Disciples Church

Joy in death <> Philippians 1:19-30

Week of May 24, 2017

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Intro:**

Good evening church family. I hope that you have enjoyed our new series on Philippians and I am excited to continue tonight in Philippians 1, verses 19-30. We have a large chunk to dive into, so let me pray and then let’s dig in!

Pray

ILL: A pastor man named Donald Grey Barnhouse shared this testimony.

*I was driving with my children to my wife's funeral where I was to preach the sermon. As we came into one small town there strode down in front of us a truck that came to stop before a red light. It was the biggest truck I ever saw in my life, and the sun was shining on it at just the right angle that took its shadow and spread it across the snow on the field beside it. As the shadow covered that field, I said, "Look children at that truck, and look at its shadow. If you had to be run over, which would you rather be run over by? Would you rather be run over by the truck or by the shadow?" My youngest child said, "The shadow couldn't hurt anybody." "That's right," I continued, "and death is a truck, but the shadow is all that ever touches the Christian. The truck ran over the Lord Jesus. Only the shadow is gone over mother."*

**You see Christ took death for the Christian so that all we will ever experience is the shadow of death that cannot hurt us. This is beautiful Church and we will see tonight how Paul speaks of death and life throughout Philippians.**

The series through Philippians has been great so far, but I don’t know if you’ve caught on yet to Paul’s secret to joy in all things. I’ll spoil it for you now and then prove it through our text tonight.

Paul’s secret to joy in all things including death and suffering is quite simply to be living for something other than himself. And not just any “something,” he is living for something ultimate! The ultimate One.

Paul’s secret, though he tries his hardest to share it with everyone, is simple and very complicated.

When you live for someone who is the ultimate source of joy, is eternal, is immutable (unchanging), and sovereign over all things then no one can take your joy. Since this is what Paul focus’s his life on, it cannot be taken or changed. Does that make sense? The source of Paul’s joy is not changeable or removable so Paul always has it. If you kill Paul his joy is not in himself or his life or on temporary things, so you don’t kill his joy. Actually instead you only increase his joy because death brings heavenly fellowship with Christ, an even more intimate union with the source of joy.

You see, when Paul’s focus and goal is consumed in something outside of himself, namely Christ Jesus, the one thing truly worth living for, then his joy cannot be killed even if Paul himself is killed.

Paul marches through life with this eternal mindset that was always focused on the future joy of being with his Lord. This is how someone can say if I die it is better. I get to be with the treasure of my heart if I die. If I live I get to continue living for my Lord and glorifying Him in all that I do on this earth. So, whether I live or die in all that I do I will rejoice because I will glorify my God!

Church, are you constantly having your joy robbed from you? Are you constantly feeling offended or hurt, robbed of life? Are you constantly feeling victimized? Husbands, do you think your bride is the problem? Brides, do you think your husband is the problem? Surely, it can’t be you right?

If this is you, then may I ask this question, what or who are you living for? If we truly lived for Christ, totally devoted to him, then even when our spouses or boss or children sin against us it would only serve to bring us joy in the opportunity to show Christ’s love. To put the gospel on display!

Your depth of your devotion to something is shown more truly when that devotion costs you something.

I would submit this to you, and know that I need to hear this as much as I believe you do, that if our joy is easily robbed it is because we’re living for ourselves, not God. Now I want to take the burden off your shoulders. Do you want to have an unchanging, unstoppable joy? We will see the key tonight here in God’s word! I know this is a lot to claim, but this passage has such a beautiful hope laid out for those of us who God has saved, so let’s dive in and let me show you. I have 3 main points from our passages tonight. 1st- Joy in the sacrificed life. 2nd- Fruit of the sacrificed life. And 3rd- the command of the sacrificed life. So, the joy of the sacrificed life, the fruit of the sacrificed life, and the command of the sacrificed life.

1. **The joy of the sacrificed life.**

**Philippians 1:19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 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. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

The word “For” that begins this passage is pointing to something prior to it. Remember oftentimes when you read scripture this word “for” could be switched with the word “because”. Since this is the case, we need to look at what has been said already. Verse 18 reads “18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I will rejoice. Yes and I will rejoice,” This passage really should start verse 19 at the word “Yes” so we can see what’s really going on. Remember when you read scripture the verse and chapter breaks were added years later but that doesn’t mean the authors thoughts were actually broken there!

So, what we have here is really Paul’s argument for why he doesn’t care if his imprisonment leads to his death or his release. Paul makes some bold statements that should shape the way we as Christians view death, but I will discuss that more in our conclusion tonight. For now, I want us to see why Paul would say if people preach Christ to hurt me- if I don’t get released, but rather I get killed, it doesn’t matter. All that matters is that the gospel is preached and Christ is proclaimed. That’s Paul’s point. This is what I mean when I say that Paul has joy in living the sacrificed life.

In Paul’s eyes if he lives, he has already sacrificed all his other desires at the altar of this desire; to make Christ known and glorify him in his life lived out. We see that so clearly in the famous passage for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Since the life he lives is already sacrificed to Jesus meaning that Jesus is the focus and aim and work of Paul’s life, then no one can take his joy. If he dies for Jesus’ name, then Jesus’ name goes forward. If they torture, but allow him to live, then he will continue to push Jesus’ name and the gospel forward. This is the joy that Paul has in any circumstance.

If you want to know the secret to a joy filled life, it is one that’s given up for the truer better life to come with ultimate fellowship with Christ Himself. That’s why you have scripture like this;

**Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?**

Luke 9:23-25 says something similar. You see here, so clearly, that Paul understood this and wanted the Philippian church to know this key to joy in all circumstances. This is the sacrificed life or we have heard Josh call it the crucified life. This is us taking up our cross to follow Christ.

Now, I would submit to you that this seems a bit foreign due to the country we live in. There has not been a lot of persecution or hardships for so-called Christians in the U.S. I would also add even with a lack of persecution here, we must be pushing back darkness and sin in the world. I believe the persecution that’s headed our way will be a gracious gift from God especially if it wakes up half-hearted professors who would not be saved otherwise. What I mean is God often uses persecution and hardship to draw out those who are truly believers. Again, your devotion to something is tested by the cost of that thing in your life. This helps weed out true believers vs. those who just kind of like the idea of faith or Christianity.

Let’s get back to the verse though and see how clear Paul makes this point. Paul says I will rejoice for, if death comes, I’ll honor God. If life comes, I will live for God. If people with pure motives preach the gospel because of me, then God gets honored. If people with deceitful motives (those preaching to hurt Paul) preach the gospel, the gospel will still be preached and God still proclaimed.

We need to see some clarity here because this can get confusing. Paul did not promote the wrong gospel being preached. I think this needs to be clarified. In our world, when we make a big deal about doctrine and rightly handling the word of God the most common push back is “why does it matter, as long as God is being talked about or taught that’s a good thing”. Well let me say clearly this is **NOT** what Paul is saying here.

Paul is not saying if they teach falsely about God then it’s ok. No, he said if they teach with **wrong motives** it is not going to hurt Paul because even though they desire to hurt him (this is their wrong motives) and that’s why they are teaching, they are still rightly pushing the gospel forward. Paul did not say that their wrong motives would not hurt them and he did not say those with wrong motives were ok to teach falsely. These are very important clarities. If we look at all of scripture, we will see the utter condemnation of false teaching and the rebuke of sinful motives in anything we do. Paul was not saying that either of these things were ok. He is simply saying even if the motives of these men are sinful, as long as Christ is rightly proclaimed, then I will rejoice.

Let’s read the meat of this verse one more time before we move to the next section;

**20 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. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

Paul has an eager expectation and hope. This expectation and hope is that he would honor God whether by his life or by his death. This is so amazing, Christian. Paul was not some super human Christian. He, in fact, was like us except in his apostleship. Let me clarify, this was not Paul’s posture because he was an Apostle. This was his posture because he was a Christian. This is the posture that Jesus has commanded all believers to have in the Matthew verse I read earlier. We are to live our lives for Christ, we are to take up our crosses daily and live a crucified life. What can anyone take from you if you’ve already given your life to Christ?

Let me make this practical again, what can your wife take from you when she sins against you if you’ve taken up your cross?

What can your boss take from you? What can your husband take from you? What can your children or parents or enemies take from you? Look, if your value is wrapped up in the way others treat you, like your spouse or boss or family, then it’s easy to get offended and hurt. However, if your value is wrapped up in Christ and your utmost desire is to live for his name then you will be next to impossible to offend or hurt or have your value robbed from you.

In fact, the opposite will happen. Here’s an example. When I want to make Christ’s name, worth, beauty and character displayed in my marriage, which of these two scenarios puts it on display better?

1. When my wife is perfect and never offends me.
2. When she is struggling with sin and angry and I love her well like Christ loved me when I was in sin?

The answer is simple and Paul was not just **proclaiming** this for the church in Philippi to hear, rather he was displaying it to them through the way he was enduring this current suffering.

Which brings me to my second point!

1. **Fruit of the sacrificed life**

**24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.**

In verse 21, Paul said if I am to live in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me. The fruitful labor Paul is speaking of is this, that he, among other things, has not completed his discipleship of the church in Philippi and that on their account he could be used for their progress and joy in the faith! A fruitful work of Paul’s sacrificed life was to continue teaching, leading, and discipling the Philippian church to full maturity and joy. Here is something I struggle with personally. We often talk about the difficulty of sanctification. It becomes hard when you’re more and more aware of your sin. Things you didn’t realize you’d need to stop doing, suddenly begin sticking out to you. I have often said in those moments, man, this is hard!

But Paul said in this passage it is for their sanctification and **joy**. What am I missing, what are we missing when our focus is the difficulty of sanctification? I would submit to you that again it is us turning our focus inward instead of seeing the joy of glorifying God through our difficulty.

I liken it to this, have you ever been upset and complained about something ridiculous? No, just me? Of course, we have all been there right? This tap water is too gross I can’t believe I have to drink from the faucet. When there are thousands of people dying because they can’t get clean water. We live in a culture of being spoiled, and due to this I think we have missed the fruit of the sacrificed life, trading it for the whininess of the spoiled life. Let me say this another way. The Christian life as God has had Paul proclaim it here should be one of joy when things get hard. Why or how is this the case? When things are difficult or hard we put on display far more our love of Jesus and purpose of living for Christ! Consider the book of Job. Satan tries to argue with God that the reason Job is upright is because God has given him everything, but Satan argues take it all from him and he will surely curse your name. How clear is this?

Even Satan knows that true love and devotion is proved and put on display in the furnace of suffering or to say it another way the true fruit of the sacrificed life is shown when sacrifice actually happens.

Christian, do you face hardship with joy because you know it will put on display the glory and beauty of Christ in you?! That’s the point here. Paul tells the church he’s confident that he will be released because of their need of his help to grow in sanctification and joy!

So, one of the fruits of the sacrificed life is duplication. Producing more believers unto their joy of living their lives sacrificially for God. Paul would have preferred to go home to his Lord but he knew it was necessary to continue his discipleship and make more devoted Christians. Thank God for this church because if these first believers had not pursued the command of Jesus to go and make disciples, how would the truth of God’s gospel and His word ever have gotten to us?

More poignantly, this fruit is discipleship. That’s why we place such a priority on discipleship here. The last command of Jesus prior to His ascension was His command for us to go and make disciples of all nations. It’s what we are doing here; making disciples who will make disciples. Whether far off or here, we are to make disciples.

That’s what the Linders are doing. They are going to sacrifice their life for the hope of the gospel to a people group who has not heard it.

Here’s the beauty of what they are going to do, they can stand with Paul and say we are not sure how this will turn out, but we are eagerly hopeful and expectant that whether through our life or death Christ will be glorified and in that we will **rejoice**! Oh, church, how different would our world be if all those who profess to be Christians would live like this!

Now there are so many more fruits to living a sacrificed life, one being joy in all circumstances. That was the first point we talked about. The second point here was mainly the fruit of discipleship. We could add the fruit of obedience, honoring our Lord in our lives lived out. All that to say when we live sacrificially, it truly produces fruit and everlasting joy in us!

I think part of the miss in current Christianity is that we don’t see the command on our lives to actually live this way. That brings me to my last point, the command of the sacrificed life.

1. **Command of the sacrificed life**

**27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.**

**29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**

What does it mean, church, to let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ? It means exactly what Jesus commanded in the Matthew verse and in the Luke verse. It means we have been commanded to take up our cross and follow our Lord no matter the cost.

**Matthew 10:34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.**

**37Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

Did you notice that word worthy in verse 37? It is the same Greek word used here in Philippians. What do you love the most in this world? Where your heart lies there your treasure lies.

If Christ is not your treasure then your life is not worthy of the gospel. Guys, this is what Jesus just said in the gospel of Matthew. If you love something more than Jesus then you are not worthy of Jesus. Or to put it another way, you cannot be His. Luke would use the word “hate” when he shares what Jesus said. Luke said if you don’t hate mother and father, son or daughter, brother or sister, yes, even your own life, you cannot be His disciple.

I don’t want to spend a lot of time here. I think God’s word makes this point very clear. What I did want to show us here is that this is a commandment for us. We are commanded to make Jesus our treasure and live for Him. That’s what Paul is saying here when he says let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel.

So, if the command is clear and the purpose of the command is clear then how do we live it out? I don’t want to give you a command and then leave you wondering what to do about it, so let’s answer the how part of this. How do we let our lives be lived in a manner worthy of the gospel?

When we live in light of this truth that death cannot separate us from God because Christ died in our place and rose again then we will most certainly live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel. When we talk about the “how” part of fulfilling this command, we must see this as the firm foundation that holds up all of the instruction of “how” to live this out.

Let’s look back at our passage and see the “how” that Paul gives.

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are ***standing firm in one spirit***, with ***one mind*** ***striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*,** 28 and **not frightened in anything by your opponents**. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Paul says whether I make it to you or not, here’s what you do to live your life in a way that’s worthy of the gospel. Look at his 1st command, “**standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**”. This command begins with unity. Christians, our lives lived out in a manner worthy of the gospel means we work together in unity as one spirit with one mind.

The Greek word for mind here is psyche which they also used to mean soul. With one spirit, one soul strive together side by side for or with the faith of the gospel.

There are some very clear and big problems that this verse addresses in the American church today. The first is this idea that we get to do life, the Christian life, on our own. If that was even an option then Paul is an utter fool here and so is the word of God. Paul could not give this command if it were ok for Christians to do life on their own. Let me say it another way, if you are not doing life with other believers, specifically in your church, if you’re not striving together for one mind and one soul in the faith of the gospel then your life cannot be living in a manner that’s worthy of the gospel.

Do you see the problem there? It’s interesting that our daily reading plan recently brought up this passage in Proverbs.

Proverbs 6:16-19English Standard Version (ESV)

**16**There are six things that the Lord hates,  
    seven that are an abomination to him:  
**17**haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
    and hands that shed innocent blood,  
**18**a heart that devises wicked plans,  
    feet that make haste to run to evil,  
**19**a false witness who breathes out lies,  
    and one who sows discord among brothers.

When the passage says six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him, it is drawing our eyes to the last thing that the proverb is listing. We should certainly pay attention to the first six, but what makes this seventh thing an abomination? Well, what is the seventh thing? One who sows discord among the brothers.

Think about that and couple it with the command in Philippians to strive side by side for the faith. God has harsh words for those who would create division between brothers and God gives clear commands for us to strive for unity. Let me clarify some things here as perhaps this has come up for you. It is an all too common experience in the local church bodies today to have many people join a body for a season, but never truly be bought in. This is the problem with a church on every corner you could attend all your life and never really allow anyone to know you or be accountable to any leadership.

It’s like keeping one foot in the door and one foot out.

The tendency in this situation is to stay as long as it is good for us, but as we are pressed to growth and accountability we quickly decide this is not the place for us. At the first sign of conflict rather than striving alongside each other we bail out of the boat and leave those left wondering what happened. At best, this situation hurts. At worst, the rumors begin spreading and the situation becomes a disease that tears through the heart of the church body. This does multiple damages in the lives of those who remain in the body and in the lives of the fellow believers who were lovingly encouraging growth. If you’ve experienced this situation, then you have a good understanding as to why God calls this an abomination. This is quite simply one of the most obvious ways that this command is disobeyed in the church today. This is ultimately a lack of commitment to other brothers in Christ and the body you are doing life in.

It is a selfish action that causes us to look for something easier instead of ever really being vulnerable enough to grow and be held accountable.

Church, think about it this way, if you’ve never had to strive alongside another believer in your church family then are you really bought in?

Christians do life in a constant battle with sin which means we will do life in our church family and still be battling sin. When we do life in an intimate way, it’s not a matter of if, but rather a matter of when you will need to strive for unity. When we say we are committed to each other in this body, but we are really only here as long as it’s a benefit to us and never really bought in then we are failing to meet this command to strive together for the faith.

Here is some clarity. If you leave and are unwilling to discuss with the leadership why you’re leaving and unwilling to fight for unity then you’re not living your life in a manner worthy of the gospel. I hope that makes sense.

So, we fight for unity, for one spirit, mind, and soul, with fellow believers in the faith of the gospel. This is key, but what else does Paul draw out here? “**28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”** This lack of fear shows your opponents that you cannot be defeated. Better yet, Christ cannot be defeated. This is the very same lack of fear Paul shows when he says I am confident that in my life or death Christ will be glorified. It’s the same lack of fear the kid in our beginning illustration showed when he said the shadow of the truck can’t hurt anyone.

So, we Christians have this lack of fear because we know whether we are suffering or even killed, God will be glorified by our lives lived or by our lives sacrificed for Him. On the battlefield, the most feared opponents are those who are not afraid to die. Why is this the case? Because you cannot take anything from them. There’s no way to intimidate or control the other person because there is no area of fear. This confidence of glorifying God whether in our life or in our death is a sure sign to your opponents of their destruction. They know they cannot win because you cannot lose. There’s nothing they can take from you to stop you fighting for unity in the faith of the gospel.

Now here’s the other half of this amazing coin. This confidence is also a clear sign to them of your salvation and that from God. This confidence partially displays the gospel to your opponents.

It shows them in a very real sense that they remain in destruction, but you have something different. The thing you trust in has brought you joy even in the face of death. That’s why the verse reads “but of your salvation and that from God.”

You cannot live in this posture if you’re not actively striving to advance the gospel. In American Christianity, the tendency has not only been to do life on your own in private, but to live an easy “all about you” life. America is where the prosperity gospel came from. The health, wealth, happiness lie that God wants you to seek your joy in wealth and non-suffering- this is nothing less than an outright lie. God does want you to be unbelievably joyful, but not in your circumstances. Rather He wants you to be satisfied and joy-filled in Him. If you are not actively fighting to advance the gospel and strive for unity/relationship in the faith with fellow believers, then you cannot even begin to obey this command in Philippians.

Let’s read on to see even more clarity. “**29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,**

**30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”**

The clarity this verse brings in contrast to the prosperity gospel nonsense is huge. Paul said to this church in Philippi and God through Paul says to the universal church, faith and suffering have been granted to you. For the sake of Christ, we have been granted faith and granted suffering. Listen, if you have never suffered for your faith, that should cause some questions to rise up in you.

If you’ve never been hurt by another who professes to be a brother in Christ then you may not be doing the work you’ve been called to do. If you’ve never strived for unity in the faith then you’re not living in a manner worthy of the gospel. This passage has such conviction in the commands that Paul gives to the Philippians. I would do you a great disservice to not draw these out for you. Now, let me turn the page here as I begin to close this.

The Philippians book has long been pushed as the book of joy and it is! Look again at the joy that Paul has in these circumstances. He’s imprisoned whether at home or in a jail and yet he has the opportunity to push forward the gospel and see God save the lives of those around him. He says he rejoices in this fact that whether in his life or death that Christ would be put on display and glorified.

Christian, you can find no greater joy than to live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel. Paul was not commanding this because he wanted to rob you of joy. He is sharing with you the secret to endless joy, to earth shattering even in death or suffering utter joy! If these commands have hit your hearts tonight and sound burdensome, I would submit to you that this is not the way Paul sees them and it is not the way you should see them.

Take heart, Christian, when we pursue sanctification and obedience in joy, God who is faithful will show you why this is the best road to walk.

**Conclusion:**

I told you I wanted to unpack this verse and cover the three main areas we see. The first was the joy of the sacrificed life, the second was the fruit of the sacrificed life, and the third was the command of the sacrificed life.

I’d like to end with returning to a point that Paul teaches about death in so far as it applies to the Christian life. If you remember I said earlier that I wanted to discuss this later and so here we are.

Let’s look at the passage one last time: **20 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. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

Unfortunately, the trend in our current culture is one that glorifies death. We have TV shows like “13 reasons why” that make suicide look like a viable option even quite possibly the only option for suffering teens in this life. We kill thousands of the most defenseless human beings in the world daily through abortion clinics and do it all in the name of choice. With the corruption that this fallen worldview brings to the topic of death, I want to be clear here, Paul is in no way promoting or approving of us taking our own lives or murdering others. This has become an epidemic and it really is a sad thing to see.

Now, this is not the only worldview problem in concerns to death. Christians, we need to have a right view when it comes this topic. Notice a few key things Paul says when he speaks about death here. Paul eagerly expects to honor God in his death. But how would he do this?

By seeing death as gain, Paul looks eagerly to the day he is reunited to his Savior. Paul says in verse 23 that he is hard pressed between life and death for to depart and be with Christ is “far better”. Christian, when a fellow believer departs to be with Christ do you celebrate that as a far better situation for them?

Do we long to be with our Lord and Savior so much so that we eagerly look toward our very own death because we know that this is the point when we will be united in a more intimate way with our Lord? This worldview is what brings Paul utter joy in the face of death!

Consider this, Christian, we tend to think of death in relation to our age. What I mean is, as we get older and more frail, we realize that we are on our way out and tend to see the inevitability of death a little clearer. When we are younger, we tend to not think much of death unless there is a “tragedy” in our lives. But what do you do, 20-year-old Christian, when you’re diagnosed with cancer? What do you do 34-year-old father of 5 when your bride doesn’t wake up one morning?

I do not want you dwelling on this in a morbid way, but as a Christian the word of God has given us the information we need to rightly form our worldview and handle situations like this. We must see the joy in God taking his child home to be with him. There is definitely mourning in these situations, but they should also be filled with celebration and joy. If God calls me home celebrate the victory I have in Christ please and know that I am better off than I ever have been. Come alongside my family and love them well but do not be worried for me.

Paul gives us this insight to death in:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 **13**But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**14**For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul’s clear instruction here for the Christian is to be encouraged that death is not to us what it is to the world. Death for the Christian is eternal life with our Lord realized and experienced in an even better way and this should bring us great hope! We should not grieve our deaths as others do who have no hope, but we should confidently face our death as one who sees the hope of our union with Christ and says for me to die is gain!

Oh, how we might live differently if we truly believed it was better to be home with our Lord. What might we be willing to risk for God’s glory if death only brought us more joy?

One last note here, Christian. For those who are not saved, death is the curse that God gave Adam and Eve in the garden and it brings with it eternal death. Would you joyfully be willing to give up your life that others may not face death apart from Christ?

My hope for you is that with this right understanding of death in the Christian’s life, we would live with an unshakable joy and hope even in the face of death! That we would, like Paul, be willing to give our everything for the name and glory of our God and the good of the elect!

Pray with me: