in the morning.

He wakes up in the morning and he sees another two different guards chained to him. They've swapped over in their shift the night before and he rubs his eyes and says, Hi, my name's Paul. I bet you can't guess why I'm here.

And they're like, well, okay, why are you here? Well, I'm here because of a guy called Jesus Christ. Oh, wait, you don't know him. Let me tell you all about him. And so Paul would tell them all about who Jesus Christ is and why he came to this earth, why he died and why Paul is telling this message that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[6 : 05] And so that would go there. He'd literally have a captive audience for that whole day. And then I'm sure these weary Roman soldiers, they would change their shift and the next one would come in and the same thing would happen again.

Hi, my name's Paul. I guess you can't guess why I'm here. So prison allowed Paul to share the Gospel with the whole Imperial guard.

By the end he said, I mean, it's pretty amazing. These thousands of soldiers would be able to just work through them all or at least it's the message has gone out that Paul is there for Christ. But prison not only allowed Paul to share the Gospel, it also emboldened others.

It caused other people to proclaim the Gospel. So if we look at verse 14, Paul says, And most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Now that's not what you would expect, is it? You know, if the leader of the early church, one of the leaders of the early church gets chucked in prison you think that people would fear that they're going to be next. That they're going to duck and they're going to run and people in Rome are going to think, Okay, we're going to keep a low profile, not talk about Jesus much.

[7 : 17] But the opposite occurred. Paul's fearlessness to proclaim the Gospel inspired all these other people, probably who've been in the shadows a bit more, to instead be fearless themselves to speak about Christ.

Paul's chains inspired those who are unchained to speak the Gospel without fear. And so throughout this we see Paul sees his prison not as a reason for sorrow, but as a reason to rejoice because his one concern is for the advance of the Gospel.

So he rejoices that Christ has proclaimed whatever the personal cost. And even in some ways as an aside, this little passage, it's an amazing reminder that God uses any and every situation to advance the Gospel.

I think the Philippians actually wouldn't have been very surprised by this. After all, would the Philippian jailer have ever heard the Gospel if Paul hadn't been put in prison the first time he visited Philippi? I don't know, probably not.

But God works through extraordinary circumstances in order to advance the Gospel, in order for people to hear about Christ. That's something that's happened throughout the centuries of Christianity.

[8 : 31] A persecution is given opportunities rather than squished the Gospel. It's emboldened people to take a stand. I remember reading about the beginning of a church in a remote part of Nepal.

And during a government crackdown, quite a few of the elders were taken to prison. But amazingly, they didn't crush the church. Other people actually saw the need and they stepped up to minister to other people's needs to try to explain the Bible to each other.

And more than that, there's this amazing account how while these believers are being marched three days over the mountains to prison, because that was the nearest prison, they passed people going the other way. And these people asked, where are you going?

Why are you all tied up in a line going to prison? And they said, oh, we're in prison for Jesus. And they're like, who's that? Well, go to our village and they'll tell you all about him. And the guy's writing it says through that loads and loads of people ended up coming to know and believe in Christ through these guys in prison.

We can have confidence that we have a God who is sovereign and who is far more powerful than all the situations that might be in play in the world. And he will advance his gospel.

[9 : 48] But back to Paul though, we see not only in his imprisonment that his number one concern is the advance the gospel, but also when Paul's faced with slander. Look with me at verses 15 to 17.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do so out of love knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

While some people are stepping up to preach Christ out of love, one group seem to have some kind of selfish ambition. They're doing it for the bad reasons. Maybe they're trying to take advantage of Paul being imprisoned to kind of establish their own ministry to be the new big fish in the pond.

But whatever it is, they've been kind of pushing slandering down Paul for their own sake. Just to be clear, these aren't false teachers. Do you notice how Paul responds to them? He says the others are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition.

Even if they've got bad intentions, they're still preaching Christ. And for that reason, Paul rejoices. Verse 18, he says, Only what then in that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

[11 : 06] And in that, I rejoice. Paul's unwavering concern is for Christ to be proclaimed. And so he's willing to have his reputation ripped to shreds.

That doesn't matter to him as long as Christ is being proclaimed. It doesn't matter that he might be losing a following. Paul's not after after trying to build his own kingdom, trying to be the big guy.

Paul wants to see Christ proclaimed whatever the cost. I think that naturally sets a challenge for us. Are we as single minded in our desire to see the gospel proclaimed?

Is that our greatest concern? And Christ is a really good test of that. Paul clearly cared more about the gospel than his own comfort or his reputation to me.

Do we? What about when we face the cost? It's really easy to become jealous, you see, when we see other people's ministry grow, maybe.

[12 : 09] I know how easy it was in St. Andrew's when there are four good gospel preaching churches. And you have a load of students come along in the first week of semester and you think, oh, this is great.

And then you find out about ten of them decide to go to another church, probably often more or whatever. And the reason comes back that you hear that some of the students are saying, oh, you don't want to go to the free church because they're doing this, that and the other and their music's bad and they don't say all kinds of things.

I mean, students say all kinds of rubbish things. But anyway, it's really easy at that point to feel annoyed and to feel jealous and thinking, why are they going to that church? Why aren't they coming here? But Paul rejoiced.

Because Paul's saying it doesn't matter where they're going as long as the gospel is being proclaimed. And that's hard to put into practice. Maybe bring that closer to home. Imagine two free churches in the same area.

We get that quite a lot in the Isle of Lewis and people go to one and not the other. Are we jealous or do we rejoice? Another example, take a youth group. You can have the kids maybe from your catchment area travel twice as far to go to a different youth group.

[13 : 23] Anything on the earth? There's a perfectly good youth group here. Paul would rejoice because they're still hearing about Christ. How do we feel if suddenly the gospel was being proclaimed?

There was a Pentecostal church that experienced massive growth. There was a great revival there as people hear the gospel and come to faith. What would our response be? Would we think, oh man, what about us?

We've been preaching the gospel and there hasn't been anything. What are they going there for? I think Paul would rejoice because Christ is proclaimed. Paul's number one concern isn't making his own empire. It's not making his own kingdom.

It's so easy to equate my church with God's mission and say, if you're not with us, you're against us. But Paul's ambitions are far bigger than that. It's for Christ and his kingdom, for him to be proclaimed wherever that is.

Faced with slander and rivalry, Paul's greatest concern then we see is the advance of the gospel, not his own reputation. That's Paul looking back in the past, now in verses 18 to 26. Paul thinks, looks forward into the future and he contemplates his future trial.

[14 : 39] So what then is his concern as he looks at the future? Let me read from verse 20. 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. I think you're getting the picture now. Paul's obsession is the same.

Christ is honored, whether by life or by death. What matters to Paul? Most to Paul isn't the outcome of the trial. Strangely enough, but his conduct in the trial. Paul's not thinking, oh my goodness, am I going to be set free or not?

Are they going to believe my testimony or not? He's saying, am I going to speak in a way that honors Christ? Am I going to be ashamed and not say anything to try to save my own skin or am I going to be bold enough to speak for Christ?

Because Paul knows he's appealed to Caesar. Caesar kind of decide whether he lives or dies and he knows the message of the gospel goes right against the message of the Roman Empire. He says that Jesus is Lord and the Roman Empire says Caesar is Lord and Paul proclaiming Christ flashes with that.

But Paul says, but saying nothing isn't an option for Paul. His greatest concerns, the advance of the gospel. And so he says to the Philippians, pray for me. I love that. Paul says you need to pray for me. I need courage.

[16 : 02] Pray for me so that I might honor Christ. I don't know the main things that normally shape your decisions. I think normally we think about what will bring us the most happiness, the most comfort, what will help me to keep doing the things I enjoy.

What will give me the most gain with the least amount of pain. That tends to be how we choose between two jobs. Tends to be how we choose where we want to live or who we want to spend time with.

But Paul just has one big filter through which he puts everything. And that's what will most honor Christ and serve the church. And into that big filter, Paul chucks in life or death, his hopes, his desires, his dreams, his travel plans, his future jobs, everything for Paul.

Go through that filter. What's going to most honor God? What's going to most help to proclaim Christ? We might think, how can life or death not matter to Paul? Paul's in face with trial. Paul's concern isn't his life.

It's but that it's that Christ is on it. But Paul, isn't it better to live to fight another day? Surely living for another 10 years will be better for the gospel.

[17 : 13] But we see Paul's actually having that same internal monologue. We come to the second part of the situation with trial. Paul is weighing up in verse 21 onwards. If it was life or death, if he had a choice between life and death, what would it be?

I mean, read those verses again. He says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I'm to live in the flesh, that would mean fruitful labor for me. Which I choose, I cannot tell. I'm 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. Convince to this, I know I'll remain and continue with all, you with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith. So that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ because of my coming to you again.

We'll look more at verse 21 in our second point. But just for now, notice how he weighs up life and death if he had the choice. In verse 23 he admits his greatest desire is to depart and be with Christ. For him death is simply the door to being with Christ more.

But he says in verses 22 and 24 that the church will be better served if he lives. And so Paul hopes that he lives. And no, he's not saying that for his sake, he's saying that for their sake, he would much prefer to be with Christ.

[18 : 36] But his only reason to live is for their sake. In many ways, Paul is acting a lot like Jesus Christ here, isn't he? Who we'll see in chapter 22, exchange the throne of heaven for death and the cross, not for his sake, but for ours.

Even when faced with death, Paul cares so much about the progress of the Gospel that he's even willing to delay being with Christ, which is his ultimate desire to instead serve the Gospel.

Paul has one concern, the advance of the Gospel to the glory of Christ. That's more important to him than comfort, than reputation, than freedom, than life, or even being with Christ ASAP.

Now I want to ask you, what is your honest reaction to Paul? If Paul came and sat down in the room with you, or you didn't notice Paul, someone sat down and told you all that.

What would you say? I think I'd say, steady on, don't get carried away. Paul, this sounds all great. I'm really glad that you're a keen Christian, but this sounds a bit like an obsession.

[19 : 45] This sounds a bit tunnel vision, this sounds a bit unhealthy. Maybe we'll think, that's just Paul. He's an apostle. That's all he does. Paul does Jesus.

And so he's a special breed of Christian for whom nothing else matters. But no, Paul's perfectly sane. And it's not just an apostle thing, it's not just the keen Christian thing, because Paul will say in chapter 3 verse 17, imitate me. Paul wants us to share this crazy sounding, wholehearted, single-minded obsession for the advance of the gospel. And if that sounds insane or unrealistic or too keen, then actually that doesn't point to Paul being crazy.

That points to the fact that our convictions need to change. Why does Paul consider the advance of the gospel more important than his own life? What does he understand that's made him make that choice?

That's because of a foundational conviction which we come on to now in our second point, which is that Christ is of supreme worth. There is nothing compared to Christ. And this comes out in Paul's monologue, doesn't it?

As he weighs it up, he says, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. To live, literally to live Christ, to die, gain. To live Christ. In other words, he's saying the whole purpose, the whole goal of living is Christ.

[21 : 26] To serve him, to know him. You could say that for Paul, the only life worth living is a life that is serving Christ, that is lived for Christ, that is centered around Christ. It's not an unhealthy obsession. Rather, Paul is reflecting, it's an appropriate obsession.

Because relationship with Christ is the reason for which we've been created. It's the purpose for which God saves us. In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9, we're told that we are saved in order to proclaim the excellencies of Christ.

We're saved in order to glorify him. We're saved in order to live for him. To live is Christ. On the other hand, Paul says, to die is gain. Because for him, death is simply the door to knowing Christ more and more. In life, he knows Christ, in death, he knows him fully and perfectly.

In fact, you notice how Paul doesn't even use the language of death, does he? He kind of skirts around. He doesn't use that word. Because in verse 22, he speaks of living in the flesh. The options for Paul aren't life and death, but life and life. Living with Christ or being at home with Christ, both of them are all life because it's with Christ.

I think we understand that in some ways. When a believer dies, we find comfort in the truth that they are with Christ. We know that they're safe in their arms of their Savior.

[22 : 57] They're never going to be snatched away and we're right to find consolation in that. When a believer dies, they go to be with Christ. Being with Christ for them is gain.

But here's the question. Are we also prepared to say that being with Christ is gain for us now? Do we believe that being with Christ is not just the best thing for the dead or dying, but also the best thing for the living?

You see, I don't think our understanding of the worth of Christ is exposed in how we talk about death, but how we talk about life. It's so easy to undervalue Christ to just treat him like the thousand-piece puzzle that you bring out on a rainy day when you've got nothing better to do.

You know, when I'm older, when I can't do this or that anymore, maybe when my children have left home, maybe when I'm retired, then I'll focus on Jesus. For now, I've got more worthwhile things to focus on.

Paul understood the supreme worth of Christ. For Paul, Christ wasn't just the silver lining around death. Christ wasn't just a retirement project. Christ is the pinnacle of life itself. To live is Christ.

[24 : 18] If we were to be honest with ourselves for just a second, how would we finish that sentence? I should have put it up on the screen, but if we'd say to live is, what would you dot, dot, dot? What would you put in there?

What immediately comes to mind? What is your life centered around? To live is being a minister in training. To live is my family. To live is my favorite sport. To live is hobbies. To live is my holiday, friendships, career.

What is living for us? What makes, what do we live for? Paul isn't saying those things have no worth. But Paul is reminding us that all of these things that we might insert in there, all these things we might live for, they're like a penny compared to, in a jar, compared to the bank vault stuffed with gold that is Christ.

That's why he's saying Christ is worth more than anything this world can offer. In chapter 3 verse 10, Paul will say he counts everything else as loss for the sake of knowing Christ, all his credentials, all his achievements, all his, all his reputation.

Nothing compares to knowing Christ for Paul. And from that, from this chapter, you could add to that, that Christ for Paul is more precious than comfort, than freedom, than even life itself.

[25 : 46] And I think we struggle to believe this partly because this world is full of so many things that glitter, so many things that seem to be treasures, that seem to make life worthwhile, but they're just shiny rocks and the true treasure is Christ.

We struggle to believe that Christ is worth more than everything else, maybe because we haven't tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Maybe we've never realised of how worth Christ is.

C.S. Lewis is right to say that we can be like children, content to make mud pies because we've never known a day at the beach. Well, maybe we have tasted the goodness of Christ, but now we're just so busy stuffing our faces with the junk food that the world offers that we've forgotten how much more sweeter and satisfying Christ is.

Christ knows how nice comfort and freedom in life are. But the news of the Gospel is that Christ chose to give them all up.

He didn't hold on to the comfort of heaven, but instead chose to experience the sorrow and pain of a broken world. He left the chorus of angelic hosts to be mocked and to be slandered and spat upon.

[27 : 06] He exchanged complete freedom for the limitations of humanity. Faced with life or death in Gethsemane, he said, not my will, but yours be done. And he chose death over life.

Why? So that he might give us a treasure beyond compare, so that he might give us himself and life with him. It's only when we realize that to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's only when we hold Christ.

It's only then that we realize that nothing else can compare. And so nothing else in this world matters but living for him. Now, that doesn't mean that we all need to become ministers and missionaries like Paul.

But that means that once we realize how good Christ is, that has to, that must overflow into a life to say that actually all of my life must be for Christ, to be proclaiming him, to be living for him, to be honoring him in life or in death. Let's pray.