

Joy When Life is Tough - Philippians
Part 2
Reasons and Resources for Living
Philippians 1:20-24
Pastor Charles Price

Now this morning, we're going to go back to Philippians 1, the letter to the Philippians has a theme of gratitude running right through it. Philippians 4 in particular talks about giving thanks in all circumstances instead of panicking in crisis, present a situation to God with thanksgiving.

And we'll talk about that in particular when we get to Philippians 4 in a few week's time. But I want to go back to these verses that we have had read to us. You see, Philippians 1 is one of the most autobiographical statements in all of Paul's writings. 40 times in this one chapter he uses the words I, me and mine and Paul to some extent, takes the lid off himself and says, I'm in this prison. If you recall, he's writing this from a prison, probably in Rome. And he said, I want you to know what my frustrations are.

I want you to know what my circumstances are at the same time. I want you to know how I've discovered an underlying sense of confidence and even joy, which is one of the words that reoccurs so much through this book.

But I want to look just at one verse primarily this morning, and then we'll put it back into its context a little as well. But this verse is the key verse to this chapter. It's Philippians 1:21, where he says, "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Not only is that the key to Philippians 1, I suggest that statement is probably the key to this letter to the Philippians. Not only that, I would say it's the key to all of Paul's writings. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Let's say that together. I think it's not difficult to get it, let's say together. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Some of you got up late this morning, let's say it again. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If you meet somebody normally who tells you dying is going to be a better option for me, you get worried about them don't you? Most of us without question would say living is the better option. But Paul says, to die is gain.

What makes him say that? Is this tongue in cheek, is this just being sort of super spiritual? Why does he speak this way? Well, there are four things in this verse I want to look at, four simple things.

First of all of all, four little headings I'll give you. First of all, the Christian life is personal is the first thing, because Paul says to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's to me, it's personal. You see, every one of us begins the Christian life alone.

You don't become a Christian by inheriting something from your parents. We don't become a Christian by hanging around other Christians and as a result, somehow catch it in the same way if you hang around folks who got the flu you'll probably catch the flu.

You don't catch the Christian life that way. You don't pick it up by osmosis. To be a Christian involves at some point in your life, some deliberate, wilful response to God. It's like getting married, you don't get married just by hanging around girls.

Somebody says to me, are you married? And I say, well, I've been hanging around girls for a long time now. Yeah, I think I probably am. There comes a moment in time when you say I will, or as somebody, a friend of mine conducting a wedding, once the person, the bridegroom said, "I wilt" and the minister said under his breath, "you will alright, but just don't admit it".

I will and at that moment, something happens. Your relationship changes, your status changes. There comes a moment in your life when you have to say to God, I will. We know, when that took place in Paul's life. Paul was previously Saul of Tarsus, and as Saul of Tarsus he's introduced in the Book of Acts and the story of his conversion is told three times because it's such a significant event.

And he was the arch enemy of the Church of Jesus Christ, intent on doing everything he could to squash what he regarded as this false movement of followers of Jesus Christ. And he was on his way to Damascus with authority to arrest, to imprison and even if necessary, to kill and martyr those Christians in that city, and on the way to Damascus suddenly, a bright light shone from the sky and Saul of Tarsus fell to the ground, and he heard a voice speaking out of the light, calling him by name. Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?

And Saul answered, who are you Lord? having no idea who it was. And to his amazement and shock, the answer came back, I am Jesus of Nazareth. Saul was convinced Jesus had been a fraud. He tells us later in Philippians three. We'll see in that passage another time that he was intent on destroying the church because he was totally committed to the Mosaic Law, the law God had given Moses. And out of his commitment to keep the law and prevent anything which threatened it coming onto the scene, he was out to destroy these followers of Jesus.

Saul came from Tarsus, but he lived in Jerusalem, where he studied under Gamaliel and he knew the stories about Jesus being crucified. He heard the stories about the empty tomb, but he believed the popular rumour that went around at that time, which was that the disciples came and stole the body on the third morning and hid it. In Matthew, 28 it tells us that story gained circulation because the Roman soldiers who were protecting the tomb were bribed to say they fell asleep, and the disciples stole the body. And it says that story still continues to this day. Matthew writes this when he tells that story, and Paul, Saul of Tarsus probably knew that story.

This is a fraud, and to his utter amazement, the voice said I am Jesus. And Paul discovered two things that day which transformed his life, the two things every one of us had to discover. The first thing he discovered was Jesus Christ was alive. Christians aren't following the teachings of Jesus who was. He was alive and the second thing he discovered was that he could transform his life. Saul said, what do you want me to do? And he told him, go and he gave him an agenda for the rest of his life, which involved getting into trouble, being a witness to Christ amongst rulers and amongst gentiles, but being persecuted because of it and all those things worked out in the

following days of Paul's life. But the point was this, that he bowed the knee. What do you want me to do? And Saul of Tarsus was never, ever the same again.

And there has to come a moment in your life and mine if it never has before, when you say I will, and you make that surrender because he's alive and willing to live his life in you, work through you and accomplish his business through you.

You might have been in this church many years, but unless you've come to that point of saying, Lord Jesus, please take over my life, you're not a Christian. You may be religious; you are not a Christian. You may have grown up in a Christian home, maybe God fearing. There has to come a moment as it came in the life of the Apostle Paul when the Christian life became personal. When you come as a sinner to Jesus and discover he loves sinners, he specializes in cleaning them up and transforming them and make them into new people.

The Christian life is personal. Secondly, the Christian life is practical, because Paul says for to me to live is Christ. It's about living. Everybody wants to live. None of us want to just exist and go through some dull routine where you get up in the morning and you have your breakfast and you go to work, you go to school and you come home and you watch television and you go to bed and you get up and you have your breakfast and you go to work and you come home and you watch television, you go to bed, you get up, you have your breakfast, you go to work, you come home, you go to bed, you get up, etc, etc. Until one day you get up after you have your breakfast, and you retire and then you go back to bed. And then one day you get up and have your breakfast and you die, it's a wasted breakfast, but that's what happens.

Is that what it's about? Of course, there are routines to life. We need routine, but we need reason, not routine and Paul says there's an underlying reason to my life. To have reason means you've got some purpose to get you out of bed in the morning and makes life satisfying and purposeful every day. It's not uncommon to find people who don't have a reason for living and they just exist until sometimes they can bear it no longer.

Other times they just fill their emptiness with meaningless pursuits. But Paul says I have got a reason to live. It's Christ! Let me read you Philippians 1:20 again and explain what he means by that. "I eagerly expect", he says, "and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but would have sufficient courage so that now, as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." Now that's some reason for living. "This is my ambition", says Paul, "that Christ be exalted in my body by my life or by my death." And the reason why I said that, 'is some reason for living' is because most of our conscious reasons for living are dependent on us staying alive. And the moment you die everything about you is gone. Your reason is gone.

Paul says I have a reason which transcends living and transcends dying. And that is that Christ be exalted in my body.

I love the way the King James puts it. "That Christ might be magnified in my body." I like that word "magnify". What does it mean to magnify something? My grandmother used to have a big magnifying glass and when we were kids, we used to, she lived with us for several years. We'd go and steal it from her and use it for all kinds of things. It was great for lighting fires from the

sun, but the primary purpose of the magnifying glass was to make things big or to bring things into focus.

Now, says Paul, my ambition is, whether by life, by death, that I might magnify God. We don't make him bigger than he is, of course, but we simply bring him into focus in our lives. Paul's saying, my reason for living is that I exhibit a big Jesus, that those prison guards who are chained to me every day, see in me a big Jesus that Jesus comes into focus in me. That those prison staff who deliver my food every day might see a Jesus in focus in me. That those who are my cellmates might see in me a big Jesus, that those Christians, fellow Christians who come to visit me in my prison cell here in Rome and visiting me, that Christ might come into focus in a new way, that my soul magnifies Christ. And if I die, my ambition is this, that my death brings Jesus into focus again. What a reason for leaving?

And you see this is the reason for every Christian. Our lives become an exhibition of Christ. Our lives become a revelation of Christ. Francis of Assisi many centuries ago now when he used to train his men in Southern Italy and send them out to evangelize, used to say to them this. Wherever you go, whatever you do, make sure you preach Christ. If necessary, use words.

You get the implication of that? Preach Christ with your mouth shut, by the way you live, by the way you behave, by the way you treat your neighbours, by the way you talk to your neighbours, by the way you handle your family, let your life bring Christ into focus. If necessary, use words. But your words will simply be an explanation of what is visible in your life. Because says Paul,

my life is about living. The Christian life is practical, it's to live. But if we need reasons for living, we also need resources for living.

And the third thing he says is the Christian life is possible. For to me to live is Christ. If Christ is my reason, Christ is also my resources for living. Now it's true that some people lack a reason for living, but there are many others who have a reason for living, but they discover that they haven't the resources that are equal to the reason and they become exhausted and burnt out. You see, we are intended to live in the strength and the power of the risen Christ living within us. And if we don't, whatever else our reasons, the time will come we'll run out of our resources.

I read an interview a while ago with Bill Wyman. Bill Wyman was the bass guitarist in the Rolling Stones, the rock and roll band. They are probably one the longest, they have been around for about 40 years and one of the most successful rock and roll bands, probably ever.

And Bill Wyman, who left the band a couple of years ago, was being interviewed as to why he left the band and what life was like in the Rolling Stones. And he was giving his answers. He was 62 years of age, which of course, is a good reason to leave a rock and roll band anyway. But he said something which I jotted down. I'll quote it to you. He said "getting to the top was exciting. But when we got there, when we arrived, there was nothing there"

And you look at the track record of Bill Wyman and his band and you see the breakdown in their personal lives, you see the broken marriages, the repeated broken marriages, you see the drug abuses, you see the drug addiction, even you see the sexual perversions and it shouts out loud

and clear there are no adequate resources, and we're trying to fire our engines on things which only destroy instead of empower. Because these kind of engines never drive life. They only destroy life, but we think they're going to give us a new drive, new sense of meaning, a new sense of power. You end up empty with no resources.

Now, Paul says, I've got a reason for living, I've got resources for living and my reason and my resources are the same, they are Christ. Now, how was Christ's resources for Paul's living? How was Christ magnified in Paul, if that was his ambition? I want to suggest to you this. To the extent to which Christ was magnified in Paul was the degree to which Paul did what he knew he couldn't do, and the extent to which he was, what he knew he wasn't in himself.

Let me explain what I mean by that. You see, the only valid explanation for Paul doing what he did and being who he was, was the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within him. You see Paul is very honest about himself. He calls himself the chief of sinners. In other words, he says, you take Christ out of my life and I'm in the dirt. I'm in the gutter as we know he was in his evil, vicious attack upon Christians.

He described himself as the least of all the apostles. I know these apostles, Peter, James, John, the rest of them, the ones who walked with Jesus. I never did that, says Paul. But I can tell you this. When we stand shoulder to shoulder, I am the least, because I know in my own heart and I know my own vulnerability, my own weakness. I wanted to tell you this, that we only discover Christ as our resources when we stop trying to hide our weaknesses and our limitations. We

begin to be honest about them. I know it's out of weakness and out of poverty that Jesus Christ is magnified, not out of strength.

So, Paul in Philippians 1:20 talks about, it's my hope that I will in no way be ashamed. Why would you say that? Because he knew it's possible? He knew I can be ashamed; I know I cannot remain faithful, that's possible to me, says Paul by implication. He talks about praying that he would have sufficient courage in that same verse. Why? Because he knew his own weakness and lack of courage, and everybody else looks more courageous than we do. All of us are aware of our lack of courage.

That's why in the writings of Paul and the New Testament altogether, weakness is strength. And the Christian life weakness is strength. So that's why God has an interest in our weaknesses, because they become his workshop out of our weaknesses.

He works. Let me read to you what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, second part of verse 9. "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses", says Paul, "so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. And here's why. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong." Now, this would turn if I can be very honest about this.

This would turn on the head the kind of Christian life that many of us think we're supposed to be living up to, where we only exhibit strength. We hide and bury our weaknesses; we only exhibit confidence, and we hide and bury our doubts.

We only exhibit boldness, and we hide terror and fear that Paul says it's quite the reverse. He says, "I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties as for when I'm weak, I'm strong," why? Because when I'm weak, that's when I allow Jesus Christ to be strong in me.

But as long as I am self-sufficient in any way whatsoever, to that extent I limit and inhibit and hinder what he would do. And that one of the things we'll discover about the Church of Jesus Christ, when we look on those evenings in the next few weeks is the Church of Jesus Christ, when it's effective it's made up of vulnerable people.

They don't cover up their weakness when they come in on a Sunday morning or Sunday night or whenever the church is meeting. But are willing to be weak, willing to be honest. We develop sometimes a kind of culture where we want to hide all of that.

It's partly why we dress up, I think., in case the real me should seep out. We come just as we are in every respect, just as we are. And is that a weakness in Paul? Again, and again in his writings, exhibits his own weakness, you see a sense of all togetherness leads us in spiritual poverty, that's the paradox.

But a sense of weakness and vulnerability opens us up to incredible spiritual riches. Which is why throughout the scripture the leading characters that God uses; he tends to wound his best servants. He tends to weaken his best servants.

Because out of their weakness, His strength is going to be exhibited. And when we allow Christ to lead us beyond what we cannot do and allow him to make us what we know we're not, to that extent, He is magnified.

So for me to live is Christ, the resources that Paul exhibited were out of his weakness, people saw strength. Out of his poverty, people saw riches. Out of his vulnerability people saw stability, because Christ was the explanation for that.

You see if we are content with what we can do by ourselves, then all we do is magnify ourselves. If our lives can be explained in terms of us, our skills, our abilities, our gifts, our temperament, our personality, if that is the explanation for the way we live, then there's only one person to pat on the back if you like it, that's the person themselves. The explanation of Paul's life was not his skills, not his ability. He did have skills, but God had to break those. Brokenness is more biblical than wholeness, it's the way to wholeness.

Back in the end of the 19th century, there were two famous preachers in London. C H Spurgeon was one of them and for many decades, Spurgeon packed the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, 5000 people every Sunday, no microphones, just his booming voice, and he did that for about 50 or 60 years. Something incredible. He began when he was 19 years of age.

And the other preacher not far from the Metropolitan Tabernacle was a man called Joseph Parker, who preached in the City Temple, another big church in London. Both used to draw enormous crowds.

Spurgeon may have had a few more I think, but both use to draw enormous crowds. And I have books by both of these men, and I enjoy the ministry of both of them. But there's one difference and they used to say if you mingle with the crowd outside the City Temple on a Sunday morning as the people leave you'd hear them say things like this. What a great preacher. What a great orator and Parker was famous for his oratory. But they said if you mingled with the crowd outside the Metropolitan Tabernacle on a Sunday morning, you'd hear people saying things like this. What a great God we have. What a great saviour we have.

You see, Parker was rather pleased with himself. I read his biography recently. Rather pleased with himself. When he built his church city temple, he said to the architect, here's my brief for you. Build a building that will cause Queen Victoria when she's meeting her guests at the station on her way back to Buckingham Palace to divert via the church to say to her guests, I want to show you where Joseph Parker preaches.

That's a pretty interesting brief for an architect. He was once invited to preach in a church, a little church, and he sent a letter back saying, Never ask an eagle to sit in a sparrow's nest. So he was quite pleased with himself.

Spurgeon, you know, on the other hand, despite the greatness and this is why Spurgeon was so great, was a man who was constantly aware of his own vulnerability and weakness. Spurgeon had no education beyond his childhood. He left school at 14. I think it was.

C H Spurgeon embattled all his life with depression. He would wake up in the morning and just be depressed, unable to motivate himself. People never knew that when they listened to him preach, but out of that weakness and that vulnerability Jesus was exhibited and magnified. You see, Spurgeon did what he couldn't do. Spurgeon became what he wasn't. To that extent, he magnified the Lord. That's God's ambition for you and for me. Our lives with all their weaknesses and all the battles that we have, and all the sins that we struggle with every day.

Don't look around and assume everybody else has got victory over every sin. Don't look at me and think that I never sin. Of course, you don't even think that. Don't even begin to think it. Just ask my wife, but you will need some time for her to tell you all of them. She doesn't know most of them because I keep it quiet. Let's be honest about that.

For me to live is Christ, because Christ business is exchanging my weakness for his strengths, my dirt, for his cleanliness, my poverty for his riches.

And the fourth thing, the Christian life is permanent. To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Here's a man who is enthusiastic about death. Now there are not that many of those people around, and if you meet somebody who's enthusiastic about death, normally you get very worried about them.

If you met somebody who said, Look, I'd rather die, you would conclude they are depressed, they are discouraged to become suicidal, they need some counselling. But this is exactly the kind of thing Paul was saying. Let me read you Philippians 1:22-24.

He says, "if I am to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what should I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. But it's more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith."

Now what he's saying is this. I'm torn between two things here. I desire to depart and be with Christ. I desire to die, but it may be that my staying alive is going to be useful to other people, mainly to you, he says to the Philippians. So, I'm not sure what to do.

I'd like to die, but I probably need to hang around a little longer because you need me to. Interesting dilemma to be in, isn't it? You see, Paul isn't being suicidal at this point. He's saying life is so fantastic because despite all the troubles and despite all the sufferings that I'm going through, I have all the resources I need by his presence in me to accomplish what he wants me to do. But there's something I can't wait for; I can't wait to be with Christ. Which is a reality, and it's far better, he says. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, let me read you Paul's preference for death in that statement. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

It's not that I'm depressed, I'm confident, but I'd actually prefer to be away from this body and at home with the Lord, says Paul. Now, most of us speak about death as a loss, and of course it is to those who are left behind, it is enormous loss. But Paul speaks about death as gain. And you see, this turns on its head the secular view of death where it ends everything. But for the Christian,

death has lost its sting. There are many uncertainties about life, of course, but there's only one certainty, there's only certainties about death. Every one of us will die.

Unless, of course, the Lord Jesus returns before that day. But death is 100%. There's a song, which says, time is like a never-ending stream that takes all her sons away. And like a stream rolling down from any past any given point, the whole thing will roll pass in due course, and every one of us will go down that stream. Every one of us will die. I'll tell you this, we only know how to face life when we know how to die and to face death. Otherwise, this dark cloud sits over us all the time.

Death is a fear. When I was at school, I remember having to learn one of Shakespeare's speeches from Hamlet. To be or not to be. You probably know it, some of you. Hamlet is suicidal. He's depressed, his father, the king of Denmark, has been murdered by his uncle. So within a couple of weeks, he married his mother and became king of Denmark instead, and Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, knows this man is a murderer. And he goes into deep depression. And let me read you this poem, I did learn it at school, but I need to read it to make sure I get it right.

To be or not to be. What that means is to live or not, to live, to live or die. That's his dilemma. To be or not to be, that is the question, whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them. To die, to sleep no more and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, tis a consummation devoutly to be wished to die, to sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream.

I, there's the rub for in that sleep of death, what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil. That must give us pause? There's the respect that makes calamity of so long a life. What's he saying?

He's saying If I go on living, I go on being exposed to these slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. I go on being exposed to these thousand natural shocks and heartaches that flesh is heir to. Life is almost unbearable, says Hamlet.

I don't want to live, but if I die, what's going to happen then? Because in that sleep of death, what dreams may come when shuffled off this mortal coil? What's life going to be like if I die? It might be even worse.

I am caught in this dilemma to be or not to be, to live or to die. Living is almost unbearable. Dying might be worse. So, what do I do? Now you contrast Hamlet with Paul. Paul says to be or not to be, to me to live is Christ that's to be.

Not to be, to die is gain. Living is great because I have reason and I have resources. And these two are matched in the Lord Jesus Christ. I have every reason to live, life is good. Yes, I am subject to the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to. Paul too knew the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. But I have resources to cope. Living is Christ. That is great to be. That's OK! Or not to be, you know, somebody, says Paul, it's even better. Because to depart is to be with Christ, and when we are in heaven, I don't think we are going to be worried about, whether we

died at 30 or died at 90, I don't think it'll matter very much when we get there. Because this life is only just a preamble. But you see every one of us in this room this morning will identify with either Hamlet or Paul.

This is more true for you. Life is rough, but I don't want to die. Might even be worse. Life is Christ, because I've taken him into my life, I've met the risen living Christ. He lives and reigns, not just is he in me, because you can be a Christian, have Christ in you, but not live in his resources, not live in his strength. You can still live the way you used to live, by human energy. But you can say to live is Christ, because he's my strength, my life, my past. And when I die and one day we will, it's gain!

Now, I don't mean to imply in any way that facing death is not a difficulty for anyone of us. The process of dying is not something we look forward to. We want to remain like, Paul said. Well, I want to remain and be with you because I can be of benefit to you and most of us don't want to leave behind the folks we love.

We want to stay with them. And none of us are enthusiastic about the process of dying, but when the reality of death faces us as it does. We have that undergirding confidence. To die is gain.

The Christian life is personal, it's to me. It is practical, it is to live. It's about living. It is possible it's Christ my resources, as well as my reason. And it's permanent. To die is not to leave it behind. It's to gain. Do you know Christ in this way? Are you a Christian but you're dead scared of being vulnerable, dead scared of showing your weaknesses, because this is where you receive

your identity from being strong. But you never give elbow room to Jesus, to exhibit his strength in your weakness is riches in your poverty.

And don't go home without telling him, saying, Lord Jesus, I need you to fill my life. If you've never become a Christian at all. I need you to come into my life and remove my sin and guilt and start the process that began in Saul of Tarsus and make me a new person.