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A True Win-Win Philippians 1:21-26

Intro: In our text last week, Paul made the emphatic declaration that, no matter how his situation was resolved, he was confident that he would not be disappointed. Paul's not saying that he would never know disappointment of any kind in his life because, as we said, disappointment is part of the human experience. What Paul is saying is that he won't be disappointed because the gospel doesn't disappoint-it does exactly what it is supposed to do; God doesn't disappoint – He does exactly what He says He will do. Then Paul goes on to explain how God won't disappoint – no matter what happened to Paul, he was confident that Christ would be magnified in his body; whether by death or life!

Clearly, Paul could be so confident because he knew he was in the center of God's will. His current circumstances might not have been what he would have chosen for himself but he saw God's hand working in the midst of them. This is a critical perspective – Paul knew God wasn't punishing him through all the adversity he was experiencing at that time. Paul wasn't the sort to sit around and pout; wondering why everything was going against him. No, he could see the gospel advancing around him and he rejoiced in the sight! Still, how could Paul be so sure that Christ would be magnified in his body? The better question is how can we be sure that Christ will be magnified in our bodies? Is it even necessary for this to be a consideration for the believer?

Let's deal with that last question first. Of course, Christians are to seek to magnify Jesus with our lives! As God's children, we are called to live our lives before Him and do everything for His glory. Paul even goes so far as to say that Christians are to feed themselves to God's glory ([1 Cor 10:31](#)). He tells us in [Rom 12:1](#) that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable (or pleasing) to God and then has the gall to say this is our reasonable service! Clearly, Christ must be magnified in the lives of those who claim to believe in Him. Jesus only dwells in the lives of His children, so if He is going to be seen in this world at all, He must be seen in the lives of those who know Him. But how do we do that? What does it look like?

1st, Christ must be magnified in our own eyes. Sure, we all love Jesus but we are all also inundated with a constant barrage of responsibilities, distractions, entertainment and diversions. There are always 2 or 3 things competing for our time and attention at any given moment, maybe more. We can't afford to segregate Jesus to a Sunday morning time slot, say...between 10:30 and noon. The reality of His presence in our lives should take precedence over everything else so that, even in the midst of our daily routine, His will for us holds our attention and guides our steps.

2nd, the Bible teaches that Christ must be magnified in the way we use our tongues. James gives a whole chapter to this subject in his epistle. He points to the power of the tongue to do good or evil and notes the difficulty people have in taming it. It's even difficult for Christians. How do we control of our tongues? There's only one way - by submitting our minds to Christ. We speak what we think. So, if Jesus is to be magnified in the way we use our tongue, He must be magnified in the way we use our mind also. There can be no purity of speech without a true purification of the mind. (2 Cor 10:5). Jesus taught the same truth when He said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34). Righteous words come from a righteous heart, one that has been surrendered to Christ, cleansed by Him, and filled with the thoughts He strives to place there.

Finally, if Jesus Christ is to be magnified in our bodies, then our bodies must be surrendered to Him. The living sacrifice Paul talks about in Rom 12 involves our inner being, which does the offering, and our physical bodies, which are being offered. Obviously, we must first belong to God before anything can be offered to Him. This is impossible for the unbeliever; it's impossible for anyone who hasn't come to God on the merits of Christ and His atoning death on Calvary. Nothing in the unsaved person can satisfy God. All acts of sacrifice, self-denial or penance apart from Christ, are merely acts of human righteousness. Only after a person comes to Jesus completely will God move them to make their lives a living sacrifice which magnifies Christ. This is the first and greatest commitment a Christian can make? Everything else in the Christian life flow from it.

Next, Paul makes an astounding declaration, a statement that is as loved as much as it is misunderstood.

21 – This statement involves 2 very important things: living and dying. Paul says to live is Christ...to die is gain. Later on in **v23** he will say, to depart and be with Christ...is far better. How can Paul be so blasé about death? Is he being suicidal here? Of course not! Paul just has a proper perspective on both his life and his death. Perspective can be a wonderful thing. Sometimes, when certain things happen, we tend to jump to conclusions and get bent out of shape but if we look at the situation from a different perspective, the truth comes into better focus.

Now, changing your perspective doesn't always produce good results. You've heard the old joke about what do you get if you play a country song backwards? You get your wife back, your dog back, your truck back... Well, in the same vein, if you watch the movie Jaws backwards it becomes a heartwarming story of a wonderful shark that goes around giving arms and legs to disabled people. See what a simple change of perspective can do for you? Now, the problem with that particular perspective is that it is skewed; it has no bearing in reality (backward or forward). Paul's statement here comes from having an accurate perspective of both life and death in Christ.

What does Paul mean by...to live is Christ? We might assume he just means that if he survives his imprisonment and trial, it's God's will for him to live. We wouldn't technically be wrong but Paul actually implies so much more here. In fact, his statement cuts to the heart of Christianity itself. What is Christianity? Unlike every other religion or belief system in the world today, Christianity isn't just a collection of doctrines and principles to be learned and adhered to. Christianity is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, everything that is rightly associated with Christianity finds its center of gravity in Him. The person and work of Jesus are the foundation rock on which Christianity is built. If you remove Christ from Christianity, there is nothing left but dead religion. Christ is the rightful center of Christianity.

The sad thing is that this clearly obvious truth is missed by so many people. Some people think they are Christian just because they hang around other Christians and emulate their lives. They identify Christianity with "Christian" character. The problem with that is so many Christians are far from what God intends them to be so their lives actually provide a false impression. Others may actually get right into it, thinking that Christianity is to be found in the visible church. They attend services, participate in the ceremonies; maybe even learn some of the doctrines. They often pass for Christians

because they participate so well. But none of these things makes a person a Christian. Christianity is a Person – Jesus Christ. What does that mean? What does Paul mean by, to live is Christ? The answers to these questions bring us to the very heart of Christianity.

To say that Christianity is Christ, in the first place, means that Christianity is faith in Christ. It's the acknowledgment that you can do nothing to save yourself, that you actually deserve hell from God, not heaven, and that Christ has provided salvation for you by dying in your place. Then, it's receiving of Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord of your life. Are you trusting in Jesus Christ as your savior? We just mentioned those who reject true Christianity by stopping short at human character, ceremonies or doctrines. Sadly, many of these people also trust these things to save them. These things won't save you and have no value in reconciling you to God. You must let God strip them away like worn out clothing. Christianity is faith in Christ and in Christ alone but it's not only that!

Another aspect of true Christianity is fellowship with Christ. This fact complements the previous point because we often tend to think of faith impersonally. Christianity is belief in Christ, but it's also communion (fellowship) with Him and fellowship must be cultivated. Discovering the truth about Jesus is wonderful but that initial discovery should lead us to greater truth, which should lead us to fellowship with Him. Too many Christians plod through life with dour faces. They know the facts of Christianity but there is no joy, no evidence of God's presence in the midst of the trials. This should not be. The Lord's presence brings joy. If there's no joy, it may be a lack of fellowship with Jesus. It may be that things are keeping you from Him. If so, set those things aside a while and spend time in Christ's presence.

Finally, Christianity means following Christ. The Christ in whom we believe is on the move and the fellowship we enjoy is not that of the living room but the fellowship of a soldier marching under the eye of his commander. In its simplest form Christ's call was always, Follow Me. That was His call to Matthew, the rich young ruler, the multitudes who came to hear Him. Jesus always invited others to follow Him. He invites you to follow Him today. Of course, you can't follow Him until you forsake everything that keeps you from Him. Peter and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their father. Matthew left his money tables. You must leave your sin, your personal

aspirations and even your own concept of yourself. Christianity is no easy thing. It's the walk of a disciple who must bear his own cross.

But, all this is just one half of Paul's statement; what about the second part – to die is gain? How is death a gain? To put this in proper perspective, let's read the rest of our text.

22-26 – Paul gives us a glimpse into the dilemma that is his life and he presents it as a conflict between what he desires (23) to be with Christ and what is necessary (24) to remain and minister to the Philippians. Paul presents this as a choice but it isn't a choice he would make. In fact, it really wasn't even up to Nero if Paul lived or died; it was in God's hands and Paul was fine with whatever the outcome would be. Surely, he found some personal satisfaction in his work of evangelism and teaching among the churches. He knows there's more work to be done and he's ready to postpone his greater desire to meet the needs of others.

But, what does he actually mean when he says, to die is gain or to depart...is far better? Some people think that if a person suffers in this life then death comes as a blessed release but this distorts the biblical concept. Death for the Christian is never pictured in the Bible as a gain over the worst in this life. It's always portrayed as an improvement on the best. Sure, Paul was suffering in prison and was anxious for a speedy release. But, it's also true that his life was full; he had been enriched by his fellowship with Christ. He was confident that Christ would be magnified in the way he led his life. He was delighted that his work in Philippi had prospered; he even saw evidence of the spread of the gospel in Rome. These facts fulfilled his deepest desires.

Even from this perspective, Paul could still say that death was far better. To many people, life and death seem like 2 evils and they can't decide which is the lesser. But for Paul, they look like 2 immense blessings, and he couldn't decide which was better because either way, Jesus was everything to him. Life or death, it didn't matter to Paul because each was a win in his book. If that's the case, what are the benefits of death to those who trust in Jesus?

The 1st great benefit of death for Christians is that it brings a permanent freedom from evil. The Christian who has experienced the delight of God's righteousness longs for a purity that he'll never have on earth. He longs to

be free of sin and all it brings (pain, care, anxiety) and death brings that freedom. The word Paul uses for depart in [v23](#) paints an interesting picture. It's the Greek word *analuō*. It had different uses in ancient times, sometimes referring to the freeing of a slave, or the sailing of a ship, or to solving a problem. Often, it referred to the breaking of camp by the Roman legions. In every instance it conveyed the idea of leaving something permanently behind.

We can see this clearly in the military operations of the Roman army. When a Roman legion ended a day's march they made camp. This wasn't an ordinary camp, it was always an elaborate affair. First a rectangle was paced off, large enough to hold the entire group of soldiers. After this, the entire encampment was secured by moat and a wall, often to a height of 10 or 12 feet. The top was reinforced and the corners were strengthened. After this the soldiers settled down for rest and for their evening meal. In the morning camp was struck, and the soldiers moved on; leaving behind the camp and all its fortifications, the only evidence that they had been there. This is how Christians break camp to be with Jesus. Anything not useful is left behind—all of the sin, pain, care and anguish of this world.

The 2nd great benefit of death for believers is that they will be like Jesus ([1 Jn 3:2](#)). It's not enough to say that death brings freedom from evil. It's true, but that's a negative. Annihilation would be just as effective and death's better than that. The Bible teaches that death brings a final perfection of our sanctification that was begun on earth. We shall be like Him in righteousness, crowned with righteousness is what Paul tells Timothy ([2 Tium 4:8](#))! The day is coming when we will be what we were created and saved to be!

We'll also be like Him in knowledge. Now we see things imperfectly. We know in part, and our knowledge (even of spiritual things) is always mixed with error. In that day we shall know as God knows us, and all that has puzzled us in this life will become clear ([1 Cor 13:12](#)). We will also be like Christ in love. What a joy and relief that will be. There is so much of self in everything we do here, but Christ's love was selfless and self-sacrificing. It's a love that reached to us when we were sinners and saved us for this life and for eternity. A love that stooped low enough to reach us in our sin and misery and yet, and will carry us beyond the farthest star right into His presence.

The 3rd great benefit of death for believers is the greatest. Yes, we will be free from sin and all its trappings; yes, we will be like Jesus in certain important respects but ultimately, the greatest gain of death for believers is that they will be with Jesus! Sure, we know Him now and He is with us in this life. We can also trust that He will be close to us when death comes for **Ps 116:15** says precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. But the day is coming when we will be with Him like never before, just as a bride is with her husband on the night of their marriage. In that day there will be no tears, no unfulfilled longings or disappointments, and no separation.

Death is always a separation, even for the Christian. For the unbeliever, death is the separation of the soul and the spirit from God. Paul tells us in **Rom 6:23** that, the wages of sin is death. This means that not only does sin bring physical death but the required payment for sin (wages) is separation from God and His love and goodness for all of eternity. There are only 2 places your soul will spend eternity in: either with God in heaven or separated from God in hell. Clearly, 1 is much more preferable than the other and yet, people refuse to accept God's terms for entrance into His presence all the time. Faith in Christ is the only cure for the cancer of sin and all that it brings in life and in death.

Now, for the Christian, death is merely the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. But even in this, there's still no separation from Jesus! Whether we live for Christ or we die in Christ, He will still be with us and we will be with Him! The dilemma Paul was facing wasn't a dilemma between having Christ and not having Christ; it was a dilemma between having Christ much and having Christ much more, between knowing Christ by faith and knowing Him by sight." As such, it was no dilemma at all – either way, it was a win-win for Paul and it can be a win-win for you as well!

If you have never accepted Christ as your personal savior, would you do so today? Jesus Christ is everything He claimed to be and so much more! Only He can bring lasting joy, clarity of mind, comforting peace and freedom from the bondage of sin. Will you put your trust in Him today?

Maybe you are already a Christian but you're not experiencing the fullness of the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. Could it be that your fellowship from Him has been neglected? Are you following in His lead? You're not

really a disciple unless you are spending time with the Master and are following in His footsteps. 😊