

## **A Christ Focused Life** **Philippians 1:12-26**

A young man came to W.E. Gladstone when he was Prime Minister of England in the late 1800's. The young man asked Mr. Gladstone to give him some advice about how to proceed with his plans for life. He told Mr. Gladstone "I want to study law." And Gladstone responded "Yes, and what then".

Then sir, I would like to gain entrance to the Bar of England." "Yes, young man, and what then?"

"Then I hope to have a place in parliament, in the house of Lords." "Yes, young man, what then?" pressed Gladstone.

"then I hope to do great things for Britain." "Yes, young man, and what then?"

Then, Sir, I hope to retire and take life easy." "Yes, young man, and what then? He tenaciously asked.

Well, then, Mr. Gladstone, I suppose I will die." "Yes, young man, and what then?" The young man hesitated and then said, "I never thought any further than that sir."

Looking at the young man sternly and steadily, Gladstone said, "Young man, you are a fool, go home and think life through!"<sup>i</sup>

Good morning everyone! It is good to be with all of you this morning. And I hope to help us all "think life through" a bit more this morning and, more specifically, have a More Christ Focused Life. Please grab your bibles and turn to Philippians Chapter 1, we will focus our attention on verses 12-26.

It is a joy to continue to dig into his letter from God through Paul with its abundance of guidance in how to be a Christian.

This is the second message in a series of messages that I plan to provide by working my way through the entire book of Philippians with all of you. Eric preached on these same verses just 2 weeks ago as my family and I were driving home from vacation. As I listened to his message (more than once) I loved hearing Him bring forth a beautiful and foundational truth found here. That a strong Christian, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will see ALL things, both good and bad, as opportunities to proclaim Christ. I thought about changing my effort to continue to work through this book with you because Eric just covered this, but I decided to stay true to the plan. I recognized things that God was stirring in me that provided encouragement and urgings for all of us that were different than some of the things Eric brought up.

My goal remains the same, to help us improve our purpose in life, that purpose is honor and glorify Jesus Christ 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost. The first message I gave on Philippians provided some real reasons why Paul dearly loved this church in Philippi. A church he had started years before this letter. The growth and devotion to Jesus this church displayed was a great encouragement for Paul and He praised them for their partnership in Gospel work and their defense of Jesus Christ - his Life, Death and Resurrection. (verses 5 and 7).

Today I bring before you a continuation of Paul's praise to this church by digging into verse 12-26. These 15 verses drip with the joy Paul expresses in verse 18 – that Christ is indeed honored and glorified in great ways because “Christ is proclaimed”!

I was struck with how these verses highlight our desire be a discipleship church and improve our efforts to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.” Matt 28:19-20.

Therefore, as we look at these 15 verses, I want to encourage us to embrace and engage in the work God has called every Christian to do in their life, to be a disciple and to go and make disciples. Three things to keep in mind with this section of Scripture are:

1. Do you “advance the Gospel” no matter what happens in your life?
2. What are your motives for what you do and what you pursue in your life?
3. Are you striving to engage in the “fruitful Labor” of Jesus?

Let's Read.....(Read all from 12 to 26)

1. Do you “advance the Gospel” no matter what happens in your life?

Paul refers to a lot of stuff when he says “What has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel” in verse 12. I think it will be helpful to recap, briefly, what happened to Paul after he left Philippi during his third missionary journey (Ac20:6). Paul sailed to 15 different ports on his way back to Jerusalem, he preached a few times, the first at a city called Troas where a young man became overcome by sleep on and fell out a third story window to his death – But God enabled Paul to bring the boy back to life as a display of His Power. Paul was continually warned not to go to Jerusalem but he went anyway, there he was beaten severely by Jewish leaders (trying to kill him), and Paul was unjustly thrown in prison by the Roman authorities as a way to keep the peace.

During this time Paul did bring up the unjust charges against him – but not in a way that championed a just ruling, instead he kept preaching WHY the unjust charges were brought against him – because the murder of Jesus, the Son of God

who rose again and offers true salvation – that’s why he was in prison! But preaching that message isn’t just for these people! God tells Paul that he must go tell the authorities in Roman (Ac23:11). The Jews plan to kill Paul, the plan is So for 2 years Paul is kept in prison to keep the peace and save him from being murdered by the Jewish leaders. When Paul gets a formal hearing to possibly clear up the matter – he does not take the opportunity to clear his name – he stays faithful to God and appeals to have his case heard in Rome, – “to Caesar you have appealed, to Caesar you will go” is proclaimed (ac 25:12) and Paul preaches the Gospel to King Agrippa and many others before boarding a ship to Rome.

The journey to Rome included storms at sea, great hunger, being shipwrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake, and the curing of a sick man, before finally getting to Rome. When he got to Rome they had no report about him from Judea so Paul awaited word for 2 years...what did he do in that time – He spoke to all who would come to him (and it sounds like that was common) about Jesus. (Ac27-28). Eric brought up this unfair imprisonment for 5 years. And as Eric said so well 2 weeks ago – what did Paul do? Did he fight for justice – did he fight to clear his name? No – he just told people about Jesus, he “advanced the Gospel.”

As Paul proclaimed Jesus and advanced the Gospel, those around him knew he was being mistreated because of his effort to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It’s exciting to see that they were inspired by his efforts “And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear!” (vs 14). And we should ask ourselves this question – is whatever is happening in our lives, and in the lives of other faithful brothers and sisters, being used to proclaim Jesus or not?

Another big lesson to learn here. It’s part of what Eric expressed 2 weeks ago also. Do we proclaim Jesus with our lives or do we fall into, what can be a subtle trap, of proclaiming Jesus for less than pure reasons as seen in verses 15-17.

2. What are your motives for what you do and what you pursue in your life? “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love (a great motive), knowing I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. (a horrible motive)”

How in the word might that situation apply to us? Well. Paul is saying that other people were proclaiming the truth of Jesus – with accuracy – but for their own

gain or to make themselves more important than him. (Not inaccuracy – Gal1:6-9)

The reason I am stressing that this was an accurate presentation of the Gospel is because of where we see Paul address false presentations of the Gospel. If you look at Galatians 1:6-9 you see Paul rail on those that preach a false Gospel – he says of them, may they be “accursed”! But here Paul does no such thing. He only clarifies that their ‘true’ proclamation is for their own gain and to take jabs at him. Paul is basically saying I’m fine with being made fun of or being insulted...In fact Paul is more than fine with these personal insults...he is rejoicing in them, because within them....Jesus Christ is being proclaimed! He’s a different kind of person than normal....isn’t he. He’s not the only different kind of person in the history of the world, there are lots of them that are different because of the life changing work of Jesus!

But, in our day and age there are many Christians who proclaim Jesus with absolute accuracy and use that accurate proclamation of Jesus for their own gain, perhaps enjoying a “Christian business model” that provides more revenue.

There are Christians, including regular church goers, ministry leaders and pastors who get caught up in proclaiming Jesus with accuracy...but also tear down other people in ministry instead of trying to work with them, or to enjoy partnership to strengthen the overall work of ministry to the world.

The key here is proclaiming Jesus with the right motive. Can any of us recognize motives that have slid off track? I don’t know. Only you can self-examine and figure this one out.

And its important to have our motives figured out because of where the last 9 verses for today take us.

3. Are you striving to engage in the “fruitful Labor” of Jesus?

Let’s wrestle with what Paul means by “*fruitful labor*” in vs 22.

Paul is making it clear, he is confident that with the support of prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, that things will work out for him to live - whatever life God has planned for him – be it one more day or 50 more years, in a way that does not bring him shame but rather honors God.

He does not care if he lives or dies, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” verse 21. To live is to do the work of Christ and to die means he gets to go enjoy eternity with Jesus.

Paul’s entire earthly life is encapsulated in verse 22 when he says...“*If I am to live...it means fruitful labor for me.*”

And that is what I hope we all improve on with our lives – to be more focused on “fruitful labor”.

Paul also shows us that this effort – to be fruitful in our labors of life – needs to be worked at, trained in, and fought for.

“which I shall choose I cannot tell” at the end of verse 22 is just a different way of Paul saying – I don’t know what God has for me – life or death...but , vs 23...if I did get to choose – I would go see Jesus.

How many of us have had that same thought? I think we all have. That when we look at the difficulty of life we say – wow, it would be nice if it was all over and I was just with Jesus.

But we don’t get to choose that. God numbers our days. What is more honoring to God and “more necessary” for Paul was to remain living to “continue with all the believers he knew to help them with their “progress and joy in the faith” verses 24-25).

So fruitful labor is living our lives in a way that helps others make progress and grow in the joy of faith in Jesus. And that is discipleship. That is the great commission – go therefore and make disciples.

We are to be Baptized and Baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to teach them all Jesus has commanded us to do.

We have a baptismal service coming up in August (date is to be determined) – if you’re a believer who has never been baptized by your own choice - God wants you to enjoy the opportunity to display how God helps you die to yourself (going down into the water) and being reborn (coming back up out of the water) becoming a new creation in Christ. (a outward display of an inward reality). It also allows you to enjoy living out Romans 10:9 *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Therefore, if you have not been baptized as a believer – you should do so – talk to Eric, Randy or myself!

And, back to discipleship, as Christians we ARE disciples (followers of Jesus) who are commanded to go and make other disciples – which will be a relationship with those people that includes the joy of helping each other grow – to make progress and know the joy that God has for you within His forgiveness as well as the way of life He wants us to enjoy.

God is communicating Paul’s passion for what life should be focused on. And it’s not to be focused on when we will die or not. It is to be focused on the “fruitful labor” of making disciples and growing together in our faith. It is helpful to remember that Paul taught gentiles, or non-Jews, about the kind of passion and

commitment it requires to be successful in this “fruitful labor” by using the example of an athlete. Jews were more in tune with living a life for God with all your heart mind soul and strength (mk12:30) – that was the foundation of their society – the worship of God. But for non-Jews, they needed more help in understanding the seriousness of it all. Paul knew that the gentiles were very familiar with the Olympic games and the dedication it took to win those games. 1Cor9:24-27- *24Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we (do it for) an imperishable (wreath or eternal life!). 26So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27But I discipline my body and keep it under control,* So I ask again – are you striving to live life to engage in the “fruitful Labor”? Not just being a disciple, but making disciples? Are you running your race in a way that has you finish with nothing left in the tank!?

Here is something to think about when it comes to the way we finish our lives. It contains a positive and a negative to ponder.

If you have seen the movie Schindler’s list, you might remember this scene. It’s a great movie, a true story, about a German businessman who purchases 1,200 Jews as slaves to work in his factories during WW2 – not for his financial gain but to save them from the gas chambers – watch it if you are old enough....its gut wrenching.

But at the end of the movie the Jews give Schindler a gold ring as a thank you – it’s made from gold they gathered by removing gold tooth fillings some of the men .... wow.

But Schindler has a profoundly understandable reaction when he is given this gift and the reality of the thankfulness he purchased for them by giving them life.... The movie goes something like this...

A leader of the Jews hands Schindler the gold ring and informs him that the inscription they carved into it was Hebrew – a saying from the Talmud – stating “He who saves one man saves the world entire.”

Schindler emotionally places the ring on his finger and shakes the man’s hand, drawing him closer he whispers...

“I could have got more....I could have got more....I don’t know...If I would have just.....

I could have got more”

The man reminds him...” There are over 1100 men alive here because of you and generations will live because of you.”

Schindler – “but I wasted so much money.... I could have gotten more. My car...it could have got 10 more....my gold pin on my coat....it could have got 2 more, at least one...at least one more to stand.”

Schindler breaks down, crying. Knowing he could have saved more people if he would have been focused and sacrificial with what He had.

It’s a true story, but it’s also a movie – so the scene is very dramatic and emotional – but its absolutely true – on the day we are done – when we go home to be with Jesus, will we have run our race and have some wins to show – some people who are saved? Or will we stand before Jesus and have no wins to show, no believers in Him.

I know I want to have some wins...or at least show Jesus I was in the game...trying. I know I have so much to improve on in order to live life more focused on “fruitful Labor” of being a disciple and discipling others.

Those of you who are engaged in being a disciple of Jesus – God bless you. But if you’re only being a disciple and not making other disciples then your only doing half the job that Jesus has commanded you to do and you’re not in the race, your just doing some of the training. If your engaged in being a disciple and striving to make disciples – God bless you. I encourage you to keep running the race harder and harder! Know that the Holy Spirit is right there with you showing you with love and support!

If you’re not sure if your actually doing any of it. I plead with you to get involved with a small group – call me – text me – e-mail me and ask about small groups. Our small groups are a foundational place where people are both being disciples and discipling others.

We have so many ways in which this is happening here at East Lincoln! Its so good. We have discipleship happening in children’s ministry, youth ministry, small groups, worship team, women’s ministry, men’s ministry, deacons, care team, our committees like missions and evangelism, etc..... etc. Get engaged if you are not in the fruitful work of being a disciple and making disciples!

The truth of our God and the mission God has presented us through Jesus is clearly seen even in unbiblical places. I ran across a quote from Julian Barnes out of a book he wrote about relationships and love that says;

“Most of us have only one story to tell. I don’t mean that only one thing happens to us in our lives: there are countless events, which we turn into countless stories. But there’s only one that matters, only one finally worth telling.”

— Julian Barnes, The Only Story

What will be the only thing that matters about your life that is worth telling once you are gone? Will it be something that mattered to you, to the world, or will it be something that matters to Jesus?

Let's pray.

Benediction:

Allow me to leave you with the final words from the book of Romans:

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about obedience of faith – to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen

Good Basic Study Questions.

1. Do you have challenging experiences from your past that you can look back on and see that God allowed them to happen for good? (I suggest sharing or journaling these for your own good as well as the ability to allow others to see how God can be praised above all things.)
2. Do you recognize any motives for what you are pursuing in life to be for your benefit instead of God's glory?
3. What are the ways you are using your life in "fruitful labor" for Jesus Christ?
4. What would you like the "one thing that mattered most to you" be obvious to others when you are gone?

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<sup>i</sup> (Told by Leonard Griffith, *This is Living* [Abingdon Press], pp. 48, 49.) Credit to include this story in this sermon goes to Steven J. Cole, pastor of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship. Sermon "What are you living for" Phil1:12-26, July 26, 2013.