



PHILIPPIANS: THRIVING IN THE STORM

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Jeff Vanderstelt

Scripture Reference: Philippians 1:18-26

Hi, I'm Kirsten. We're going to be reading scripture together today. If you have one near, please grab your Bible. We're going to be reading Philippians 1:18 through 26. Please stand in your homes for the reading of God's word.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 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. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am 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. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Hello family. In this passage we're looking at today, Paul gives us the secret to life, the way to really thrive, even in the midst of a storm. I don't know about you, but I love survival stories. In his book *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Aron Ralston shares a story about how he had a solo descent into Blue John Canyon in Utah. He talks about how he dislodged a boulder on his way in it, and he pinned his wrist to the side of the canyon, he was absolutely stuck. And for five days, he did everything he could to get free. And finally it came to the conclusion, the only way he could get free was to amputate his right forearm with this very dull multi-tool he had, and he did that. And then exhausted, absolutely dehydrated, he repelled down a 60-foot cliff, hiked eight miles to find a Dutch family who guided him to a rescue helicopter. And eventually he made it to the hospital and he survived.

Some may have seen the movie 127 Hours, which captures this in movie form. And man, I love those kinds of stories because it shows the human spirit, it shows that we want to live. We are desperate to live. We go to great lengths to really live and survive whatever we're going through. I mean, we'll find the best doctors, engage in the best diets, create new diets every month, find exercise plans, move to a new climate, you name it, we'll do whatever it takes to live.

And we find that humans are incredibly fragile and yet remarkably resilient at the same time. We're seeing that right now during this pandemic that people want to live and they're finding all kinds of creative ways to continue to not just survive, but hopefully thrive. And that's really what this passage is all about.

See, the real question for a lot of people isn't just, do you want to live? It's do you want to thrive? And I think the question behind that is, what do you want to live for? I mean, what is it that you're living for? Paul, as he writes to the church in Philippi from his Roman jail is asking that question and the answer to his question reveals to us the way we could actually not just live but thrive and make it through trials and suffering and eventually even face our death with great hope and joy.

The answer for Paul to this question is really the clue to thriving in the storm. Here's his answer -- It's a verse you probably know, you've probably quoted. In fact, the downside of knowing a verse so well is we can actually lose the meaning, the depth, the significance, but this is what he says,

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

Now, it's interesting, there's actually no is in the original Greek language here. It literally says this, For me, living Christ. Which can be translated in most of our Bibles as what has been, Living is Christ, but it can also be translated, Living means Christ or Living honors Christ or Living depends on Christ.

See, for Paul life, living, thriving is all about Jesus Christ. What about us? How would you fill in the blank?

For me, living is... blank. How would you complete the sentence? Now be honest, it's probably the thing you're most afraid of losing. It's probably the one thing you can't imagine your life without. Likely during COVID-19, it's been consuming you quite a bit.

So what is it, For me living is... What is it for you?

Now unfortunately for many of us, the blank gets filled with lesser substitutes like money and success in my career or power, beauty, pleasure, entertainment, I mean all of these things are things that we often live for. But the problem is none of them actually will enable us to absolutely thrive through suffering and certainly it won't give us the courage to face death one day with a lot of hope.

Now if you follow Paul's progression, you'll also have another blank to fill in. What are you living for? For me, living is blank and dying is blank. If you say living is money, then you would fill in the second blank and say dying is being broke. If you said living as pleasure, then you would say dying is losing all pleasure, having no more pleasure. If for you living is power than dying is being powerless. If it's beauty or health, then dying is losing all beauty, aging and eventually even rotting. If it's entertainment, living to me is entertainment than dying is having no more fun.

See, the problem with living for anything that diminishes along the way and definitively will go away when we die, is that we will find that we're never really truly living, but only incrementally losing. That over time we find ourselves becoming less and less and less as we face the impending reality of our death.

So what are you living for? And are you really living? Are you thriving? Even in the middle of this storm we're going through. See, Paul can rejoice in his present storm and the reality of his own future death, knowing that he may be executed soon, but he can do it because he knows he's living for something that lasts forever and only incrementally gets better for him every day while he's still alive.

Paul just said a few weeks ago in the text that we were reading that he's able to rejoice in his chains because the gospel is advancing even when people's motives are wrong, and now this is what he says in verse 18, Yes and I will rejoice. In other words, I'm not just rejoicing. Now I know I'm going to keep incrementally being filled with joy.

For I know, he says, that through your prayers and the help, which could also be translated the full provision or supply of the Spirit of Jesus, that this will turn out for my deliverance.

First of all, don't miss the power of prayer here. Paul is putting prayer in partnership with a very help and provision of the Spirit of Jesus. In prayer, family, you and I are partnering with the very Spirit of God and bringing spiritual help to people's very present needs.

See the Philippians, though they're absent from Paul and feel like they're absolutely helpless to help him are able to, in prayer, enter into that jail cell with the spirit of Christ and minister to his very needs through prayer. I mean, this is huge.

In a season where we can't be with each other like we want, we still can enter into each other's lives through prayer, and in partnership with the Holy Spirit, minister to one another.

Man, if there's a time for us to grow in prayer, it is now. This quarter, our theme is prayer and we're going to continue to give you the resources and the guides that you need to learn how to grow in prayer. Please take advantage of the Doxa app, the spiritual practices that we put there. Our team is working really hard to serve you, to help you grow in your prayer life.

I've really been blessed as I've watched the Facebook page, Doxa Needs, and seeing many of you make your needs known to the family. And then family, the way you've started praying and it's so encouraging because it's happened every single time, we start praying, one after another after another and pretty soon the person who requested the prayer comes back on and says, Family, my prayer, your prayers are being answered or I'm feeling the presence of God meet me right now. I feel the weight lifted. I could tell you started praying for me. It's amazing! Please family, believe that this is real. We have access to the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, ministering to the hearts and souls of people that we care for very much.

And then notice what Paul says is certain to happen. He says, This will turn out for my deliverance. That word is the same word that we use for salvation. So Paul is saying, I'm confident this is going to lead to my salvation. And you may not understand what that means if you aren't aware of how Paul talks about salvation. When he thinks about the good news of the gospel and how it brings about our salvation, Paul thinks of it in three different tenses. If you read some of his other works, Romans and Corinthians, you'll see that he uses a past, present, and future tense when he thinks about our salvation.

Past, he knows that we have been saved from the penalty of sin, that our faith in Jesus' death for our sin on the cross has enabled us to be saved. We've been saved from the penalty of sin that we deserve. And we've been saved into a relationship with God, our father who loves us so much.

We're also being saved. We're being saved from the power of sin today that keeps us from thriving, that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead by his Spirit is now in us. So we have access not only to the presence of Jesus, but the power of Jesus to live a new life.

And we will be saved in the future from the presence of sin. There'll be a day when we will be given a new resurrection body. There will never be a struggle again with sin. We will be in the very presence of Jesus forever and we will become like him. The scripture says that when we see him, we will become like him. We'll be glorified. We'll be perfect. Everything God always wanted us to be.

And see, the apostle Paul believes that the present storm that he is experiencing and the future death that he will face is going to turn out for his own salvation. How?

He continues. Verse 20, It's my eager expectation and hope. That's another way of saying I'm absolutely certain, That I will not at all be ashamed. Another place, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God for salvation. He's not going to be ashamed because the power of the gospel is going to save him and he goes on and says, But that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body. That word honored could also be translated, enlarged.

The concept is that Jesus magnified that Jesus fully seen that he's being fully known. And this idea that Paul is holding to is that what began as like a seed of faith in him grew up into

maturity and it's like Christ is filling the very presence of Paul's body with his very presence that, that he's enlarging in Paul's life. That as Paul realizes how desperately he is in need of God's presence and power, Jesus continues to pour out more and more and more of himself into Paul's life. That he fills him more and more with his presence. And as a result, Paul is not only experiencing the enlargement of Christ in his own life, but he's also becoming more and more like Christ as Christ is his life.

See, family, I want you to hear this. The beauty of this narrative is that Paul is saying the very thing that makes me alive, the very thing that makes me fully living is Jesus in me and me in him. I've said this a lot of times to us family, I'm going to say it again to us. We were all made in the image of God to be both in relationship with God but also to be a display of the true nature of what God is like.

The word Doxa is the Greek word for glory, and the word glory is the full reality of something. We as Doxa, we as God's people, as his image bearers are meant to live a life that displays the truth of what God is life. That's what it's like to glorify God. And the essence of being human is when you are fully living out your purpose and your purpose is to glorify God, which means you look more and more like him in everything you do.

The more you live like God and love like God and speak like God and treat others like God would, the more human you are becoming. And as a result, the more human you become, the more fully alive you are.

The problem is we've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. We've all failed. We're all living a subpar human life as a result, but God doesn't leave us there. In fact, the whole point of the gospel is that God wants to reattach us to him and reform us into his image.

See, salvation is really about reattachment. You see this in all of human relationships, a little baby immediately needs healthy attachment to survive, and if they don't get it, they're wounded, that's healing that needs to happen later on. In our relationships, in our community, we need attachment and we are feeling that right now because we're tired of looking at each other through a screen. We feel that need.

And marriages show this most intimately and when they come together as two becoming one, the best marriages that thrive have healthy attachment. First with God and then one another. But sin severed that relationship. Sin broke the attachment. So Jesus came to bring about salvation to reattach us to God, to reconcile us in relationship, to make it so that our life source would be just moving through our being. The Spirit of God would begin to renew and restore and rebuild all that has been broken in us. And that's what Paul is experiencing. See, Paul knows the more that he's in need, the more he depends on Jesus, the more he's filled with the presence of Jesus, the more he becomes like Jesus. And as a result, the more human and fully alive Paul becomes.

Where are you in need of Jesus filling you? Where do you need his presence? Where do you need his restoration, his rebuilding so that you can truly thrive. Not to survive, thrive. And maybe for some of you, you're saying, I don't even have an attachment with God. I know what you're talking about, that relationship being severed, but it has not been reattached. And today you can have that reattached. You can say, Lord Jesus, you died on the cross for my rebellion and sin so that I not only would be forgiven, but be restored back to a relationship with God the Father. I want that. I want your forgiveness. I want your restoration and you rose again from the dead to give new life, and I want you to come and fill me with the presence of God and give me new life today.

He'll do that.

For others of you, you might want to ask, where are you not experiencing abundant life right now? Where are you just kind of surviving? Invite Jesus into that place. Like Paul said, let him be honored, let him be the one who enlarges life for you by filling you with his presence.

You know, after I lost my friend Randy back in November, eventually I went into counseling and I've been seeing a counselor every week since February. Just been such a gift for me to be honest about the areas that were broken when I was really young and areas that needed reattachment with God and then reattachment with others. My wife, my kids, our leaders, you family. I just want to encourage you, God has been so graciously rebuilding so many things that were broken in me and I feel week after week, more free and more alive, more connected, more filled with God's Spirit than ever.

I'm so thankful for brothers around me who will love me enough to not just let me stay as I am, but continue to push me forward so like Paul, I can say I know that their encouragement, and family, your prayers and the provision of so many people around me has led to me being able to be confident that this will result in my own salvation, my ongoing transformation becoming more and more like Christ.

See, here's the amazing thing about the Christian life. The Christian life is not about me working harder, striving more, trying my best to change. It's about me being able to say, I don't do this alone, I do this in connection, in communion with Jesus Christ, and his Spirit is the one that changes my desires, changes my history, rewrites it, redeems it, heals it, and then also restores me.

See, we work out God's salvation and we work out of God's salvation, and as we do, Jesus makes us more like himself. That's what he's been doing in me and I hope that's what you're experiencing too. In fact, I would say if you're experiencing that and you've realized how deeply you need him in the midst of the COVID-19 reality and the storm we're facing, if you've been leaning into him more and more and saying, Jesus, more of you, more of you, I need more. I don't have enough. I need you to fill every part of me. I need you to be Lord, over everything I'm going through. If you've been learning to do that, then this season, this storm for you has been a time of thriving.

I know that's been the case for me. I, through prayer and experiencing his presence and experiencing his restoration, I'm actually becoming more like Jesus in one of the worst years of my life. I just lost another friend this last week who took his life and I could be living in despair, but what I'm experiencing is God meeting me, filling me, changing me. It's crazy. So many people in the world right now are doing the opposite. They're becoming less, they're feeling more broken, more distraught, more in despair, more weary, and those of us who know Christ can say with Paul, I know what it's like to thrive in the jail cell, to thrive in the storm, to be stuck in isolation and not be alone because he's with me.

Is this what you're experiencing family?

I hope it is. If not, you might need to re-examine what you're living for. You might need to re-examine what true life is for you.

But if we can say with Paul for me to live as Christ, then what we'll find is Jesus is both our reason for living and our source of true living, even in the storm and even in the face of death one day.

When you think about your own death, do you agree with Paul that to depart and be with Christ is far better? That word depart is the same word they use when a ship leaves a harbor and it's headed towards its destination. And for those of us who know Jesus, whose lives have been changed by him, our death is just the leaving the harbor on the destination to what we've always longed for, which is to be in the presence of Jesus forever.

I don't know how it was for you, but growing up I used to say, Jesus, man, I can't wait to you to come back, but could you wait until I get married so I can experience that? And of course then I got married and I love my wife and love marriage and loved all the joys that come with it. But then I was like, man, if we could just have kids, man, we'd love to have kids before you returned Jesus. And I want kids, and then I got kids and my kids are amazing, and I love them. But it's like, okay, that's still, there's more. Okay Lord, I want a great career, I want to accomplish your calling in my life and I want to see the church grow or I want to reach more people. And all those are good things.

But what I have learned is none of them, none of them compare to having Christ. None of them satisfy my soul like he does. None of them help me thrive like his Spirit in my life does.

And so the reason Paul can say to die is gain because he knows at the end of his life when he departs on that journey to go meet Jesus finally face to face in the presence of God without any sin. He knows he's going to get everything he's always wanted for most. That he's already been getting Jesus, but in that moment, he will get the fullest supply of the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

See, if living is Jesus Christ, then dying is absolutely gain because you get him unhindered forever. And Paul knows that this isn't just gain for him, if he were to be executed, this gain

would go beyond his own life to many, many people. He knows if he were to be executed, the all the guards know, all of Caesar's household know, now, almost all the Rome is getting to know that the reason why Paul is in chains is because of his love for Jesus Christ and his absolute confidence that Jesus changes everything, that he's the true King of the world.

And so, kill him. What's that gonna mean? He gets to be in the presence of Christ and the gospel goes forth even more. I can imagine this conversation with the guards and Paul probably pretty frustrating as they realize. Paul is pretty much unstoppable. I mean, imagine the conversation with the guards.

Guards: Hey Paul, we don't like you. We don't like your Messiah. We're going to kill you.

Paul: That's great. Dying's gain, bring it on. I only get to be with Jesus and everyone will know that I'm all about Jesus when you kill me.

Okay, on second thought, we're going to allow you to live.

Oh man, fantastic. Living means I get to keep working for Jesus and see more and more people meet Jesus.

Okay, well we're going to let you live, but we're going to make you suffer.

Guys, I consider the sufferings of this present world nothing compared to the glory that's going to be revealed to me. Bring it on, it'll be a joy to suffer for the name and fame of Jesus Christ.

They got nothing on him! They can't do anything to him! I mean, the only thing that Paul ultimately treasures can never be taken away even if they kill him!

What if that was our reality? What if we treasured Christ to that degree? Kill me, it's okay, I just get to go be with him. Let me live. I'll live for him. Eat me up, take away my things, make fun of me, whatever. I'll do that for his fame then, cause I'm not about my glory, I'm about his.

See, Paul is free and alive, and so motivated by God's love for him and his love for God that it leads him to want to do whatever is best for the fame of Jesus and the good of others. Which is why even though Paul sees death as gain, he enters into this struggle.

Verse 22, If I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yeah, that would be good. Yet, which shall I choose? I can't tell, he's struggling. He says, I'm hard-pressed between the two because my desire is to depart and be with Christ. For that would be far better, but to remain in the flesh would be more necessary on your account, he says to the church in Philippi.

What's happening? As Paul is seeing Christ enlarged in his life, Paul is becoming more like Christ and therefore doing the very thing Christ would do. Which we see in chapter two, he considered others' interests more important than his own and he was willing to lay down his life on the cross for us so that we might have new life forevermore.

Paul is becoming like Jesus and he's saying, Yeah, I would rather just go be with Jesus right now, but for your good, I believe God's going to keep me here longer to continue helping you.

You know family, if we really understand the secret to life which is for me to live is Christ to die is gain then not only will we thrive in the storm and face death with hope and joy and only grow increasing measures of rejoicing as we anticipate being with Jesus, but we'll also want what's best for others in the storm. We will want others to thrive.

What does that look like for us in this present storm? I said earlier, first, we can pray for the presence and help of the Holy Spirit for our brothers and sisters and our friends. Was having a conversation with my kids and we're really struggling through how do we engage this situation as ministers of the gospel, as people sent by Jesus to our friends?

And I told them, I said, First of all, kids, if you haven't gone public with your friends, you need to. It's time for you to tell your friends that you love Jesus, that you belong to him. And then ask them if they need any prayer because you have access to the living God who can actually not only hear but answer the requests that we bring to him.

Haylee was sharing how already she's seeing a friend of hers who she's praying for see the answers to her prayers. So I said, pray and then ask them when the prayer gets answered, let us know so we can celebrate what God's doing in your life.

Family, do that. Who is the Spirit leading you to right now to begin first of all, to say, this is who I am. I follow Jesus. I love him. He's changed my life. But also I want to pray for you because I have access to God the Father through Jesus, and I want you to get the help from God that you need right now.

Second, Paul says in verse 25, Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and your joy in the faith.

See, Paul is not only committed to be a faithful witness to the gospel, but he's very committed to their growth and their joy in the faith.

Family, who are you presently committed to? Committed to help grow in the faith, to see their joy increase. Everybody's in need right now, and I want to ask you, who is God putting on your heart that he's saying you need to reach out to them, you need to pray for them, you need to help them grow?

If you're not in a DNA group, now is the time to get in one. Men, you have a few other guys. Ladies, you have a few other women that you can meet with regularly and you can ask just a few questions. How's it going with you and Jesus? Where do you need to invite the Spirit to make Jesus larger in your life. And then take some time to pray and invite the Spirit to fill you more and more so that you become more and more like Jesus.

And then Paul ends, here's the goal, That in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.

Family, wouldn't that be amazing if all of us were living in such a way that we could say because of the way that I thrive in the storm, face my death with hope and rejoicing, and help others thrive, they are given many causes to give God praise and glory because of my life in Christ.

That's what Paul's life did. That's what ours can do. During this crisis, let's thrive in this storm for the glory of Jesus, for our own personal joy, and for the good of those who maybe aren't thriving yet.

Family, I want to end our time together in a prayer. It's a prayer of Saint Patrick, evangelist to Ireland in the fifth century. And in line with this idea that to live is Christ and to die is gain, this prayer helps us really express that in a powerful way. I'd like you to pray it with me. Let's pray.

As we arise today, may the strength of God pilot us, the power of God uphold us, the wisdom of God guide us. May the eye of God looked before us, the ear of God hear us, the word of God speak for us. May the hand of God protect us, the way of God lie before us, the shield of God defend us, the host of God save us. May Christ shield us today. Christ with us, Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ in us, Christ beneath us, Christ above us, Christ on our right, Christ on our left, Christ when we lie down, Christ when we sit, Christ when we stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of us, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of us, Christ in every eye that sees us, Christ in every ear that hears us. Amen.

Family, I love you. Want to encourage you to take time to process through some of these questions. What are you living for? Where do you need Jesus in your life right now to become bigger than anything else?

For us to live is Christ, to die is gain.